


Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora

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Born	Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora August 14, 1645 Mexico City, Mexico
Died	August 22, 1700 (aged 55) Mexico City, Mexico
Occupation	priest, poet, non-fiction writer, mathematician, historian, philosopher, cartographer, and cosmographer
Religion	Catholic

Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (August 14, 1645 – August 22, 1700) was one of the first great intellectuals born in the Spanish viceroyalty of New Spain. A polymath and writer, he held many colonial government and academic positions.

Early career

Sigüenza was born in Mexico City in 1645 the youngest of eight siblings. He was related to the famous baroque poet Luis de Góngora. He studied mathematics and astronomy under the direction of his father, a *Peninsular* who had been a tutor for the royal family in Spain.

Sigüenza entered the Society of Jesus as a novice August 17, 1660, took simple vows August 15, 1662 at Tepotzotlán, and left the society (or was expelled) in 1667 or 1669. On July 20, 1672, he was named to the chair of mathematics and exact sciences at the University of Mexico and was ordained a priest the following year. He was chaplain of the Hospital del Amor de Dios (now Academia de San Carlos) from 1682 until his death. He was well known in the colony as a man of science. He was also a poet, non-fiction writer, historian, philosopher, cartographer, and cosmographer. Such was his prestige that the French King Louis XIV tried to induce him to come to Paris. He published his first poem in 1662. In 1671 he published an almanac. In 1693, he published *El Mercurio Volante*, the first newspaper in New Spain.

In 1681 Sigüenza wrote the book "Philosophical Manifest Against the Comets" in which he tried to dismiss fears of impending superstitious predictions based from astrology; in the work he takes steps to separate the fields of astrology and astronomy. The jesuit Eusebio Kino strongly criticized the texts written by Sigüenza because they were contradicting to established Catholic beliefs in the heavens. Sigüenza often cited authors like Copernicus, Galileo, Descartes, Kepler, and Brahe. In 1690 Sigüenza took an audacious move to defend his previous work by publishing "Libra Astronómica y Filosófica".

In 1690 Sigüenza published a pirate captivity narrative which has been considered Latin America's first novel, *Los infortunios de Alonso Ramírez*. However, new archival evidence discovered by Fabio López-Lázaro proves that this incredible story of a Puerto Rican taken captive by English pirates off the Philippine Islands is a historical account,

not a fictional one. The archival documents contain dozens of eyewitness accounts corroborating not only the existence of Alonso but also his capture in 1687, his life with pirates (most notably William Dampier), his collaboration with them, and his return to Mexico in 1690, at which time Spanish colonial authorities suspected Alonso of piracy. The new archival evidence leaves no room to doubt that Sigüenza's key role in creating *Los infortunios de Alonso Ramírez* was in editing Alonso's coarse narrative into a superior literary piece. It was commissioned by the Spanish administration during the war against Louis XIV to solidify Madrid's commitment to the struggle against French colonial rivals and their buccaneer collaborators but also to warn them about Spain's unreliable English and Dutch allies.^[1]

The Ixtlilxochitl-Sigüenza-Boturini collection

At the hospital Sigüenza became a close friend of Juan de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, who put at his disposal a rich collection of documents of his ancestors, who included the historian Fernando de Alva Cortés Ixtlilxochitl and the kings of Texcoco. In 1668, Sigüenza began the study of Aztec history and Toltec writing. On the death of Ixtlilxochitl he inherited the collection of documents, and devoted the later years of his life to the continuous study of Mexican history. (For an account of what happened to these documents after the death of Sigüenza, see Lorenzo Boturini Bernaducci.)

The Virgin of Guadalupe

Among these documents was purported to be a "map" (codex) documenting the 1531 apparition of the Virgin Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe that Luis Becerra Tanco claimed to have seen in the introduction to his 1666 defense of the apparition tradition.

Because of his association with these early documents, Sigüenza played a significant role in the development of the legend. He was a devotee of the Virgin, and wrote Parnassian poems to her as early as 1662. But his most lasting impact on the history of the apparition was his assertion that the *Nican mopohua*, the Nahuatl-language rendition of the narrative, was written by Antonio Valeriano, a conception that persists to this day. He further identified Fernando Alva de Ixtlilxochitl as the author of the *Nican motecpana*. This declaration was stimulated by Francisco de Florencia's *Polestar of Mexico*, which claimed that the original Nahuatl account had been written by Jerónimo de Mendieta.

In 1680, he was commissioned to design a triumphal arch for the arrival of the new Viceroy, Cerda y Aragón.

Also during the 1680s, he wrote histories of Mexico that speculated that the Olmecs had migrated to the New World via Atlantis and that Thomas the Apostle had evangelized the natives shortly after the death of Christ.

Teotihuacan

He was one of the first persons, during Spanish rule, to dig around the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan.^[2]

Royal geographer

In 1691, he prepared the first-ever map of all of New Spain. He also drew hydrologic maps of the Valley of Mexico. In 1692 King Charles II named him official geographer for the colony. As royal geographer, he participated in the 1692 expedition to Pensacola Bay, Florida under command of Andrés de Pez, to seek out defensible frontiers against French encroachment. He mapped Pensacola Bay and the mouth of the Mississippi: in 1693, he described the terrain in *Descripción del seno de Santa María de Galve, alias Panzacola, de la Mobila y del Río Misisipi*. When a Spanish attempt to colonize Pensacola Bay in 1698 was thwarted by the arrival of a French fleet, Sigüenza was blamed by the leader of the expedition, Andrés de Arriola, for inciting the French action. He successfully defended himself against these charges in 1699.



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Rescue of documents from the New Spain archives

In 1692, there was a severe drought in New Spain and a disease attacking wheat. This caused a severe shortage of food. Sigüenza was able to identify the cause of the wheat disease as a small insect called *chiahuitli*. There was no maize in the capital and many people were hungry. On June 8, 1692, a crowd gathered in front of the viceregal palace. They threw stones and set the archives on fire. Sigüenza saved most of the documents and some paintings, at the risk of his own life. This act preserved a considerable number of colonial Mexican documents that would otherwise have been lost. He later wrote an account of these events.

Later career and death

In 1694, he retired from the University and apparently reentered the Jesuit Order.

In November 1699, Sigüenza was named *corregidor general* (book examiner) for the Inquisition. He died of a kidney ailment in 1700 in the Hospital del Amor de Dios in Mexico City, where he had spent much of his career. He left his body to science, and his library to the Jesuit Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo. He also left a number of unpublished manuscripts, only fragments of which survived the Jesuit expulsion from the viceroyalty.

Works

- *Oriental planeta evangélica, epopeya sacropanegyrica al apostol grande de las Indias S. Francisco Xavier* (1662).
- *Primavera indiana, poema sacrohistórico, idea de María Santísima de Guadalupe* (1662).
- *Las Glorias de Queretaro* (1668) (poem).
- *Teatro de virtudes políticas que constituyen a un Príncipe* (1680).
- *Glorias de Querétaro en la Nueva Congregación Eclesiástica de María Santísima de Guadalupe... y el sumptuoso templo* (1680).
- *Libra astronomica* (1681).
- *Manifiesto filosófico contra los cometas despojados del imperio que tenían sobre los tímidos* (1681).
- *Triunfo parthénico que en glorias de María Santísima... celebró la... Academia Mexicana* (1683).
- *Parayso Occidental, plantado y cultivado en su magnífico Real Convento de Jesús María de México* (1684).
- *Piedad heroica de Don Hernando Cortés, Marqués del Valle* (1689).
- *Infortunios que Alonso Ramírez natural de la ciudad de S. Juan de Puerto Rico padeció... en poder de ingleses piratas* (1690).
- *Libra astronómica y filosófica en que... examina... lo que a [Sigüenza's] Manifiesto... contra los Cometas... opuso el R.P. Eusebio Francisco Kino* (1691).
- *Relación de lo sucedido a la armada de Barlovento en la isla de Santo Domingo con la quelna del Guarico* (1691).
- *Trofeo de la justicia española en el castigo de la alevosía francesa* (1691).
- *Descripción del seno de Santa María de Galve, alias Panzacola, de la Mobila y del Río Mississippi* (1693).
- *Elogio fúnebre de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (1695).

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- (Spanish) García Pura, Manuel, *México y sus gobernantes*, v. 1. Mexico City: Joaquín Porrúa, 1984.
- López-Lázaro, Fabio, *The Misfortunes of Alonso Ramirez: The True Adventures of a Spanish American with 17th Century Pirates*, University of Texas Press, 2011.
- (Spanish) Orozco Linares, Fernando, *Gobernantes de México*. Mexico City: Panorama Editorial, 1985, ISBN 968-38-0260-5.
- (Spanish) Solchaga Zamudio, Noé and Solchaga Peña, Luisa A., *Efemérides Mexicanas*, v. 1. Mexico City: Editorial Avante, 1992.

External links

- (Spanish) A chronology of his life ^[3]
- (Spanish) El Mercurio Volante ^[4], An Electronic Edition (in English)

Notes (reference list)

- [1] López-Lázaro, Fabio, *The Misfortunes of Alonso Ramirez: The True Adventures of a Spanish American with 17th Century Pirates*, University of Texas Press, 2011
- [2] <http://www.milenio.com/node/501242> Tunnel under Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent under exploration in 2010
- [3] <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utlac/00057/lac-00057.html>
- [4] http://www.mith2.umd.edu/eada/html/display.php?docs=siguenza_mercurio.xml&action=show

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