

Clavijero's Perception of the America and American's from the exile perspective¹

A percepção de Clavijero sobre a América e os Americanos sob a perspectiva do exílio.

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Resumo

Este artigo se propõe a avaliar a importância da Geração Mexicana de 1750, exilada na Itália em função da expulsão da Companhia de Jesus da Nova Espanha em 1767, ilustrada pelos escritos do jesuíta Francisco Javier Clavijero. Quer-se mostrar a abertura deste grupo em relação às idéias modernas e ilustradas, que combinaram com a tradição escolástica: isso foi facilitado pelo uso do ecletismo que já vinha caracterizando o pensamento jesuítico desde o século XVI, mas que assume contornos singulares no "Século das Luzes"

Palavras chaves: Clavijero, Ilustração e Jesuítas, Geração Jesuítica Mexicana de 1750

Abstract: This article focuses on the significance of the Mexican Jesuit Generation of 1750, which was exiled to Italy after the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from New Spain in 1767, as illustrated in the writings of the Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavijero. It attempts to show the openmindedness of this group towards modern and enlightened ideas that they combined with the scholastic tradition. This was facilitated by the use of eclecticism that had come to characterize Jesuit thought since the sixteenth century but that was assuming singular shape in the "Century of Lights."

Keywords: Clavijero, Enlightenment and Jesuits, Mexican Jesuit Generation of 1750

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² Doutora em Engenharia de Produção/ UFRJ. Pós-Doutora pelo Latin American Studies Center, University of Maryland, College-Park, MA, USA, 2002.

This article focus on the significance of the Mexican Jesuit generation exiled in Italy after the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from New Spain in 1767, illustrated by the writings of Francisco Javier Clavijero. I intend to demonstrate that during the period in which the Mexican Jesuit Generation of 1750 was teaching and writing in New Spain, Clavijero's writings and those of other Jesuits and authors influenced by them, drew upon predominantly scholastic eclectic formulations, but in which one can detect, if not the direct influence in terms of content, at least an attitude of sympathy toward the new, or 'modern' spirit: new forms of investigation, learning and teaching methods: critique of authority, etc. There was also incorporation, equally eclectic, of the enlightened attitude, as well as of some of its ideas and methods. But most of the aspects of the Enlightenment that they incorporated were those represented by Vico, who valorizes history over rationalism, celebrating the particularity of historical and cultural contexts rather than the universalism and abstraction of the Enlightenment in general³. I will try to clarify the way in which Clavijero, in his defense of the Mexican lands and people, mixed aspects of Enlightenment and Scholasticism, and to explain his complicated identification with his subject, sometimes referred as "us", sometimes as "they".

Clavijero's work was in great part facilitated by the fact that Jesuits from so many different places met one another in Enlightened Italy. In addition to the intrinsic value of the works written by some Mexican Jesuits during their Mediterranean exile, one should consider the circumstantial historical role of this literature as the first effort to divulge a new culture from the American continent to Europe. Nevertheless such scientific and humanistic movements of renovation as the one headed by the Mexican Jesuits would probably not have happened there if they had not started already in New Spain. Actually, this movement was continuing there with authors like Gamarra y Dávalos e José Alzate (1738-1799), both of them having been influenced by the Jesuits in the process of introducing modern as well as enlightened ideas into New Spain.

1) Enlightened ideas and the Thomistic Tradition in the writings of Clavijero in New Spain

Although, in general, the study of Jesuit thought in any time period can show important differences in the philosophical, scientific and theological options among the members of a particular school of thought, what I am referring to as the Mexican Jesuit Generation of 1750 - represented by Clavijero - could certainly be seen as a united group. This doesn't apply, of course, to the relation between this group and other Jesuits, and even less to

³ For a view of particularism," as opposed to "universalism in XVIII century Germany see CARHART, Michael, *The Science of Culture in Enlightenment Germany*, Harvard Mass.: Harvard University Press.



its relation with provincials or others occupying high positions in the hierarchy of the Society. The fact that the Mexican Jesuit Generation of 1750 had become the Generation of Expelled Jesuits in Italy after 1767 is fundamental for this study because most of the sources preserved were written in the exile. Even if this Jesuit generation started innovating while still teaching in New Spain, their philosophical courses of this period survived only in the Latin and in manuscript form, making it difficult for researchers to gain access to them.

Besides reading the works of Bacon, Descartes, Newton and Gassendi, New Spain intellectuals also had access to the writings of the Spaniards Tosca, Losada and Feijóo. New Spain's cultural apogee coincided with the movement for the reform of several disciplines - philosophy, sciences, literature, theology, history, and law - provoked by the arrival of modern ideas. Such reform started with the Jesuits in New Spain, not after their expulsion. Although one can properly argue that another renovation movement took place in New Spain after 1767, one cannot affirm that it broke with the Iberian and Jesuit tradition.

These men represented in the New World what may rightly be called the "Christian Enlightenment", which had already developed in Spain - well exemplified by Feijóo, for instance - and in other Catholic countries of Europe.⁴ Following in the footsteps of their European counterparts, they clearly perceived the intrinsic value of the new learning and realized that the future welfare of the Church - and that of the Jesuit Order - demanded their coming to terms with modern thought insofar as it did not conflict with Catholic teaching and tradition. From their perspective, this had to be done on the basis of solid intellectual foundations if they were to win the sympathy and allegiance of rational men⁵.

The pioneering role of the Jesuits in New Spain and the continuity of the reform movement of renovation in their work in Italy and also in New Spain - mainly with Gamarra y Dávalos e Jose Alzate - is brilliantly illustrated by the

4 The position of "the Jesuits" in "the Enlightenment" is extremely difficult to characterize, because both the Society of Jesus and the rhetoric of Enlightenment were highly contested in the 1760s. In France, the Jansenists played a major role in suppressing the Jesuits there; see KLEY, Dale Van *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). But in Austria a number of Jesuits returned from Rome as Jansenists themselves; see BERNARD, Paul P. *Jesuits and Jacobins: Enlightenment and Enlightened Despotism in Austria* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971). In Bavaria, the republican and radical Order of the Illuminati was founded by a lapsed Jesuit, Adam Weishaupt, in the 1770s. McMAHON, Darrin *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), describes a "counter-Enlightenment" of "anti-philosophe" Catholics; similar scenarios played out differently elsewhere, as each region of Europe had its own indigenous configuration. See PORTER, Roy and TEICH, Mikulás. *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

5 RONAN, Charles E. *Francisco Javier Clavigero, S. J. (1731-1787): Figure of Mexican Enlightenment* Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1977. On the importance of solid intellectual foundations, John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 28, argues that "the intellectual coherence of the Enlightenment may still be found ... in the commitment to understanding, and hence to advancing, the causes and conditions of human betterment in this world. The first part of this formula is as important as the second: The Enlightenment was committed to understanding, that is, to analysis on the basis of good argument, leading to reasoned conclusions."



work of Clavijero, especially if one compares his writings from New Spain (before his exile in 1767) with those written later in Italy. In fact, the Jesuits as a group wrote little while working “in the field” in the New World, but after their expulsion they had plenty of time for reflection and writing. Clavijero himself illustrates this trend. The most important works attributed to Clavijero during his time teaching and preaching in New Spain include a *Cursus de Filosofia*, which survives only in a fragmentary manuscript. Clavijero’s *Dialogue entre Filaletes y Paleófilo*, which seems to have been very interesting from the comment made by Gabriel Méndez Plancarte, is apparently lost altogether. Nevertheless, we can glean information regarding Clavijero’s work during this time period once from the aforementioned letters exchanged between him and his colleagues and provincials, and from his biography written by Maneiro.

Maneiro tells us, for instance, that in his first class teaching rhetoric at the Colegio Máximo, Clavijero created a furor by publicly criticizing Gongorism, a style of oratory and teaching then current, characterized by pompous, obscure, and affected language and meaningless literary embellishments. For Clavijero, the reform of rhetoric meant stressing the effectiveness of simplicity, directness, and purity of style, he endeavored to advance the cause of cultural renovation a step further⁶. Maneiro himself, of course, was an enthusiast of the movement for reforming the teaching of philosophy in New Spain. What makes his writing so special for us, however, is the sense of being transported through time while reading his book. He was in contact with this group of Jesuits while in New Spain and during their exile in Italy, witnessing the suffering caused by their separation from their patria, as well as their deep contact with European enlightened ideas. When publishing Clavijero’s correspondence in 1945, Romero Flores put forth the image of Clavijero as someone with strong sympathy toward novelties and with difficulty in adhering to the discipline of the Society of Jesus. One year after his publication, José Miranda concluded that, on the basis of Maneiro’s work and the correspondence published by Romero, it was possible to include Clavijero entirely in the Enlightenment⁷.

My reading of the above documentation directed me towards a more cautious position in terms of considering Clavijero an entirely enlightened man. The Clavijero who emerges from his historical works written in exile, from the reading of his correspondence and from the biography written by a contemporary, appears to me an example of a Jesuit under the pressure of his Order and the Inquisition as well, as was so common in that time period. He attempted to introduce the new without making it too evident and, certainly, experienced some difficulty in adhering to the discipline of the Society of Jesus. A very interesting piece of anti-Jesuitism broadly disseminated

6 Idem, p. 30. Clavijero’s Cuban colleague, Julián Parreño, known as “the reformer of the Mexican pulpit”, led the heaviest attacks against Gongorism, also known as “gerundianismo”.

7 MIRANDA, José. Clavijero en la Ilustración mexicana. In: *Cuadernos Americanos*, n.4, Julio-Agosto de 1946, vol. XXVIII, pp. 181-196.



during the eighteenth century, entitled *Secreta Monita*, can be very helpful in threading of Clavijero's biography and his personal correspondence⁸. In the letters exchanged between Clavijero and his superiors, as well as in those that he exchanged with contemporary Jesuits (e.g., Francisco Xavier Alegre) or poblanos (e.g., Torrija y Brisa),⁹ we can reconstruct some of the rules of the Society of Jesus, and these in turn enable us to make sense of Clavijero's case.

This can only be done, however, if one bears in mind that throughout the eighteenth century there was an increasing antipathy toward the Jesuits. The Society of Jesus was suppressed in the 1759 in Portugal and in the 1760s in France and Spain.

This was probably the reason for the wide distribution of a document entitled *Secreta Monita*, or *The Secret Counsels of the Society of Jesus*. In the early twentieth century, the Catholic Encyclopedia dismissed the *Secreta Monita* as the dastardly smear campaign by a disgruntled Pole named Jerome Zahorowski, who had been expelled from the Society in 1611. As late as 1835, the origins of the document were not clear. While discussing the authenticity of the document, Breckinridge suggested three possibilities for its origins: 1) that it was the real *Secret Counsel* of the Order emanating from its head and revealed by accident; 2) that it may have been a revelation made by one expelled Jesuit; 3) that it was a mere supposition, compiled by several Jesuit authors and embodying what an enemy might suppose they would say if they officially propounded their real secret instructions. The author of these comments, clearly an anti-Jesuit, argued strongly in favor of the authenticity of the document. According to Breckinridge, *Secreta Monita* was first published in Venice in 1596, however there were several other editions published in vernacular languages throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. The first translation of the work from its original Latin was to English in 1658. In the following centuries it was published in Amsterdam in 1717, in London in 1722 and 1746, in France in 1727 and in the USA in 1835, to quote only the most important editions¹⁰. Breckinridge concluded that because the content in all of the translations was pretty much the same, it is nearly impossible that the document was the work of just one expelled Jesuit. Breckinridge pointed out that the idea that a disillusioned former Jesuit could author this kind of a document is foreseen and preempted by the strict rules regarding expelled Jesuits put forth in the document itself. One of the main preoccupations

8 *Secreta Monita. Societate Jesu (The Secret Counsels of the Society of Jesus, in Latin and English) with a discourse on the authenticity of the work by Robert J. Breckinridge*, Second American Edition, Baltimore: Edward J. Coale & Co, 1835. The first version of this document was published in Venice in 1596. The noted concordance of the Jesuits and the reformers related to the Bourbon reforms on a philosophical approach - the eclecticism - cannot blind us of the possibility of a real repression taking place in the interior of the Society of Jesus

9 ROMERO FLORES, D. Jesus. Documentos para la biografía del historiador Clavijero. In: *Anales del Instituto de Antropología e Historia*, México, 1945, tomo 1, 1939-40, pp. 307-335.

10 *Secreta Monita*. p.1



and precautions of *Secreta Monita* was the necessity of precluding anyone expelled from the Society from being accepted in other orders and/or having access to press, and so on. And, even if someone had managed to do so, how can one explain how such a homogenous document could have emerged from the various enemies of the Jesuits in so many diverse locations and time periods? Breckenridge concluded that the *Secreta Monita* must have originated as an authentic document of the Jesuits themselves.

Besides helping to shed light on the biographies and letters written by Jesuits during the eighteenth century, in the context of this study the content of *Secreta Monita* itself can be taken as another illustration of the plurality of 'enlightenments' within the Iberian World. The ideas and the rhetoric of Enlightenment were appropriated by both Jesuits and secularist reformers whose goal was the construction of a national state overriding the power of the Church. But even within the Society of Jesus, supposedly the most centralized and uniform institution within Iberian culture, one could find variations as well.

What seems less problematical to affirm is that, reading these secrets rules, one can sense a strange mixture of Machiavelli and Saint Thomas, in the eclectic way characteristic of the Iberian thought in general and of the Jesuit order in particular¹¹. Put bluntly, the rules of *Secreta Monita* can be summarized as "the end justifies the means". Everything should be conditioned to the best interest of the Society: in order to promote the Society it is licit, for instance, to use the secrets of the confessionary involving matters dealing with the minimal weaknesses of human behavior or with questions of state. Just as an illustration, the document has chapters on "How the Society ought to conduct itself when it commences a settlement in a new place"; "methods of preserving the familiarity of Princes, Nobleman, and persons of great distinction"; "How the Society should act with those who have great authority in the state; the role of confessors in relations with the rich, widows, Princes, etc".

Reading the aforementioned document produces paradoxical feelings. Considering the amount of Machiavellianism that lies beneath most of its propositions, this is unquestionably a modern document. At the same time, the use of modern predicates in the document by the "conservative" Jesuit against the "modern" ones- if this is the case - illustrates a preoccupation in shielding the Society from innovations. In its opening, the document makes clear that, these rules being secret, they were not supposed to be known by the majority of the members of the Society. The Mexican Generation of 1750 certainly seemed to have been included among those who were not to have access to it. Actually, while reading the correspondence between Clavijero and Alegre, it is quite possible to relate their behaviors and fears to some situations prescribed in the text. The correspondence between Clavijero

¹¹ Coinciding with this insight I found out that the Latin edition of *Secreta Monita*, published in Amsterdam, was actually called *Machiavelli Mus Jesuiticus*, inscribed to *John Krausius*, a Jesuit.



and the Provincials, for instance, reveals their framing of the rebel Jesuit in accordance with some of the rules of *Secreta Monita*. The rule concerning how to deal with those members who show more interest in their studies than in the success of the Society was often applied to Clavijero, although he had fulfilled two major requirements for being accepted into the Society: rich birth and intellectual capacity. If the question of the actual modernity of Clavijero is a disputable one, from his biography and correspondence exchanged with colleagues, other priests and provincials it seems out of the question that he was simply a “tormented modern ideologue”¹².

II) Enlightenment and Thomistic ideas in Clavijero’s historical writings in the Italian exile.

Clavijero’s *Historia antigua de México* was the most influential history of Mexico since Jose de Acosta’s *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* in 1590. It was, according to Clavijero, a history of Mexico written by a Mexican. His historical work, written in Italy, offers an amazing combination of Scholastic theology, modern natural history, enlightened history, and a criticism of enlightenment that anticipated Romanticism. The idea here is to point out some of the combinations involving these different approaches in the *Historia antigua de México* (1780) and in his *Dissertaciones*.

As a group, the Mexican Jesuits exiled in Italy exhibited considerable nostalgia for their homeland. This longing - almost romantic in its tone - appears in Clavijero’s *Historia Antigua de México* as well. “Spaniard Americans” were Creoles who were neither “pure” Spaniards nor “pure” Americans. The experience of exile further enhanced the sense that the New Spain that they had been forced to leave, seemingly (and in fact) forever, had been a self-identifying political community. For many of them, particularly when confronted with hostile foreigners, Spain was still their nation, a world that indicated a common ethnic inheritance. But their culture or their patria - a far more powerful term - was “Mexican”, or “Peruvian”, or “Chilean”¹³.

Clavijero’s writings - and those of others in Europe - contributed to a break with the regionalist and “provincial” in the Creoles’ spirits, enabling the Creoles to recover the past, the nature, the culture, and the intellectual life of their countries. Clavijero was one of the most engaged interlocutors of Cornelius De Pauw and Buffon in the “Dispute of the New World”. According to his biographer Juan Maneiro, he was already writing his *Historia Antigua de México* when the *Philosophical Investigations* by De Pauw came out

12 A term used by José Miranda in “Clavijero en la Ilustración mexicana”. The biography of Clavijero written by Maneiro offers more signs of modernity in him than the letters published by Romero Flores or the ones found in the Archive de Hacienda (see Navarro B., Bernabé, Op. Cit., p.228).

13 PAGDEN, Anthony. *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.



in print¹⁴. Buffon had postulated that the nature of the New World was inferior to the European, mainly because of its humidity, caused by a second “American” deluge, and De Pauw explored the degenerative consequences of such an environment on the American inhabitants. The most influential American voices raised against Buffon and De Pauw’s accusations were those of the North American federalists and the Iberian American Jesuits, mostly Mexicans exiled in Italy. In the writings of the Jesuits, as well as in those of “scientists” influenced by them, which I intend to explore in my further research, one can find a rich source for the study of the combination of science and religion aiming at constructing a national political identity.

With Clavijero’s *Dissertaciones* and his *Historia Antigua de México*, Mexico became part of the debates of the Enlightenment in Europe, as these works gave Europeans access to a body of encyclopedic knowledge about this part of the Americas, which aroused their curiosity about exotic lands and peoples. It was this informative Jesuit literature that first provided Europe with the detailed knowledge of the Americas and the Far East that helped to create exoticism, an important element within the Enlightenment¹⁵. It is important to point out, however, that not all Jesuits were apologetic of the nature and population of the Americas. While analyzing Jesuits’ reactions to Buffon’s and De Pauw’s theories, one should distinguish, as Antonello Gerbi does, between the Spanish and the “Spanish American” Jesuits, both exiled in Europe since 1767. Most of the European (Spanish and Italian) Jesuits kept their sympathy toward Spain or were in a position of equilibrium between Europe and the Americas. They were very concerned with De Pauw’s recrimination of Spanish conquest and colonization of the New World. The Mexican Jesuits, on the other hand, aimed to defend the Americas – their land and their people – from what they considered to be lies. In doing so, they produced the first literature about American lands for Enlightenment audiences in Europe¹⁶.

In this sense, even if the exiled Jesuits did not play a direct role in the Spanish American movement for independence, they were certainly an influence. Clavijero, the most influential among the Italian exiled Jesuits, had an intensive correspondence with independence leaders such as Francisco de Miranda, and Hidalgo was among his pupils in New Spain. In a general sense, the Jesuits’ writings – either devotional or scientific – continued to inspire the Creole patriotism that they had started to shape during their missionary, educational and political work in the New World.

However, their writings, particularly the most important among them – *Historia antigua de México* and the *Dissertaciones* by Clavijero –

14 De Pauw’s *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* and Buffon’s *Natural History* had being already published in 1767.

15 MORNER, Magnus (ed.). *The Expulsion of the Jesuits from Latin America*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1967, p.10.

16 GERBI, Antonello. *O Novo Mundo. História de uma polêmica (1750-1900)*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996.



relate to the Enlightenment in a very specific way. While one must note the enlightened influence in the conception of History, in the dismissal of the criterion of authority, and so on, at the same time Clavijero and other Jesuits were defending their patria - Mexico and the American continent in general - against the absurdities written about them by enlightened philosophers and historians like Buffon, De Pauw, Raynal and Robertson. David Brading considers these natural philosophers the enlightened representatives of a much older tradition - the Imperial Spanish Historiography of the New World - initiated in the sixteenth century with Oviedo, Sepúlveda, Góngora and Jose Acosta¹⁷. How about the exiled Jesuits? How did they relate to the Enlightenment?

The easier answer would be to say that the Italian-exiled Jesuits related to the Enlightenment primarily in an eclectic way, considering their inclusion in a Catholic Enlightenment. But how did they combine tradition and modernity, religion and the search for historical truth? I would begin to answer this by pointing out the mixture of universal and particular arguments that emerge from Clavijero's historical works in response to those he calls "enlightened philosophers". In general, the universal is attributed to the enlightenment, and the particularistic and casuistic to a pre-modern or medieval way of thought. In Clavijero, however, this division is not very well delimited. His main aim, according to himself, is to combat the abstract generalizations of the enlightened philosophers (Buffon, De Pauw, Raynal, Robertson), which he considers to be without any basis in real observation or even contact with reports from local witnesses. But the main argument used by the Jesuit to defend his most important point - the equality of Mexicans and Europeans -, is based precisely on the "Universal Reason of Enlightenment". If there is anything still separating Europeans and Mexicans, it is the latter's lack of education: "The real obstacle is social rather than natural: it is not imbecility but misery"¹⁸.

How could Clavijero, with such strong enlightened argumentation, still maintain an equally strong compromise with the role of the Bible in order to explain America's nature, how it was populated and its present population? It seems to me that one can properly argue that, in order to accommodate the Sacred Writings with natural and human history, Clavijero makes two different uses of the particular argument against the universal argument, as well as of the universal against the particular.

The use of the particular argument against the universal, understood as abstract generalization, is what gives tone to his work. It is based on concrete (and isolated) cases that he confronts mostly with Buffon's arguments belittling the nature, including fauna and flora, of the New World. Clavijero's

17 BRADING, David. *The First America. The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and Liberal State. 1492-1867*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

18 CLAVIJERO, Francisco Javier. *História Antigua de México* (1780) Primeira edição del original escrito en castellano por el autor, 4 tomos, México, Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1945 (1780). *Dissertaciones*, p.43



criticism of excessive generalization by the Enlightenment often drives him back to the particularistic and casuistic elements that had been used since the Middle Ages and then modified by neo-Scholastics in the sixteenth century. The fact that almost ninety percent of his examples are from Mexico confirms the use of concrete data and facts, in contrast with Buffon who had never set foot on the American continent. Armed with these facts particular to Mexico, Clavijero then generalized about the Americas as a whole. That is, against Buffon's universalistic and deductive conclusions about American nature, Clavijero advanced a particularist (and possibly inductive) argument.

In defending American culture against the broad generalizations of De Pauw, Clavijero again used a particularist method, but in this case he was more cautious in applying universal conclusions.

He starts his answer to De Pauw's thesis on the inferiority of the American population by valorizing the particular over the universal and finishes it with a universal argument¹⁹. While responding to absurd accusations related to the barbaric habits of the Americans, he opts to make a clear distinction between the civilized societies in the Americas (Mexicans and Peruvians) and the primitives ones. His compromise is only with the defense of the first. He admits that several of De Pauw's accusations "may be true for other parts or tribes in the Americans", although absolutely false for the Mexican case. In doing so, he approximates Mexicans and Europeans in one group, opposing them to another group, composed of primitive American Indians, Asians and Africans. Consequently, the abnormalities pointed out by De Pauw may be true in particular cases, but can never be assumed to constitute a general rule²⁰.

This contradiction between his trust in one Universal Reason and in the opposition of civilization versus barbarism is not something singular of Clavijero. It is actually part of the Enlightenment as a whole. Although Clavijero criticizes the excess of generalization among the "enlightened philosophers" he is attuned with them in what concerns the hierarchy among societies and its consequences: there are societies more equal than others. He tries to prove the equality of Mexicans and Europeans based on the fact that he, himself, had reached such a conclusion by ocular witness of the Mexicans' habits, customs, and behavior.

Would it be the proof that the Mexicans share a universal reason, which he admits does not extend to all societies? One may wonder whether his rationalism was founded on a different basis than that of the enlightenment. It does seem more likely to me that Clavijero bases his rationalism on an old attitude of recognizing the rationality of the Indians, but not of all Indians, already present in Zumágara, Las Casas and other Jesuits before him. Clavijero

19 Idem, p. 397

20 Here he offers some examples: the killing of imperfect babies, tribes where men, instead of women, had milk in their breast and nursed the babies, and so on. CLAVIJERO, F.J. *Dissertaciones*, p.395.

is too close to several decisive points of the enlightenment, making it hard for him to support his position only in the writings of his predecessors. As already pointed out, he is quite familiar with the enlightened distinction between civilized and uncivilized societies: the challenge he faces is how to include the Mexicans in the former category. He is capable of amazing arguments in favor of cultural relativism, but they are mostly included in order to present a more favorable picture of Mexican society²¹.

Although he uses universal criteria when he needs to, Clavijero seems to be aware of its impropriation, as can be seen in the hierarchical way he presents the societies of the Americas. The universal criterion works for nature, but yet does not undermine differences between civilized and uncivilized societies. In other words, Clavijero is defending the nature of the whole American continent, but not all people who live in it.

Amongst the enlightenment authors, it seems that the biggest influence on Clavijero was that of Vico, particularly the historical conception of the "problematic" Italian author and his criticism of the excess of rationalism in Enlightenment. The diverse historical meanings found in Clavijero's work are a consequence of the universalistic philosophy of history, akin with the version of the Catholic Illustration, with which he entered into contact in Italy. Although there is no sure indication that Clavijero had in fact read Vico, he had certainly read and mentions often the writings of the Italian Boturini, an assumed follower of Vico. The acceptance of the Viquian theories in more traditional Catholic circles was certainly limited: it was restricted to the acceptance of the role of Providence and its revalorization of the primitive cultures, especially in regards to their myths and religions. More difficult to accept was Vico's theory of the ages, the ups and downs ("corso and ricorso"), and Vico's questioning of the historical authority of the Sacred Scripture²².

The decisive role assumed by the Sacred Writings in Clavijero's historical works complicates our puzzle even more. When dealing with the question of populating the New World or arguing in favor of a unique and universal Deluge, Clavijero clearly recurs to the universal as opposed to the particular criterion for religious reasons: the truth of one unique universal Deluge is guaranteed by biblical truth. Clavijero's main argument against Buffon's theory of a second Deluge that supposedly took place only in the Americas in favor of a single and universal Deluge is the authority of the Biblical text, although he also considers it plausible to prove this theological truth making use of natural history and geography. But, even in this case, the force of religious doctrines would serve to authenticate findings based on the study of natural history and geography. In the discussion about the

21 Only in one moment he demonstrates admirations for the Araucanos, but this is owed to their resistance to conquest, not to respect for their customs, society or institutions.

22 TRABUSE, Elias. Clavijero, historiador de la ilustración mexicana. In: ROSALES, Afonso Martínez. *Francisco Xavier Clavijero en la ilustración mexicana (1731-1787)*, México: El Colegio de México, 1988, pp.52-6

climate of the Americas, his arguments begin with a discussion about the best environment, using the Bible as the reference. In contrast to the relativism with which Clavijero treats this subject in the beginning of his response to Buffon, listing the different climates within Mexico in order to show that they may be good for different purposes, his conclusion is that the best climate is the one that approximates more to the “eternal spring” or the “earthly paradise”²³.

His commitment to religion seems also to be the key to explaining why, on a few occasions, Clavijero commits the same mistake that he criticizes in Buffon and De Pauw: making generalizations not based on concrete cases. In his discussion of the presence of the demon among the Aztecs in *Historia*, for instance, he does not narrate any concrete case. He admits (generically) the presence of evil in Aztec life, at the same time that he attempts to eliminate the devil (specifically) from any explanation of Indian origins or habits²⁴. The challenge that Clavijero faced was to eliminate the devil without contesting the Holy Writ’s authority. Clavijero accepts the thesis that assumes that the Americans had their origin in the New World based on the theory of the united continents instead of any version of the migration (Acosta, for instance). His explanation for the separation of the continents draws upon a big earthquake²⁵. The interesting consequence of such an explanation is that it argues that the origins of the American Indians coincided with those of the Asians and Europeans. At the same time, his explanation eliminates the possible influence of any other people over the development of the Indians. The theory of the united continents serves not just to prove the equality of the American Indians with other people. It is also an instrument to demonstrate that the Indians had their own culture, without any influence from other cultures.

The issue of languages, for example, illustrates this well. [run in]Differently from those (mostly Jesuits) before him who were trying to point out the similarities hidden behind the differences between the Indian and other European and/or Asian languages - as the ‘universal syncretism’ of the XVII century²⁶ - Clavijero was prompt to defend the singularity of the Indians language and culture. More than that, he actually emphasized the diversity among Indian languages: according to Clavijero, the language of one tribe was different and incomprehensible to members of another tribe. In other words, there was no such thing as one Indian culture²⁷. The Anahuac did not share in the “barbarism” of some northern tribes. As Pagden points out,

23 CLAVIJERO, Francisco Javier. *Historia Antigua de México*(1780), Book I, p.98-130

24 Idem, p. 16

25 CLAVIJERO, Francisco Javier *Dissertaciones*, p.139. This was catastrophism. See RUDWICK, Martin J. S. *The Meaning of Fossils: Episodes in the History of Paleontology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

26 Expression borrowed from PAZ, Octávio. *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. As armadilhas da Fé*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2000.

27 Idem, pp.21-2



Clavijero's theory of continental drift thus relieved him of the need to explain, or explain away, the more obvious "barbarism" of the northern tribes and left him free to concentrate upon the people of Anahuach²⁸.

Here again Clavijero faces a great challenge while trying to explain the development of the Indian societies. First of all, he was trying to locate the migration to America in terms of biblical time, but justifying his capacity to do so in his ability to read the Indians' own records - their "picture writings" -, which could not be read by Europeans. In them, Clavijero finds reference to an Aztec version of the Flood, and even to the Tower of Babel, which would explain the variety of languages spoken among the Indians²⁹.

By the same token, Clavijero believes in the enlightenment premise that all cultures should be judged by the same general criteria. When he tries to equalize the Mexicans with the Europeans, for instance, he constantly makes reference to the fact that Aztec civilization was far more advanced than several ancient cultures, and other contemporaneous cultures.

How can one reconcile the secular historian who searches to base his true history of ancient Mexico in Indian primary sources and Spanish reports about the conquest with the one engaged in religious purposes³⁰? How could enlightenment principles and extreme religiosity coexist in one man? I would say that Clavijero is certainly an eighteenth century product, but his intellectual preferences were far from being wholly enlightened. As Pagden notices, he sometimes deplores the freedom of thought that "this century of enlightenment had brought and the threat that it posed to the authority of the Church".

Much of his account of historical causation is conventionally scholastic; so, too, are many of his cultural assumptions, and the intellectual world to which he belonged remained, despite his readings of Descartes and Montesquieu, the Aristotelian-Thomistic one in which he had been schooled. But like many Jesuits, even in the narrow intellectual confines of a colonial society, Clavijero had, in his years as a professor of philosophy, read many of what he called "the moderns". The names of Descartes, Gassendi, Leibnitz, and Fontenelle all appear in his writings and, as we shall see, many of his more original ideas about the origins of culture are heavily indebted to Montesquieu³¹.

28 PAGDEN, Anthony. *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, p.108

29 CLAVIJERO, Francisco Javier *Dissertaciones*, p.14

30 Note that when Clavijero's history of Mexico ends at the conquest of the Aztecs by the Spaniards.

31 Idem, p.99.



That is to say that, in general, an enlightened view of the historical process predominates in his *Historia antigua de México*. This can be seen in his encyclopedic spirit, as well as in his use of primary sources and the writings of other recognized historians in his only historical work. It is a quite admirable is his view of the historical development of Mexican Indians as a social phenomenon with roots in the pre-Hispanic past, without connecting them to any ancient people from other continents. In the words of José Emilio Pereira, his *Historia Antigua de México* is an essential piece for the recuperation of the Indian world - particularly the Aztec one - from the triple perspective of Catholicism, classical culture and enlightenment³². By opposing certain aspects of European enlightened philosophy Clavijero is offering a Creole enlightenment. Elías Trabuse diagnoses in him an attraction toward the enlightened philosophers and historians in search of a meaning in History, breaking with the antiquarian historians who reduce their works to a compilation of facts. But, differently from them, he did not assume an attitude of neglecting the details. At the same time that Clavijero broke with the schemes of this Spanish historiography, he confronted the bias and preconceptions of the "philosophical history" from the depreciators of the Americas³³.

But this wasn't an easy task. At least two problems had to be resolved: the elimination of the devil from the historical explanation and the association between ancient Mexico and ancient Greece and Rome. Concerning the writing of a secular explanation for the Indian past based on human causations Clavijero was far more successful than his predecessors. This does not mean that Clavijero completely excluded references to the Devil from his History of Mexico³⁴. Despite isolated references, he clearly intends to exclude from the explanations of human affairs any non-human agent that has not been attested to by the Holy Writ³⁵. These non-human agents could be the Devil or the angels as well. He considers the assumption that the original Indian inhabitants were transferred to the American continent by angels to be an old superstition. Insisting that men are rational beings possessed of free will and that any explanation of human actions had to be expressed in terms of purely human agency enabled Clavijero to exclude such non-human entities. As well posed by Pagden,

32 PACHECO, José Emilio. "Lost Homeland: notes on Francisco Javier Clavijero and "the natural culture" of Mexico. In: *The Latin American in Resident Lectures*, n.V, Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974-5.

33 TRABUSE, Elías. Clavijero, historiador de la ilustración mexicana. In: ROSALES, Afonso Martínez. *Francisco Xavier Clavijero en lá ilustración mexicana (1731-1787)*, México: El Colegio de México, 1988, pp.41-57, p.52

34 Some authors have point out the recourse to the Devil in some passages of *Historia Anticua*. See, for instance, VILLORO, Luiz. *Grandes momentos del ingigenismo en México*. México: Conselho Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 1987 (primera edición 1950).

35 CLAVIJERO, F. J. *Dissertaciones*, p.31



If the Devil was responsible for whatever deviant forms non-Christian beliefs and practices might take, then the chronicler had no need to trouble himself in explaining their origins³⁶.

Moreover, the belief in the satanic origins of the Indians made the intended association between ancient Indians and modern Creole cultures a hazardous business. In order to write a secular, modern and enlightened history of the Mexicas that would allow for approximating them to the Creole, Clavijero had to remove from the whole project the threat of that eschatological reductivism that, in his view, had vitiated the writings of so many previous historians of the Amerindian societies. In his concern with offering readers the primary sources he is standing upon, and his preoccupation with the search for truth through the use of such sources, there is no doubt about the modernity of the conception of History in Clavijero. But, in reality, *Historia antigua de México* does not offer new sources on the Indian past beyond what Sigüenza y Góngora or Torquemada had used in his *Monarquía Indiana* (1615)³⁷. What distinguishes Clavijero from both of them is the style, much less tortuous and much clearer.

The second puzzle, the creation of a classic antiquity for the eighteenth century Creole elite, somehow associating Incas and Aztec with ancient Greeks and Romans, was not an easy task either. Clavijero subscribed to the idea that the Indians living in New Spain in the eighteenth century were too miserable to have their condition associated with any “white” man, even in a remote past. The Creole solution, supported by Clavijero, was to claim that the Creoles themselves were the true heirs of Indians in their imperial time. This could bring further complications, however, for such association depended upon a dubious interpretation of the role of the conquest: any attempt by the colonists to raise the image of a glorious “Aztec” or “Inca” past, no matter how thoroughly sanitized, might result in the rebellion of the subdued Indian and mestizo masses. The association was even more difficult in Peru than in Mexico, because of the continuing complaints about the autonomy of the Inca Empire - Tawantinsuyu - that culminated in the revolt of Tupac Amaru in 1780-3. The Mexican Indian past was more remote in the sense that by the seventeenth century the Creole elite identified themselves with Aztec “classical antiquity”. This can be seen, for instance, in the works of Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645-1700): he decorated his triumph arcs ordered by Spanish authorities with the achievements of the twelve Aztec emperors, instead of

36 PAGDEN, Anthony. Op. cit., p.100.

37 About this question of the Indians sources in the works of Torquemada and Clavijero, see CLINE, Howard F. A Note on Torquemada's native sources and historiographical methods. In: *The Americas*, n.25, pp.173-86

with mythological fables³⁸. Before Sigüenza y Góngora, an important name in the pioneer literature glorifying New Spain at the very beginning of the XVII century was Bernardo de Balbuena (1568-1627)³⁹.

The other complication that would come from the association of the Creole elite with ancient Mexico - and of them with Greeks and Romans - is that in order to do so, Clavijero would have to exclude the vice-regal period from his history. The strategy chosen by Clavijero seems to have been, in Pagden's words, "silence": his history stops with the conquest, without making mention of the process of evangelization and consolidation of the Spanish rules, as some previous histories had done. One result was that, for the XVIII century Creole elite, the conquest began to be associated with a "Golden Age", a period when Mexico had been less a colony and more an independent kingdom. Clavijero maintains the view of the conquest of Mexico as a donation to Cortez by Montezuma, while modifying the traditional interpretation of this donation. In the traditional version, Montezuma donated his empire to Charles V, who he considered to be "the Great Lord" who had been forced by the Devil to leave Mexico towards the east, promising to return⁴⁰. In Clavijero's version, Montezuma is supposed to have identified the "Great Lord" with Quetzalcóatl. For the sixteenth century actors (Cortez) or authors (Sahágun), the only Indian deity they heard of was Huitzilopochtli. Although Clavijero knew from his readings of Sigüenza y Góngora that the identification of Quetzalcóatl with the "founder of the Indian empire" was in contradiction with any Indian report, he couldn't help but use the link that had been created in the sixteenth and seventeenth century between Quetzalcóatl and Saint Thomas, in addition to the virgin of Guadalupe, symbols of Mestizaje by then associated with the Creole⁴¹.

According to Pagden, "Clavijero's strategy was to run the gulf between past and present to his own advantage"⁴². He was always prompt to admit the huge gap between the noble Indians of the past and the miserable ones of the present. But, he argues, didn't the same happen to the Greeks and Romans? Who, looking at the Greeks in the present, could believe that they produced a Plato or Pericles in the past?⁴³ Charles La Condamine already employed this kind of argument for the Peruvian case, and Carli openly criticizes Spanish colonialism in his *Lettere Americane* of 1780. Clavijero, La Condamine and

38 PAGDEN, A. Op. Cit., p.100.

39 Born in Spain, Balbuena arrived in New Galician, New Spain, in 1571, and did his studies at the Universidad de Mexico (1585-1590).

40 CORTÉS, Hernán. *Letters from Mexico*, ed. and trans. Anthony Pagden, 2nd edn, New Haven-London.

41 PAGDEN, A. Op. Cit., p.102

42 Idem, p.103

43 CLAVIJERO, F. J. *Historia antieua de México*, vol. I, p.123



Carli were, in fact, applying Montesquieu's argument against slavery, source of decline and destruction of peoples⁴⁴. Another implication of the association between the Aztecs and the Greeks and Romans was the possible resemblance between the Spaniards and the Turks: besides being the classic enemies of the Spaniards, in the spirit of enlightenment, Turkey was a metaphor for "royal absolutism"⁴⁵.

Conclusion:

Besides the writings of the exiled Spanish and Portuguese Jesuits, a rich source of information on the New World for the enlightened audience in Europe were the letters written by Jesuits missionaries in Brazil from Belgium, Holland, Germany, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Austria, Bohemia, Croatia, Germany, Switzerland, and Slovakia. These writers offered a view of the 'others' - the Americas and of the Americans - different from the one drawn by the Iberians, although similarities can be found between the two groups⁴⁶. Their European audience was initially constituted of the receivers of these letters: superiors, provincials, and rectos of the schools that the missionaries had attended. Later these letters were extended to periodic publications about the missions aiming at a larger public. The pioneer publication of this group was *Lettres Edificantes et Curieuses* in France, followed by the first Ethnographic Cultural Journal that reached even larger audiences. Through these journals as well as through the writing of the aforementioned Jesuits from the Iberian world, the Americas and other continents colonized by the Europeans contributed to the stimulation of the European enlightenment as a whole.

44 MONTESQUIEU, Charles de. *Ouvres complètes*, Paris: ed. Roger Caillois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2 vols, 1950, p.490 Apud PAGDEN, A. Op. cit., p.104. Clavijero's *Dissertationes* were dedicated to Carli, to thank him "in the name of the Americans". for having studied accurately the History of America, and for having had courage to defend those despised Nations against so many renegade Europeans who have declared themselves their enemies and persecutors". In appealing to Montesquieu, Clavijero goes against mostly of the Jesuits who accused Montesquieu work of being infidel, which culminated with the ban of *The Spirit of Law* by the Pope in 1775. See ISRAEL, Jonathan Irvine. *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-170*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001

45 PAGDEN, A. Op. Cit., p. 104.

46 There is a project being carried on at the University of Mainz, Germany, on Jesuits in the Spanish and Portuguese Americas during the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries that deals with reports of missionary work by Jesuits from other parts of Europe there: <http://www.kigmanz.kath.theol.uni-mainz.de/Projekt.htm>,

