

Humboldtiana NEOGRANADINA

Alberto Gómez Gutiérrez

Humboldtiana neogranadina is a five volume collection written, compiled and edited by geneticist Alberto Gómez Gutiérrez, corresponding member of the Colombian Academy of Exact, Physical and Natural Sciences, which seeks to review in high detail the contribution Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and Aimé Bonpland (1773-1858) to science and transnational cooperation, on the current territory of Colombia. This work registers the findings of Alexander von Humboldt in the domains of nature and society on his day to day passage through the Viceroyalty of New Granada in a journey essentially limited by the current borders of Colombia, less with an apologetic spirit than with the intention of documenting a substantial series of nineteenth-century encounters and presences that can be deduced from the Humboldtian papers.

Volume I opens with the words of Professor Frank Holl, from the Münchner Wissenschaftstage in Germany, the words of Father Jorge Humberto Peláez, S. J., rector of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, and Pablo Navas Sanz de Santamaría, rector of Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, followed by a description of preliminary meetings that brought the Prussian explorer to New Granada. Volume 1 includes a short pre-biographical autobiography written by himself in Spain accompanied by his juvenile chronology, as well as a biographical review of Aimé Bonpland.

The work then enters into Colombian territory, starting on April 12, 1800, on the river mouths of the Meta into the Orinoco. From there it continues southward and upstream, up to the town of San Carlos upon Rio Negro which extends the waters of the Guainía river beyond the southeastern border of Colombia. Leaving aside the details of his return to the Venezuelan coast and his passage on the island of Cuba, reference is made to his second (and very risky) entry to the Colombian territory, this time by sea on the Caribbean waters of the Morrosquillo Gulf, then Cartagena, and their journey by the Turbaco-Canal del Dique route towards the Magdalena River, going up this fluvial artery up to Honda.

Once there, after visiting the mines of Santa Ana and Mariquita and returning to Honda, they finally ascend the eastern mountain range of the Andes, via Guaduas up to Santafé de Bogotá. Humboldt and Bonpland stationed in the Bogotá Savannah nearly two months and had multiple personal meetings around José Celestino Mutis (1732-1808), his main host, in the midst of valuable excursions and discoveries.

The trip then continues to Popayán via the Fusagasugá-Ibagué-Cartago trail, crossing the main geographical landmark of what was called “El Quindío”, that is: the passage of the Central mountain range between the valley of the Combeima river and the valley of the Cauca river. In Popayán, a third Neogranadian encounter of scientific value is prepared and associated with the enlightened Francisco José de Caldas (1768-1816), months after his interactions with Captain Joaquín Francisco Fidalgo (1758-1820) in Cartagena and José Celestino Mutis in Santafé de Bogotá.

Once Humboldt and Bonpland ended their visit to the native town of Caldas and its surroundings, the chronicle takes them to Pasto before definitively leaving the Colombian territory on the last day of december 1801, when the travelers continued to the present lands of Ecuador and the territories of the Viceroyalty of Peru.



A third passage through today's Colombian maritime territories, led them to navigate near the island of Malpelo, in the Colombian Pacific Ocean. This was not, however, their last goodbye to the Neogranadian society. Subsequently, in the course of the first half of the XIXth century, critical encounters with Neogranadians took place in Europe, with a positive impact both on the upcoming nation of Colombia and the works of the Prussian Baron himself among which his personal encounter in Paris with Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) stands out. These encounters are described in the second volume where subsequent personal relationships with some members of the Colombian elites in scientific domains are detailed, among which the reader will find those with a main disciple in those years, Colonel Joaquín Acosta (1800-1852), and especially with two europeans who would continue the transatlantic scientific cooperation, Jean-Baptiste Boussingault (1801-1887) and Agustín Codazzi (1793-1859).

The third volumen of *Humboldtiana neogranadina* starts with the Presentation of the psychologist and communicator Germán Rey Beltrán and the Introduction of Henry Bradford Sicard, rector of the College of Advanced Studies in Administration in Bogotá, and includes eleven original Humboldt writings specifically associated with New Granada, comprising: a) an autobiography written by the Prussian in Bogotá in 1801; b) a *Reasoned report on the salt mines of Zipaquirá*; c) the integral text of the *Geography of the plants* (with comments by Francisco José de Caldas, Joaquín Acosta and Ernesto Guhl); d) the "Preface" in the work *Plantæ æquinoctiales*; e) "Extracts from the statistics of Mexico", commented by Caldas; f) the "State of metallic mines in New Granada"; g) extracts of the "Prolegomena and Indexes" in the work *Nova genera et species plantarum*; h) The "Report on the Province of Antioquia and on the discovery of platinum in its matrix"; i) the "Description of the Bogotá Savannah"; j) the "Biographical Notes" of Humboldt on José Celestino Mutis, and Bonpland on Francisco Antonio Zea, published in the *Biographie Universelle* of the Michaud brothers, and k) the series of studies on "Thermal sources and volcanoes of mud, sulfur and of fire in New Granada", in addition to a list of "Original publications by Alexander von Humboldt", which seeks to synthesize the heteroclite printed production of the Prussian traveler. This volume closes the Epilogue of Juan Luis Mejía Arango, past minister of Culture in Colombia and present rector of the University School of Administration, Finance and Technology of Medellín.

The detailed accompaniment of the travelers of the Franco-Prussian commission in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century and their Neogranadian endeavors were complemented, in the fourth volume – after the Presentation of Hernando García Martínez, deputy director of research at the Alexander von Humboldt Biological Resources Research Institute, and before the Epilogue of José Manuel Restrepo Abondano, past rector of Universidad del Rosario and present minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism in Colombia–, with the original iconography and scientific texts of Humboldt concerning the viceroyalty of New Granada. These works are distributed thematically, in chapters entitled “Cartography”, “Astronomy”, “Landscape”, “Archeology”, “Zoology”, “Paleontology”, “Biological anthropology” and “Geography and hydrology”. Additionally, two chapters are offered which deal with complementary dimensions of the scientific prospecting of this commission that opened the eighteenth century: the first, under the title of “Geology and Neogranadian mineralogy” (written with the historian Jorge Tomás Uribe Ángel) and the second, “Humboldt, Bonpland and the plants of New Granada” (written in collaboration with the late botanist and historian Santiago Díaz Piedrahita and the late philologist and orchidologist Pedro Ortiz Valdivieso, S.J., who contributed their thoughts on the great taxonomic work that these travelers published in the two tomes of the *Plantæ æquinoctiales* and in the seven volumes of *Nova genera et species plantarum*). The description and instructions for using the web portal www.geoatico.net –developed in collaboration with Fernando Salazar, Omar Rivera and Mauricio Cubides– are included below, in which the digital georeferencing of the Humboldt and Bonpland expedition route can be found in scale 1:24.000. This same volume was, and contains five independent contributions by Colombian scholars – Mauricio Nieto Olarte, Jorge Arias de Greiff, Margarita Serje de la Ossa, Vicente Durán Casas, S.J., and Carl Langebaek Rueda–, under the titles “Science, romanticism and exploration voyages”, “Scientific encounters around Alexander von Humboldt in the American Spain”, “Ideas for a geography of plants: the paradoxical vision of Humboldt on equinoctial America”, “Kant, Humboldt and the Tequendama Falls: two Prussians united by geography” and “Civilization and savagery in a European man: between the Enlightenment and Romanticism”.

The fifth volume of *Humboldtiana neogranadina*, which contains large-scale cartography and other Neogranadian illustrations, in addition to a selected iconography of Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland, opens with the words of Luis David Prieto Martínez, vice-rector of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and those of geneticist Jaime Bernal Villegas, rector of Technological University of Bolívar in Cartagena, and closes with the Epilogue of Juan Carlos Henao, rector of Externado de Colombia and of Fernán Vejarano Alvarado, one of its most outstanding professors of demography and history.

Finally, an annexed booklet compiles the “General Index” and the “Onomastic Index” corresponding to all the previous volumes, as well as academic biographies of collaborators and authors of the texts compiled in *Humboldtiana neogranadina*.

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