

Ulrike Leitner

Humboldt's works on Mexico

(Paper presented at the conference "Alexander von Humboldt y la Ciencia Americana. Bicentenario" in Mexico-City, 1999, Aug. 15.-19.)

ABSTRACT

Humboldt wrote about Mexico from the perspective of a scientific explorer and naturalist. His works include his diaries, the *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne*, the *Tablas geográficas*, the *Vues des Cordillères* and a geographic atlas. Concerning the scientific aspect, the lack of a section on Mexico in the *Relation historique* is not a real deficit, since this can be found in the *Essai*. But only the diaries and letters from the journey, both published by the Alexander-von-Humboldt Research Centre, Berlin, can be considered an adequate substitute.

The following will show the origin of Humboldt's writings on Mexico, offer historical and bibliographical facts and present the publications "Beiträge zur Alexander von Humboldt-Forschung", as well as Humboldt's handwritten estate as far as they are available to us.

RESUMEN

Humboldt escribió sobre México desde la perspectiva de un explorador científico y un naturalista. Sus obras incluyen diarios, el "ensayo político sobre el reino de la Nueva España", las tablas geográficas, las vistas de las Cordilleras y un atlas geográfico. En lo relacionado al aspecto científico la falta de una sección dedicada a México en la "relation historique" no representa un déficit real, porque ésta se encuentra en el ensayo. Pero sólo los diarios y las cartas de viaje, ambos publicados por el Centro de Investigación Alexander-von-Humboldt, Berlín, pueden ser considerados un sustituto adecuado.

El siguiente texto mostrará los orígenes de los escritos de Humboldt acerca de México, ofrecerá hechos históricos y bibliográficos y presentará las publicaciones "Beiträge zur Alexander von Humboldt-Forschung" así como los manuscritos de Humboldt según éstos sean accesibles a nosotros.



1. Introduction

“Right now he [Alexander von Humboldt] is extraordinarily busy with a work that will sell excellently, because it is absolutely new and consuming him at the moment: the statistics on Mexico; an altogether splendid work. We are almost neighbors and I have therefore seen most of it. It has in its own way most unique features [...]”, wrote Johannes von Müller from Berlin on June 21, 1807 to their publisher Johann Friedrich von Cotta in Stuttgart.¹ The *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne* did indeed find an especially attentive readership in Europe. This was partially due to the growing interest in economic problems, but also because of its inherent criticism of Spanish colonial politics.

In this paper I want to address the origin of Humboldt’s Mexico-related writings and their place in his entire work. I also wish to briefly compare their contents. (It is a well-known fact that Humboldt held the comparative method in high regard.)² Additionally, extensive research undertaken by the former East German Alexander-von-Humboldt Research Center has also been included. This research dates back to the founding years of the research center at the time of the centennial of his death in 1959. Furthermore, I’d like to use this opportunity to present the Research Center’s publication series “Beiträge zur Alexander von Humboldt-Forschungsstelle”, in particular the edition which includes the correspondences and diaries, as well as what is available to us of Humboldt’s handwritten estate.

2. “Tablas géografico-políticas del reyno de Nueva Espana”

On the March 22, 1803, Humboldt landed in Acapulco together with Carlos Montúfar and Aimé Bonpland, coming from Lima by ship. “The coast is one of the most picturesque we ever saw, the sandy beach of Coyuca gilded by the sun’s reflexions, then a densely grown banana plantation, coconut palm trees, and, behind all that, three mountain ranges, very high and partially wooded. An impressive view [...]”, wrote Humboldt in his diary.³ Almost a week later he asked Viceroy José de Iturrigaray for permission to travel in his country for scientific purposes: “The desire to make a contribution to the natural sciences and to study in close proximity the customs and products of distant countries was the reasoning behind undertaking an expedition

1 “Mit ungewöhnlichem Fleiß arbeitet er [Alexander von Humboldt] an einem Werk, das reiend abgehen wird, weil es ganz neu ist und sein grtes Interesse gerade in gegenwrtigem Augenblick hat, an der Statistik von Mexico; es ist eine ganz vortreffliche Arbeit. Wir wohnen fast nebeneinander, und ich habe daher das meiste gesehen; es hat in seiner Art ganz einzige Sachen [...]” Maria Fehling (ed.), *Briefe an Cotta. Das Zeitalter Goethes und Napoleons 1794–1815*, Stuttgart/Berlin, 1925, p. 160.

2 The explanations are based on the bibliography of Humboldt’s monographs: Horst Fiedler (†)/Ulrike Leitner, *Alexander von Humboldts Schriften – Bibliographie der selbstndig erschienenen Werke*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2000. (Beitrge zur Alexander von Humboldt-Forschung 20)

3 “Die Kste ist eine der malerischsten, welche wir je gesehen haben, der Sandstrand von Coyuca vom Sonnenreflex vergoldet, dann eine dicht bewachsene Bananenplantage, Kokospalmen, und hinter allem drei Gebirgsketten, sehr hoch und teilweise bewaldet. Ein imposanter Anblick [...]” *Alexander von Humboldt. Reise auf dem Ro Magdalena, durch die Anden und Mexico. Part II: bersetzung, Anmerkungen, Register*. Margot Faak, ed. and transl., Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1990, p. 201. (Beitrge zur Alexander-von-Humboldt-Forschung 9)

to the inside of the New Continent at my own expense.”⁴ Iturrigaray generously offered his help and sent the passports necessary for the journey. I am able to show the passport with which Humboldt and his travel companions left Mexico (see fig. 1).⁵

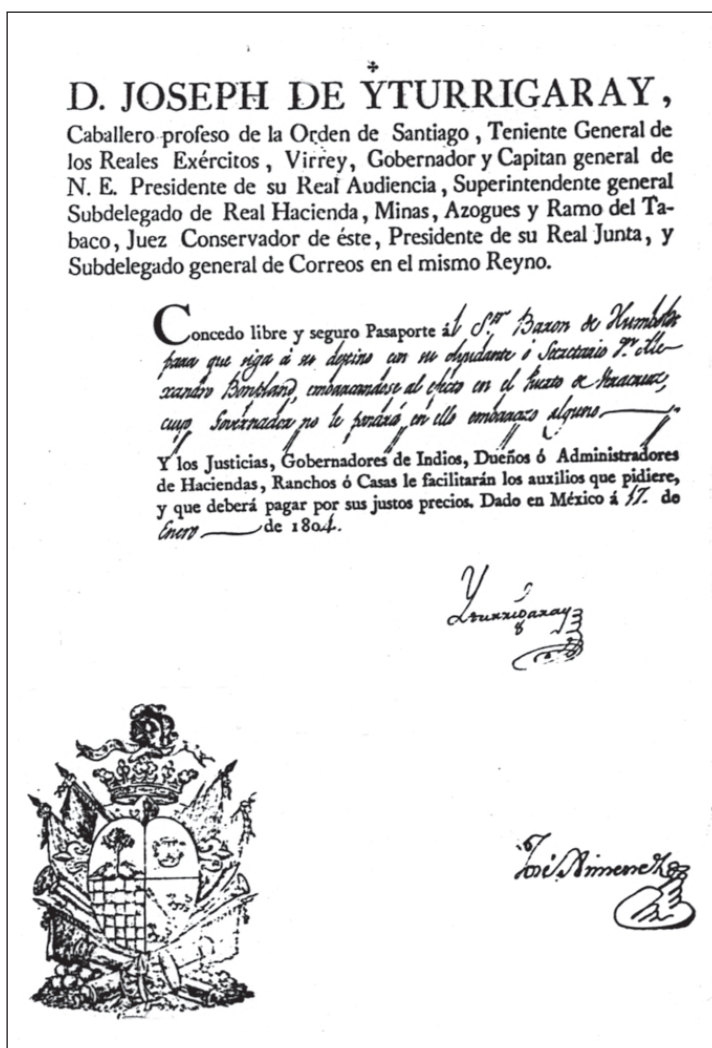


Figure 1

With this passport, the archives of Mexico City became accessible, allowing Humboldt to use manuscripts, statistics and maps. Humboldt collected further material on excursions: he visited mines, occupied himself with determinations of geographic positions and barometric levellings, and visited a cigar factory and a drainage system. He also worked and taught at the Mountain Academy.

4 “El deseo de contribuir a los progresos de los conocimientos físicos y de estudiar de cerca las costumbres y producciones de los países remotos, me han dejado emprender a mi propio gasto, una Expedición en el Interior del Nuevo Continente.” Letter from A. v. Humboldt to José de Iturrigaray, Acapulco, 28.3. 1803. *Alexander von Humboldt. Briefe aus Amerika 1799–1804*, Ulrike Moheit, ed., Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1993, p. 223.

5 It is part of the collection of documents in the archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences. This collection was surprisingly returned from Georgia (former Soviet Union) 3 years ago. It had been considered lost in World War II.

Humboldt summed up the collected material in the Tablas g ografico-politicas. He offered a copy to the Viceroy on Jan 3, 1804,⁶ about a month before his departure for Veracruz. From there he continued his journey to Cuba and North America on the March 7. He emphasized that his materials were not even known to the Viceroy's office. The study, which was apparently originally written in Spanish and then copied by hand, is assumed to have been presented shortly thereafter. Fig. 2 shows the draft of Humboldt's letter to Iturrigaray and fig. 3 the original of Iturrigaray's reply.⁷

Ei

Excelent. V.º

Yo, los vuestros dominios que forman de la
 felicidad de esta parte de mundo de V.º
 creo ~~de~~ ~~deber~~ cumplir quanto antes con
 mi obligacion ^{poroposme} a los ordenes de V.º
 de ^{obediencia} las expresiones de mi profunda
 veneracion y respeto, no hago con tanto
 mas gusto quanto mas conosco la necesidad
 que lleva V.º como protector de las
 ciencias ~~de~~ ~~de~~ utiles a la humanidad y
 de los frutos que las cultivan.

Figure 2

Alui. Sr. mto. Me recivido con la atencion casta xº
 20 de E. de este mes el papel que acomp. me ~~relacion~~
 a sus observaciones sobre la agricultura e industria de que tengo; y siendo este un do-
 cumento que al paso que acredita los profundos es-
 nocimientos de V.º me proporciona adquirir algunos
 quei utiles para el gobierno de estos Dominios, doy
 a V.º las debidas gracias d. mandole un feliz viaje
 y asegurandole que desde todas partes oire con go-
 su nombre y celebrare ocasiones de complacerle.
 Dios guarde a V.º mi. an. Mexico 20 de
 Enero de 1804.

D. S. M. de V.º su atemo
 y apasionado servidor.

Jose de Iturrigaray

Sr. Baron de Humboldt.

Figure 3

6 Letter from A. v. Humboldt to José de Iturrigaray, México, Jan 3, 1804, see: *Briefe aus Amerika*, op. cit. p. 264.

7 Humboldt-Nachlaß Nr. 1, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, Kraków, Polen.

Later copies of the Tablas still exist in Ann Arbor (Clements Library), Mexico (at the Archivo gen., Ramo de Historia and in private possession) and in New Orleans (Tulane University Library). A French extract is located in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. With the publication in Europe of Humboldt's Mexico work, the 1822 print has in the meantime become scientifically outdated. Current reprints (Mexico 1969, 1970 and 1993) offer a text suitable for scientific purposes. Humboldt's own original manuscript (see fig. 4), which he apparently brought to Europe, are contained in that part of Humboldt's papers which was brought to Kraków (Poland)⁸ following the evacuation of the Berlin State Library during World War II. It is still unpublished. Those familiar with the Mexican edition of 1993⁹ will notice that in this illustration, some of the titles and sub-titles written in different letter sizes were left out by the writer of the manuscript copy on which that edition is based. Except for these outward differences which allow one to draw conclusions about Humboldt's style, the copy is identical with the original.

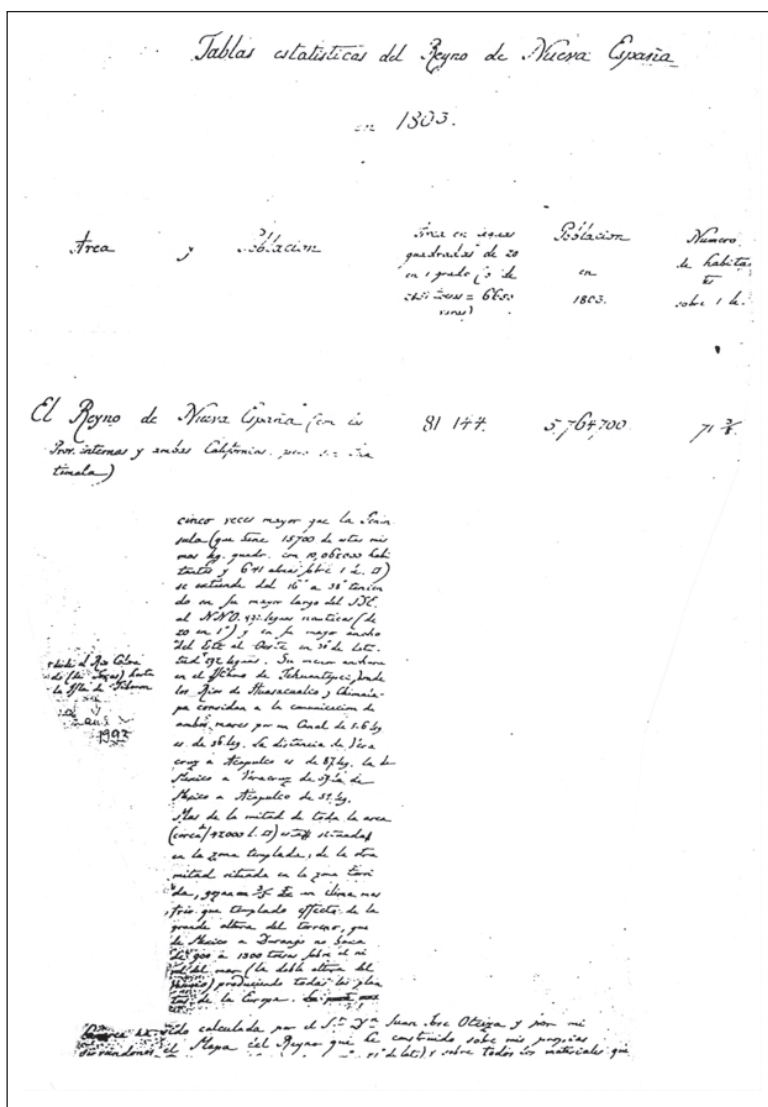


Figure 4

8 Humboldt-Nachlaß 1, op. cit.

9 Alejandro de Humboldt, *Tablas geográfico-políticas del reino de Nueva España*, Introducción, transcripción y notas de José G. Morena de Alba, México, Universidad nacional autónoma de México, 1993. For a facsimile copy and transcription see <http://www.agn.gob.mx/humboldt/index.html>.

The Tablas contain, as the name suggests often in tabulated form statistics on the physical expansion of the country, on population size and density, on the political and administrative structure of the viceroyalty, and economic data about income, the military and commerce.

Another small text which Humboldt wrote during his stay in Mexico is the *Essai de Pasigraphie géologique dressée à l'usage de l'Ecole des Mines du Mexique*. In this paper Humboldt proposed a special language of formula for geognostic and geographic observations. This text is also a part of the estate of Humboldt papers in the Berlin State Library. Already in 1958 it was published by Hanno Beck.¹⁰

3. Alexander von Humboldt's Diaries

Since Humboldt's report on his American journey (*Relation historique*) ends with his arrival in Columbia in 1801, his diaries are the essential source for a full account of his stay in Mexico. They are on loan from the owners, the von Heinz family, descendants of Wilhelm von Humboldt and can be found in the manuscript department of the Berlin State Library at Schloß Tegel in Berlin. In four extensive volumes, Margot Faak undertook the time-consuming task of compiling a selection of the transcriptions which are now located at our research center. The first volume contains the diaries in the original languages (mainly French)¹¹; the second one has the German translation as well as various indexes.¹² An additional volume sums up Humboldt's texts on the topic: Latin America on the eve of the revolution of independence.¹³ Another volume¹⁴, which has been published within the year, includes a selection of the diaries concerning the first part of the journey, thereby providing a comparison to Humboldt's diaries and the published text in the *Relation historique*. Concerning controversial points, as e.g. the exact route of the journey, the diaries should always be taken into consideration first.

Bringing back the diaries to Europe with him, Humboldt referred to them regularly and made them the basis of his publications on the results of the American journey, especially for the *Relation historique* which is why it contains some annotations added down the line. He later took the notebooks apart and had them bound into nine volumes. Their chronological order thus seems in some cases to be interrupted. In the edition I mentioned previously, M. Faak attempted to reestablish the original order. On pp. 309–392 of vol. 8 (pp. 202–296 of vol. 9 in the translation), his stay in Mexico is described, consisting of parts from the original diaries VII and IX.

10 Hanno Beck, "Alexander von Humboldts 'Essay de Pasigraphie', Mexico 1803/04", *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 32 (1958) 2: 33–39.

11 *Alexander von Humboldt. Reise auf dem Río Magdalena, durch die Anden und Mexico. Part I: Texte. Aus seinen Reisetagebüchern*, ed. Margot Faak, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1986. (Beiträge zur Alexander-von-Humboldt-Forschung 8)

12 *Reise T. II: Übersetzung*, op. cit.

13 *Alexander von Humboldt. Lateinamerika am Vorabend der Unabhängigkeitsrevolution. Eine Anthologie von Impressionen und Urteilen aus seinen Reisetagebüchern*, ed. Margot Faak, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1982. (Beiträge zur Alexander-von-Humboldt-Forschung 5)

14 *Alexander von Humboldt Reise durch Venezuela. Aus seinen Reisetagebüchern*, ed. Margot Faak, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2000. (Beiträge zur Alexander-von-Humboldt-Forschung 12)

Humboldt considers all observations worthy of writing down, but his preference for precise measurements is especially remarkable. Lists of data are therefore often left out by the editor. Descriptions of the flora, of customs and habits, of language, culture and nature, the rocks and layers of mountains, descriptions of trade and commerce, remarks on the social situation of the population, all these go beyond a mere description of his experiences and excursions with Bonpland and his other companions. Humboldt's summary of his stay in Guanajuato from August 7–September 6, 1803 is a good example of this: “[It was one of the] most exhausting periods of my life. I climbed all mountains using my barometer. In Valenciana I descended three times to the bottom of the mine, two times in Rayas, in Mellado, in Fraustros, in Animas and in San Bruno. I visited the mine of Villalpando, spent two days in Santa Rosa and in Los Álamos [...] I had a dangerous fall on my back in Fraustros, and experienced extreme pain for 14 days due to a sprain of the base of my spine!”¹⁵ He showed his interest in history by writing down all sources of information, even traditional anecdotes. This makes the texts entertaining and varied. He tells, for example, the story of the creation of Jorullo with irony (“one of the most dreadful phenomena history has to offer”), which rose up on the 29th of September 1759 in the form of a cone, and—according to myth—was to have been the work of some monks. They had apparently been poorly received at the Hacienda of Jorullo and had therefore cast spells upon the plain. “Surely the Jorullo is the greatest work monks have ever created, and if one is not impressed by the gullibility of a people who claim they can constantly observe how the eternal laws of nature have been abolished, one has to be amazed by the eagerness of this religious caste to do everything in their power in order to base their world on fear.”¹⁶ This kind of critical remark about the role of the clergy, made many times by Humboldt, as well as his overall critical attitude of Latin American society, placed him in the role of a champion for the revolution of independence. Today, based on Humboldt's newly edited diaries, letters and other authentic statements, this myth is reduced to Humboldt as a reformer, a representative of a just liberalism and economic progress.

4. Voyage aux régions équinoxiales du nouveau continent fait en 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803 et 1804, par Alexandre de Humboldt et Aimé Bonpland

It was already in his diaries that Humboldt developed a concept for his future publications. This concept changed several times over the 30 years of publication: Parties in one or more volumes present the scientific results of the journey in the different disciplines of natural history (such as geology, geography, botany etc.) under the main title *Voyage aux régions équinoxiales*, and are illustrated by important French and German artists.

15 “[...] einem der anstrengendsten Zeitabschnitte meines Lebens. Ich bin mit dem Barometer auf alle Berge geklettert, ich bin in Valenciana dreimal bis auf die Sohle eingefahren, in Rayas zweimal, in Mellado, Fraustros, Animas, San Bruno, ich bin im Bergwerk von Villalpando gewesen, zwei Tage in Santa Rosa und in Los Álamos [...] Ich habe in Fraustros einen sehr gefährlichen Sturz getan, indem ich auf den Rücken gefallen bin, wovon ich 14 Tage lang wegen einer Verstauchung des Steißbeins stärkste Schmerzen verspürt habe!” In: *Reise T. II: Übersetzung*, op. cit., p. 265.

16 “Sicherlich ist der Jorullo das größte Werk, das Mönche je hervorgebracht haben, und wenn man sich nicht über die Leichtgläubigkeit des Volkes wundern will, das jeden Augenblick die ewigen Gesetze der Natur aufgehoben sieht, muß man sich über den Eifer dieser religiösen Kaste wundern, die [...] aus allem Nutzen für sich gezogen hat, um ihr Reich auf der Furcht zu gründen.” *Reise T. II: Übersetzung*, op. cit., p. 276.

Written by Humboldt mainly during his stay in Paris beginning in 1807, the work consists of 29 volumes in the French folio/quarto edition (34 volumes including the *Synopsis plantarum* by K.S. Kunth, see table 1). At the same time, a lower priced French edition in octavo as well as a German edition were in the planning. But Humboldt later changed these plans: The *Géographie des plantes*, intended to form the first partie in combination with the description of the journey *Relation historique*, was moved to partie 5, originally intended for the geological partie which then was never written. The *Relation historique* was however published so late, that the atlases—at first meant to accompany the *Relation historique*—were equipped with an explanatory text which in the case of the *Examen critique* (Partie 1.2), intended as an independent publication, was never completed and discontinued in 1839 (just like the *Relation historique* in 1831). Numerous reprints, excerpts and separate prints added to the bibliographical confusion. One of these separate prints—a chapter of the *Relation historique*—became the well-known *Essai politique sur l’île de Cuba*. Its connection with the original work became obscured because of how it was received, especially in the Spanish-speaking world. The disastrous publishing situation in Europe made things even worse. Humboldt later states that he “went from one French bookseller’s bankruptcy to the next” in Paris. The precious design did indeed cause financial distress not only to his publishers, but also to Humboldt himself, who sacrificed his fortune to finance the expensive copperplate engravings. Due to the high price, hardly any customer was able to afford the work, priced at 13 033 Francs, 6 480 of which was only for the main botanical work *Nova genera!* Unique in this huge venture was the conceptional separation between the narrative description of the journey (a genre widely corresponding to the trends of the time, e.g. to Georg Forster, essentially Humboldt’s teacher as an explorer) and the scientific parts. The latter mirror the historic process of the genesis of disciplines out of the overall history of nature at that time.

Mexico-related parts within the *Voyage aux régions équinoxiales* are the *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne* (Partie 3) including the atlas, *Vues des Cordilleres* (Partie 1.2) and *Recueil d’Observations astronomique* (Partie 4). I will come to the work mentioned first in more detail later. The *Vues des Cordilleres*, the “pittoresque atlas”, should be of interest to “unscientific people”¹⁷, as well. Placing images and descriptions of human artwork next to those of nature and landscapes, more than other volumes, the monumental work also displays the aesthetic gains of Humboldt’s journey. After the American journey Humboldt became very much interested in the physiognomic questions of nature which becomes obvious in his depiction of nature, especially the mountain shapes. Here one is able to see not only Humboldt’s desire to depict the intensity of his nature experience by means of realistic landscape paintings, but also—by way of observing nature—the influence of Goethe. This becomes clear in Humboldt’s comment when sending Goethe the first fascicle of the *Vues des Cordillères*: “Nature and art are tightly associated in my work. May you not be entirely dissatisfied with this edition, may you in these views recognize yourself, the influence of your writings upon me, the influence of your powerful presence!”¹⁸

17 Letter from A. v. Humboldt to J.F. v. Cotta, June 9, 1805, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Schiller-Nationalmuseum, Cotta-Archiv (Stiftung der Stuttgarter Zeitung), Marbach/Neckar.

18 “Natur und Kunst sind in meinem Werke eng verschwistert. Möchten Sie mit der Bearbeitung nicht ganz unzufrieden sein, möchten Sie in einzelnen Ansichten sich selbst, Einfluß Ihrer Schriften auf mich, Einfluß Ihrer herrschenden Nähe erkennen!” Letter from A. v. Humboldt to J.W. v. Goethe, Jan 1, 1810, Goethe-u.-Schiller-Archiv, Marbach.

Partie 1.

Section 1. Relation historique

quarto edition: 3 vols. 1814–1831

octavo edition: 13 vols. 1816–1831

separata: Essai politique sur l'île de Cuba. 2 vols. 1826

Tableau statistique de l'île de Cuba. 1 vol. 1831

Section 2. Vues des Cordillères et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique

folio edition: 1 vol. 1810–1813

octavo edition: 2 vols. 1816

Section 3. Atlas géographique et physique des régions équinoxiales du Nouveau Continent

folio edition: 1 (2?) vols. 1814–1838

octavo edition (separatum of the text): Examen critique de l'histoire de la géographie du Nouveau Continent. 5 vols. 1836–1839

Partie 2. Recueil d'observations de zoologie et d'anatomie comparée faites dans l'océan atlantiques, dans l'intérieur du Nouveau Continent et dans la mer du sud

quarto edition: 2 vols. 1811–1833

Partie 3. Essai politique sur la royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne [...] avec un atlas physique et géographique, fondé sur des observations astronomiques, des mesures trigonométriques et nivellemens barométriques

quarto edition: 3 vols. 1808–1811

1st octavo edition: 5 vols. 1–5. 1811

2nd octavo edition: 4 vols. 1–4. 1825–1827

Partie 4. Recueil d'observations astronomiques, d'opérations trigonométriques et de mesures barométriques

quarto edition 2 vols. 1080–1810

extract in octavo: Conspectus longitudinum et latitudinum geographiarum 1808–1811

separatum: Nivellement barométrique 1808

Partie 5. Essai sur la géographie des plantes accompagné d'un tableau physique des régions équinoxiales

quarto edition: 1 vol. 1805–1807

Partie 6. Botanique

6.1. Plantes équinoxiales folio edition 2 vols. 1805–1817

6.2. Monographie des Mélastomacées folio edition 2 vols. 1806–1823

6.3. Nova genera et species plantarum

folio edition: 7 vols. 1815–1825

quarto edition: 7 vols. 1815–1825

separatum: De distributione geographica plantarum 1817

6.4. Mimoses et autres plantes légumineuses folio edition 1 vol. 1819–1824

6.5. Révision des Graminées folio edition 3 vols. 1829–1834

6.6. K.S. Kunth: Synopsis plantarum octavo edition 4 vols. 1822–1826

Table 1. Voyage aux régions équinoxiales du nouveau continent fait en 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803 et 1804, par Alexandre de Humboldt et Aimé Bonpland

The *Recueil d'Observations astronomiques* contains a more detailed description of the journey. It lists the data of all measured and calculated geographic localities. Humboldt wrote in his introduction: "I've made it my duty to note all observations without preselection in my diary." The publication's main part is made up of Oltmann's calculations based on the data which Humboldt had given him to organize and calculate. Humboldt names 200 astronomic localizations of places and 500 height measurements. Oltmann probably wrote in German, which was then translated for the French edition by Humboldt. In addition to this jointly produced text, the work contains a number of extensive contributions added by each individual scholar under his own name. One could therefore say that the German and the French editions, published separately between 1808–1811, are in a sense interwoven in terms of how they evolved.

5. Further publications

During his American journey, Humboldt regularly sent reports to scientific colleagues in Spain, France, Germany and England or publishers of periodicals, with the intention of having them published during his absence.

Among those who received such reports were Jean Baptiste Joseph Delambre, Jérôme Joseph de Lalande, Antoine François Comte Fourcroy, Franz Xaver von Zach, Karl Erenbert von Moll. Letters to French scientists were read in the Institut national in Paris, reports to the botanist Karl Ludwig Willdenow in Berlin in the Society of Natural History. Because some of these letters are written in the explicit hope that they will be published, and can actually be regarded as articles for journals, the volume "Letters from America"¹⁹ must be mentioned here as a supplement to the report of the journey.

Humboldt's reports and letters were also the basis for two articles about the American journey not written by himself: In 1804 J.C. de Lamethérie published his "Notice d'un voyage aux tropiques"²⁰ based on Humboldt's reports and letters read in the Institut National and, in 1805 F.W. Schütz's publication "Alexander von Humboldt's [...] Reisen um die Welt und durch das Innere von Südamerika"²¹ appeared, compiled from Humboldt's published letters.

After his return and before the publication of the volumes of the *Voyage aux régions équinoxiales* Humboldt tried in two different ways to arouse interest in his work and to present his first results: Preprints of the already written, but not yet published parts (e.g. in Zach's journal *Monatliche Correspondenz*) and lectures which he had also published (if not in journals, then at least as "private prints for friends"). The lecture "Ueber die Urvölker v. Amerika und die Denkmähler, welche von ihnen übrig geblieben sind"²² which he held at the Philomatic Society of Berlin of which he had become a member the year before, sums up the available knowledge about precolumbic cultures in a readily understandable fashion, and at various times refers to his work in preparation, the *Vues des Cordillères*.

19 See note 4.

20 *Journal de physique* 59, An 12/13, Thermidor, pp. 122–139.

21 *Hamburg/Mainz*, Vollmer, 1805.

22 *Neue Berlinische Monatsschrift* 15 (1806), März, pp. 117–208.

Some of these short prose texts exceed the later account of the journey in their expressiveness and stylistic perfection, readily allowing readers to envision Humboldt's adventures in the wide prairies and deserts and to hear the sounds of the jungle. Humboldt later considered some of these texts worthy to be included in the *Views of Nature* (1807) or his last work, *Kleinere Schriften* (1853), which he was unable to complete before his death.

6. "Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne"

As the introductory quote reveals, beginning at least as early as 1807 Humboldt was occupied with the work he called "Statistics of Mexico", relatively early compared to the *Relation historique* which first appeared in 1814. Besides the physical geographical description, the work contains economic geographical aspects (mining, agriculture and trade), statistical studies and investigations into the structure and social situation of the population and the public health system. As Ursula Thiemer-Sachse emphasizes, the work thereby becomes one of the first monographs on a single country written from an historical-sociological and political science point of view.²³

<p>f. = fascicle, p. = page, pl. = plate</p> <p>Vol. 1</p> <p>1808 May (?) f. 1: title pages, p. I–XLVIII, p. 3–52, pl. 9, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17 Sept. 26 f. 2: p. 53–172, pl. 5, 6–8, 12, 18 1809 May 22 f. 3: p. 172–348, pl. 3, 15</p> <p>Vol. 1 and 2</p> <p>1809 Nov. 13 f. 4: p. XLIV–XCII, p. 349–428(?), pl. 1 and 1^{bis}</p> <p>Vol. 2</p> <p>1810 f. 5: p. 429–662 1811 Jan. 14 f. 6: p. 663–788, pl. 2, 4 1811 July 1 f. 7: title pages (?), p. 789–904, pl. 10, 19, 20</p>

Table 2. Dates of the Publication of the "Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne"

In its original form, the work was published in short intervals between 1808 and 1811 in 2 quarto volumes and then, in 1811, in 5 octavo volumes. The matter in the two editions is the same, they only differ in pagination. Each of the 7 fascicles of the quarto edition included the corresponding tables of the atlas volume (see table 2). Fascicle 1 (of April 1808) contained in addition the

23 Ursula Thiemer-Sachse, "Alexander von Humboldt und sein Beitrag zu einem wissenschaftlichen Mexiko-Bild, dargestellt an seinen Forschungen über Alt-Mexiko und die zeitgenössischen Indianer", *Ethnographisch-archäologische Zeitschrift*, 11 (1970): 163–214, p. 184.

title pages of volume 1; the last fascicle (July 1, 1811) contained the title pages of volume 2, as well as new titles for the first volume because the publishers' specifications had in the meantime changed: Although the work had begun as a joint venture between the German publisher Cotta and the French publisher Schoell in Paris, the title of the French edition of 1811 listed only Schoell as the publisher. Cotta left the project in 1810 because of Schoell's growing financial problems. In 1811, Schoell was on the brink of ruin.

As demonstrated by José G. Morena de Alba, editor of the *Tablas*,²⁴ the chapter divisions of both works correspond (see fig. 5)—another reason the *Tablas* are often regarded as the core of the *Essai*.

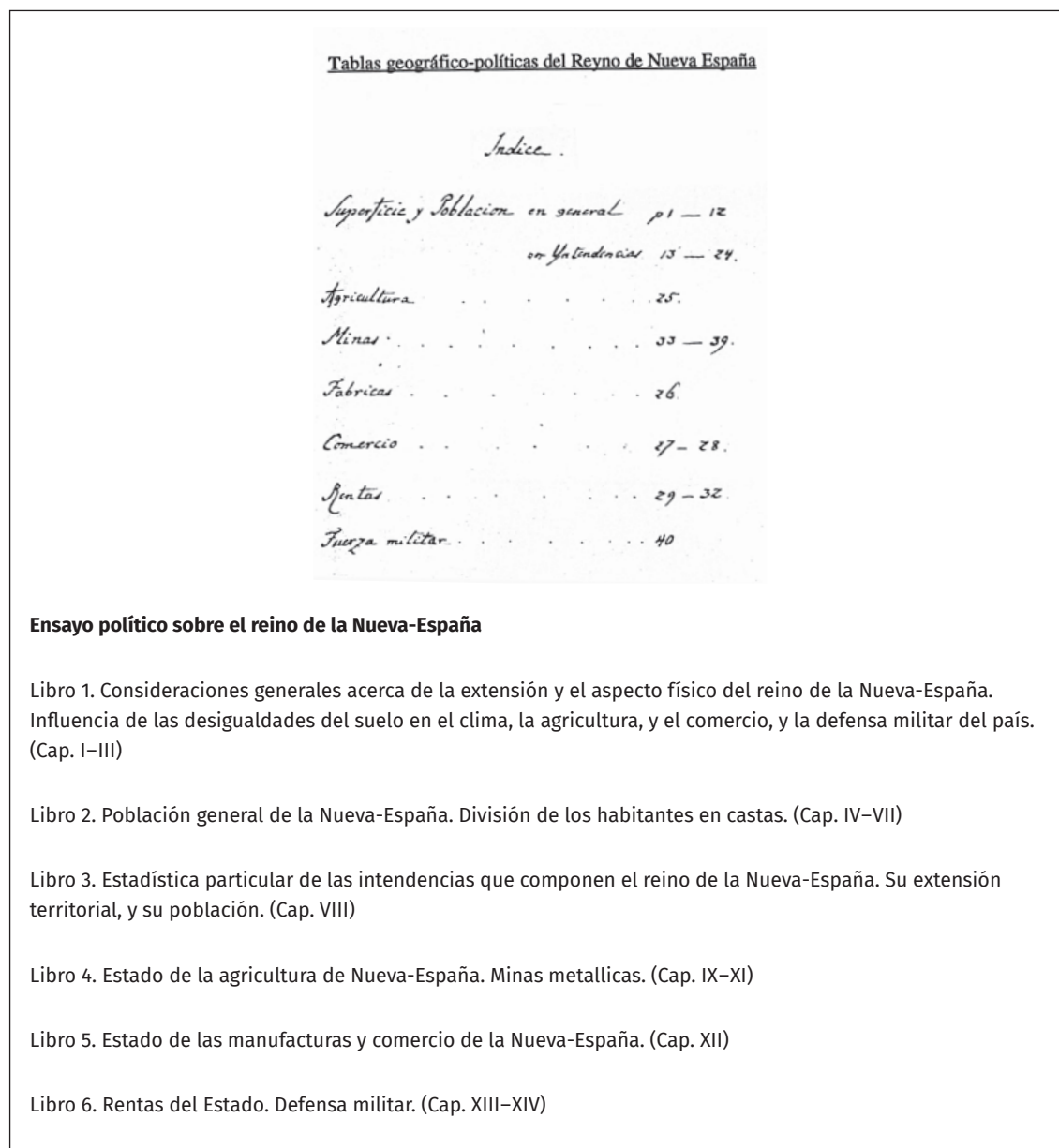


Figure 5

24 See note 9.

Spot checks show that Humboldt corrected figures with data available to him later. The growth in size is more striking though; the *Essai* was 36 times more extensive than the *tablas*. It is already noticeable in the *Tablas* that Humboldt omits the obviously intended tabular structure for the sake of a more descriptive, narrative style. (The descriptive pieces reach far beyond the limits of the tables.) This tendency became altogether prevalent in the *Essai*: Here only but a few tables are interspersed throughout text.

A second source of the *Essai* were the diaries. Although Humboldt included some parts of them, they were completely rewritten using additional material. A comparison between the two is made rather difficult by the fact that the observations in the diaries were noted in chronological order, whereas the *Essai* is arranged systematically by topic. The different mines, e.g., appear in completely different places in the diaries, depending on when Humboldt visited them, but the *Essai* sums all of them up in chapter 11.

Humboldt left out personal impressions and rarely wrote in the first person, lending for a stronger objectification of the observations in the *Essai*. Besides the *Relation historique*, the *Essai on Mexico* is the one most similar to the *Essai sur l'île de Cuba* of 1826. Both list figures, compare them with each other, as are statistical methods applied in both.

Made up of 19 plates, the *Atlas géographique et physique du royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne* accompanies the *Essai* and was published simultaneously in 7 fascicles from 1808 to 1811.²⁵ The historian of geography and Humboldt scholar Hanno Beck has often emphasized that Humboldt, probably influenced by his work as a miner, made the profile map, originally a view into the mine from the side, into a scientific instrument. Part of this is the marvelous profile of the Mexican highland (see fig. 6)—“the first profile ever to be done of an entire country”.²⁶

Many maps are based on Humboldts own sketches, influenced by studies in Mexican archives. As an example: Plate 1 and 1^{bis} of the fourth fascicle, the main map of Mexico, is based on the Spanish map made by military engineer Carlos da Urrutia on behalf of the Viceroy.²⁷ The collaborators can be identified through the names in the plates: Cartographers were the engineer geographers Friedrich Wittich and Friedrich Friesen in Berlin, Jean-Baptiste Poirson in Paris and others. The copperplate engravers are also mentioned: Friedrich Arnold in Berlin, Jean-François Barrière in Paris, responsible for map and landscape depictions, Louis Bouquet for the profiles and L. Aubert for the letters of the subtitles.

After the founding of the Mexican Republic, further map material became accessible which Humboldt used for the revision of the text. However, a new and expanded edition of the atlas was not published. The new cartographic findings were added to the *Atlas géographique et physique* (Partie 1.3), which was being published at that time. These 7 maps were therefore rightly included in the new edition of the Atlas published in 1969 by Hanno Beck and Wilhelm Bonnacker.

25 Gerhard Engelmann, “Alexander von Humboldts Mexiko-Atlas. Eine Nachlese”, *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 59 (1971) 4: 315–320.

26 “des ersten Profils, das je von einem ganzen Lande gegeben worden ist”, Letter from A. v. Humboldt to G. v. Cotta, July 26, 1854.

27 Brand Donald D. Brand, *Humboldts Essai Politique sur le Royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne*, see *Alexander von Humboldt. Studien zu seiner universalen Geisteshaltung*, Joachim H. Schultze, ed., Berlin, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1959, p. 137.



Figure 6

7. New editions and translations of the Essai

The extraordinary reception of the work is demonstrated not only by the multitude of reviews in important scientific journals in France (*Moniteur universel*) and Germany (*Monatliche Correspondenz*, *Allgemeine Geographische Ephemeriden*, *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*), but also by the fact that over a very short period of time a second French edition, as well as German, Spanish, Italian and English translations were published. The French *Nouvelle* edition came out between 1825–1827 in four octavo volumes. It is the only part of the French *Voyage*, for which a second edition was published during Humboldt's lifetime and on which he collaborated. Corrections, references to Humboldt's other works recently published, as well as sometimes extensive footnotes show the revisions done by the editor, for whom Humboldt supposedly (according to Brand) did the proof-reading. New statistics, as well as additions from Humboldt's works which had in the meantime been published, were also apparently included.

Originally, Humboldt had intended to produce parts of all the volumes of the French, as well as the German version himself. In this he only succeeded with the first published volume on plant geography. In May of 1808 he at first also worked on the German version of the *Essai* and in November of that year he delivered a German manuscript for the first volume to his publisher Cotta. He had initially hired a translator for this manuscript, but was so disappointed by the results that he decided to do the German version himself. Unlike the French version, it was thoroughly revised, thereby lending this first volume the significance of an authentic work. This is not the case for the other volumes. When the parallel German-French collaboration fell apart, Humboldt also dropped his plans to edit the German version himself and offered Cotta the copyright for a translation. The latter secured Philipp Joseph von Rehfues to do the translation, an author of some works on Italy and a friend of Wilhelm von Humboldt. Cotta did not adhere to Humboldt's request that the publisher also be mentioned on the title page, so that Humboldt wouldn't be held responsible for possible mistakes. However, Cotta regularly sent Humboldt proofs.

The English edition, translated by John Black, came out in 1811 just after the French original, published by the Longman's English publishing group. The Italian edition of 1827–1829 followed the second French Edition.

The work naturally had quite a following in Spanish-speaking regions and partial translations into Spanish were soon realized. The complete Spanish edition—today still the standard work—was done by V. Gonzalez Arnao in Paris 1822, where a great amount of Spanish books were published at that time. It was the specialized publishing house Rosa, a business associate of Jules Renouard, the publisher of the French original, which undertook the project. Humboldt knew the translator Gonzalez Arnao who was living in Paris at the time. Humboldt's letters to Renouard (Berlin State Library, still unpublished) reveal the intense cooperation with the publisher. Simultaneously, Spanish editions of the *Essai sur l'île de Cuba* (Renouard 1827), the *Viaje a las regiones equinocciales del nueve continente* (Rosa 1826) and the second edition of the *Mexico-Essai* (Rosa 1827) were being worked on. Fervent requests for indulgence in a letter to Renouard demonstrate how much Humboldt was occupied by proof-reading, the writing of manuscripts etc. at that time: "I have been getting up at 5 o'clock and going to sleep at 2 o'clock for a month now. I have 9 proofs for Mr. Smith [publisher of the French *Relation historique*] full of numbers. I am doing as much as I can, and if I was a little angry, I wish for myself a portion of the indulgence that I demand be received by the black people who appear in the work you are translating right now."²⁸

Later editors corrected and commented on the text, but generally adhered to Gonzalez Arnao's version. The modern edition of Ortega y Medina of 1966, due to its annotations and additions, is still indispensable beyond the Spanish speaking realm for scientific research concerned with Humboldt's Mexico work.

8. Conclusions

Humboldt has dealt with the topic of Mexico in the multiple genres available to him as a scientific explorer and naturalist: in his diaries, in the *Essai*, in statistics (*Tablas*), in a volume of annotated illustrations, and in a geographic atlas. Concerning the scientific aspect, that the *Relation historique* lacks a section on Mexico is not a real deficit, since it is compensated by the *Essai* (the "statistical painting" as a counterpart to the "nature painting").²⁹ But none of these works meets Humboldt's demand for the unification of the empirical and the aesthetic, the demand for a scientific nature painting to the same extent as the *Relation historique*. This high standard is probably also the reason Humboldt failed to finish the work. Equally, none of these publications show Humboldt's analytical curiosity so typical for the *Relation historique*, which equally addresses both nature and culture within a narrative context describing the course of his journey. The diaries and letters from the journey can be seen as an incomplete substitute for this special combination of literary and scientific essay. Moreover, they have the advantage of describing the journey in a direct and often suspenseful way for the reader. They too already contain the kind of reflections to be expected only in the *Relation historique*, although they lack the essayistic stylistic finishing touches of the latter. The description of a barren landscape on his way from Mexico to Guanajuato and his reflection on the reasons for

28 "Je me lève depuis un mois à 5 heures et je me couche à 2^h. J'ai pour Mr. Smith 9 feuilles d'épreuves hérissées de chiffres [...]. Je fais ce que mes forces peuvent supporter et si j'étais un peu malin je demanderais pour moi une partie de cette indulgence que je réclame pour les noirs dans l'ouvrage que vous allez traduire." Letter from A. v. Humboldt to J. Renouard, [Mart? 1827], Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Hs.-Abt., Slg. Darmstaedter, Renouard-Briefe 57.

29 "Statistisches Gemälde" in Humboldt's German version of the *Essai*, p. 1.

aridity, for example, in the following sentence so often quoted, is typical for Humboldt's holistic view of the world: "Alles ist Wechselwirkung—Everything is interrelatedness."³⁰

Therefore, in closing, I would once again like to emphasize the value of the travel journals as an important publication about the American journey and a necessary addition to the remaining unfinished works of Humboldt. "To make some noise is part of the trade"³¹—with this quote from Humboldt may a final reference to the editions of the Humboldt Research Center be permitted.

30 Reise T. II: Übersetzung, op. cit., p. 258.

31 "Läuten gehört zum Handwerk"