

Science and power during the colonial period in Peru, 1550-1750

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The purpose of this research project is to put at historians and science history scholars' disposal fragments of the most important texts written or published in Peru in the 17th century. Along with preliminary studies and a critical edition of texts, the material will allow exploring how and which content was the movement of "knowledge" and scientific ideas in Peru between 1600 and 1700. This study states that scientific knowledge was used in the elaboration of a Creole proposal in Peru and that, at the same time; the American experience influenced or transformed the European scientific knowledge.

Scientific speeches and lectures were not limited to simple theories for understanding the surrounding reality. Instead, scientific bodies were closely linked to many power spheres and, in the Peruvian case, were one of the vehicles as a means to articulate and consolidate the power elite and, even, the Viceroy Court. This search for scientific arguments for the formation of a Creole ideology cannot, at the same time, hide the fact that, indeed, there was a genuine vocation for the discussion and preparation of scientific ideas, stimulated by the observation of own natural and social phenomena in America. As it is known, monarchy staff, missionaries, literate people and merchants met an essential role in the spreading of the scientific background of the Old World. At the same time, the creation of universities in Mexico and Lima in the mid-16th century, the multiplication of Jesuit schools and the presence of cosmographers allowed establishing permanent diffusion sources of the classics legacy in Classical times -in particular Aristotle, Pliny, Ptolemy and Pedanius Dioscorides- and knowledge of Renaissance and Modern Europe. Likewise, the creation of printing in America and the circulation of books strengthen this diffusion process, despite the distance and censorship inquisitorial.

In this back and forth of men, books and ideas, knowledge did not just circulate in one direction. Wise residents in America adapted and transformed European theories, that is interpretations and traditions of different origin were combined to grasp the specificity of American nature and society. Do we refer, in this case, to an Americanization of European science or a process of "universalization" of local knowledge? Was this process extended to all scientific areas? Finding answers to these and other questions guide the present research.