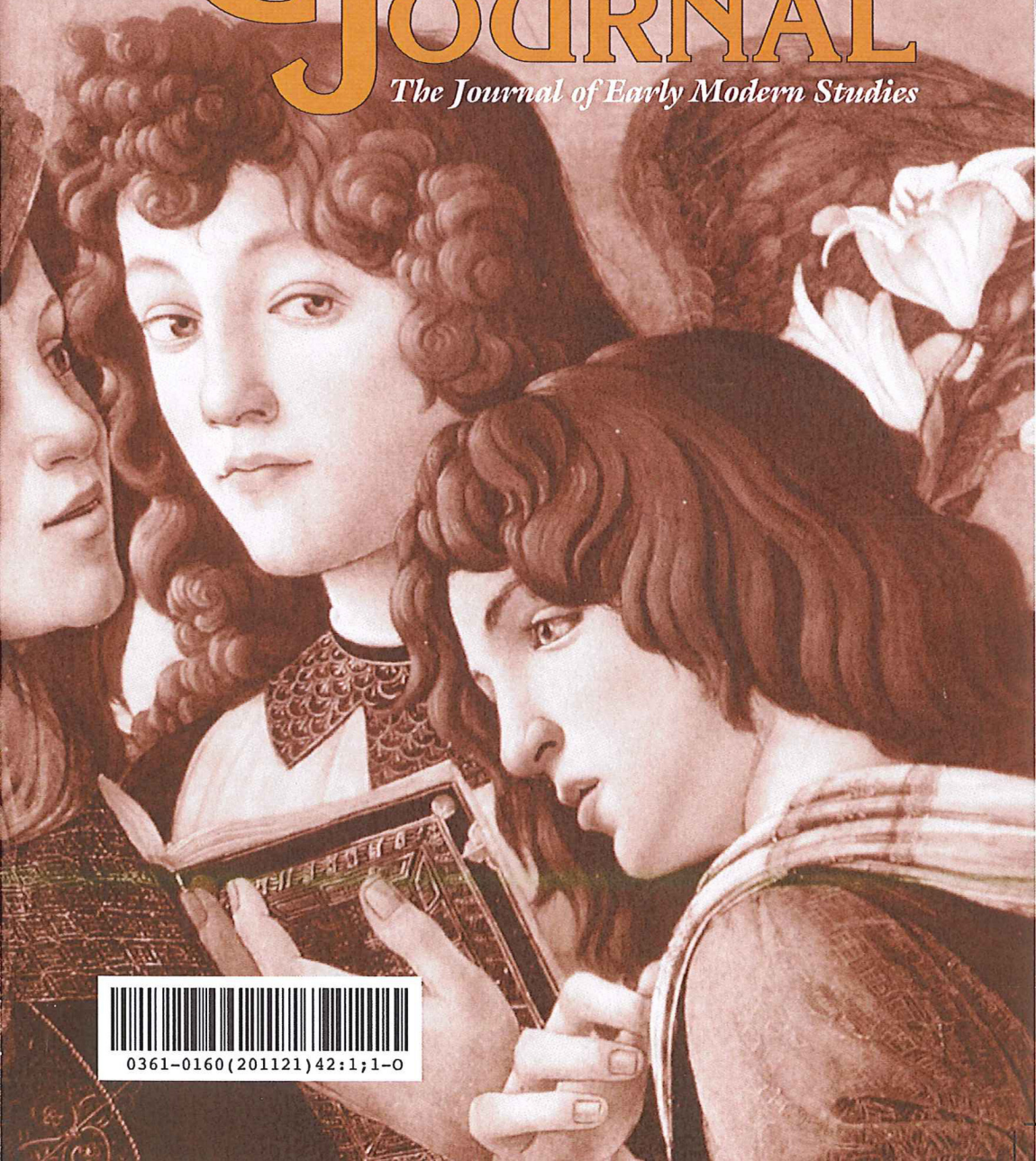


THE

Volume XLII, No. 1
Spring 2011

SIXTEENTH CENTURY JOURNAL

The Journal of Early Modern Studies



0361-0160(201121)42:1;1-0



Cristóbal de Acuña: Nuevo descubrimiento del Gran río de las Amazonas. Ignacio Arellano, José M. Díez Borque, and Gonzalo Santonja. Madrid: Iberoamericana de Libros y Ediciones, 2009. 184 pp. €16.80. ISBN 978-84-8489-445-2.

REVIEWED BY: Raúl Marrero-Fente, University of Minnesota

Ignacio Arellano, José M. Díez Borque, and Gonzalo Santonja present us with a new edition of Cristóbal de Acuña's *Nuevo descubrimiento del Gran río de las Amazonas* (1641), a firsthand description of the Spanish expedition to the Amazon in 1639. The book consists of a preface, an introduction, a modernized Spanish version of the text, two appendixes, an index, and a bibliography. Three valuable research tools of this edition are the index of 255 annotated words, the list of 116 Amerindian societies of the Amazon, and the addenda to Markham's list of ethnic groups. In addition, the editors' review of the life of Cristóbal de Acuña provides several elements that are essential to achieve a thorough understanding of the Jesuit's work.

The introduction by Arellano, Díez Borque, and Santonja expertly frames this work by placing it in the context of previous editions in Portuguese and Spanish by Freitas (Buenos Aires: Emece, 1942), Díaz (Iquitos, Perú: IIAP-CETA, 1986), Cuesta (Madrid: Banco Santander, 1993), Esteves (Montevideo: Oltavera, 1994), Leite (Lisbon: Impr.

Nacional, 1994), and Maderuelo (Madrid: Dastin, 2002). The editors also contribute with detailed information regarding the *editio princeps* (Madrid, 1641), and its history of publication. While the most obvious purpose in the introduction is to summarize existing knowledge on Acuña's work, they also break new ground by bringing together fresh research on the aspects of language and culture in the *relación*. In other words, the editors by adopting a uniform approach to the modernization of the text help the readers to understand the most difficult passages in Acuña's work.

In the pages of the introduction, the editors explain their methodology and examine the ways in which Acuña's text describes the everyday life of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. Here, the editors provide us with an in-depth analysis of several key issues in the Jesuit's account: the Spanish expedition, the geography of the Amazon, and the everyday life of the Amerindian people. A section entitled "Vida y costumbres," offers an historical and cultural background that is very useful for a nonspecialized audience. Arellano, Díez Borque, and Santonja provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the cultural production of the Spanish colonial period, the relevance of the *relación* genre, and how Acuña's book has been interpreted by scholars in recent times. The detailed introduction written by the editors, constitutes a valuable ethnohistorical source that is essential in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the contact that took place between the Amerindian societies, and the Spanish empire in the Amazon region.

The main section of the book is the annotated edition of Acuña's *Nuevo descubrimiento* . . . , with 255 detailed historical, literary, and cultural notes that illuminate the historical period of the seventeenth century. The work under review here consists of the most comprehensive annotation available, and one of the few that can be considered a critical edition in the present. The result is that it is easier to read the text, while also the necessary corrections have been made to previous errors with the extensive notes. Arellano, Díez Borque, and Santonja's edition represent a valuable contribution to the study of the corpus of Spanish chronicles pertaining to the Amazon region, since it suggests new directions for future research. The authors' contribution is fundamental in what until today has been a neglected research topic in the field of Colonial Latin American studies. The result is a specialized reference tool that will help to revise the historical studies devoted to the indigenous societies of the Amazon area. This critical edition also constitutes an important contribution to the interdisciplinary approach prevailing in the burgeoning field of Amazonian studies.

Arellano, Díez Borque, and Santonja's edition attests to the fact that scholarship in Colonial Latin American studies has expanded significantly in recent years, and that innovation distinguishes the research done in this field. The book is an invaluable research tool not only to Latin Americanists specializing in the literature, culture, and history of the region but also to scholars from other disciplines. By giving due consideration to the cultural production of the Amazonian region, this work offers a more complex and complete picture of the Spanish empire in the Americas. Recent scholarship in Colonial Latin American studies has been characterized by the addition of new objects of study. This broadening of the range of objects of study has embraced new geographical areas beyond the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru. Spanish texts pertaining to the Amazon are now being studied more in-depth, but still much remains to be done in this field. The book under review here is an informative source which provides fertile soil for future research in Colonial Latin American studies, and constitutes an attempt to move the discipline forward while also attesting to the new vitality that prevails in the field.