

# Notes on Mexican bibliography

**A**s the quincentennial nears, it is satisfying to recall that the first print shop on the American continent was installed in Mexico around 1539.

The book publishing that began then has remained constant and splendid. Proof of that is the beautiful *Bibliografía mexicana del siglo XVI*, compiled and edited by Joaquín García Icazbalceta in 1886. Republished by the Fondo de Cultura Económica in 1954, it contains 581 pages with illustrations. Agustín Millares Carlo, a scholarly Spanish bibliographer then living in Mexico, made valuable additions to the text. It came out as part of the Biblioteca Americana, planned by Pedro Henríquez Ureña and published in his memory.

This excellent work was complemented in 1988 with two superb volumes by Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, entitled *Bibliografía novohispana de arte* (Bibliography of New World Spanish art) It is also part of the Fondo de Cultura Económica's Biblioteca Americana. The first part, *Impresos mexicanos relativos al arte de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Sixteenth and Seventeenth century Mexican art prints), contains 382 pages and includes a preface by José Pascual Buxó. *Impresos mexicanos relativos al arte del siglo XVIII* (Eighteenth century Mexican art prints) is the second part, containing 414 pages.

Agustín Millares Carlo, a knowledgeable and dedicated scholar published his *Prólogos a la biblioteca mexicana* (Prologues to the Mexican Library), by Dr. Juan José de Eguiara y Eguren. This Spanish annotated version of the Latin text contains a preliminary note by Federico Gómez de Orozco, a biographical study and a bibliography of the author, both written by Agustín Millares Carlo.

This edition by the Fondo de Cultura Económica appeared in 1944, containing 302 pages. It points out that the first Latin edition of Eguiara's *Prólogos* dated from 1755, while the second Latin version was published in 1944 along with the first edition in Spanish.

In his preliminary note, Gómez de Orozco singled out Eguiara as an illustrious personality from the Mexican colonial period who gave us an overview of cultural activity



*Silvio Zavala\**

*The first print shop on the American continent was established in Mexico in 1539, and since then a rich and varied artistic and editorial production has been part of Mexican culture.*

*Disfale romanum ordinarium.*



*Disfale Romanum  
nuper adoptatum comodū*

*quozucūq; sacerdotū summa diligentia distri-  
ctū: atq; ita ex nouo ordine digestū vt appo-  
sit introitib; gradualib; offertorijs; et  
·munionibus oēs missæ sint in suis locis  
integre. In quo etiā adjunctæ sunt  
multæ missæ uoꝝ; et alia plurima  
supradicta, q̄ in missalib; hacten-  
ten ipsais desiderabatur.*

*AN 1561*

\* Member of *El Colegio de México*.

from before the Spanish conquest and for the two and a half centuries of colonial domination. He showed that in Mexico, as in Europe, talent and scholarship were not rare, since valuable works of positive interest were produced that deserved the honor of being reprinted in nine European editions (p. 9).

Millares Carlo pointed out in turn that Eguiara's prefaces were the first attempt to "systematize literary and scientific Mexican works, dating from before the arrival of the Spaniards and from the period between the early sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century (p. 32)."

“Beristáin based his work on Eguiara's manuscripts, adding two thousand names”

Eguiara used native, Spanish and foreign sources to point out as fables the inaccurate opinions about American creoles repeated as truths among even influential and illustrious people in Spain (p. 35). Eguiara's words, translated from Latin to Spanish by Millares, show the native Americans' learning, and he uses their codices and libraries as his proof (p. 60).

He also writes of Mexican bookshops and books, and refers to certain well known European authors who praised Mexico, not only for its gold and silver, but for its written works (p. 113). Listed are existing libraries of note and bookstores (p. 123). The cleverness of the Americans and their love for and interest in literature absorbed Eguiara (p. 124). He concludes that he does not put Mexican talents ahead of all the others, nor is he belittling the glory of other countries. The latest work on this subject is a noteworthy edition of Eguiara y Eguren's *Biblioteca mexicana*, prepared by Ernesto de la Torre Villar and sponsored by the National University of Mexico.

José Mariano Beristáin de Souza (1756-1817) made an important contribution to Mexican bibliography in the nineteenth century, publishing, in 1816, his *Biblioteca hispanoamericana septentrional o catálogo y noticia de los literatos, que ó nacidos, ó educados, ó florecientes en la América Septentrional Española, han dado a luz algún escrito, ó lo han dexado preparado para la prensa* (North American-Spanish Library, or Catalogue and Inventory of the Men of Letters, who being born, or educated, or having flourished in Spanish North America, have given birth to some writing, or who have left it prepared for printing). The work was reprinted in 1883. In December 1980 the Claustro de Sor Juana published a facsimile of the first

edition in Mexico City, supervised by the Instituto de Estudios y Documentos Históricos (Institute of Historic Documents and Studies).

Beristáin read Eguiara's *Biblioteca mexicana* for the first time in Valencia. It was one lone volume, containing only the names of Mexican writers for the first three letters of the alphabet and Beristáin, unsatisfied, longed to continue and finish it.

He came back to America in 1790, but lost his notes on returning to Spain in 1791. He did not think of the *Biblioteca* again until 1794, when he was granted a canonry in the Metropolitan Diocese of Mexico. He then requested Eguiara's manuscripts, but could only find four rough-draft notebooks in the library of the Church of Mexico. These only went through the "Js" for writer's names, and did not include the "Josephos", or even some "Joannes". Later he located other notebooks from Eguiara's catalogues, but in 1796 gave up hope of finding the rest of the printed work. He resolved to begin formulating his own catalogue, using another plan and method.

Based on his research and using Nicolás Antonio's *Biblioteca hispana* as his main guide, Beristáin began writing the *Biblioteca hispanoamericana* in Spanish. He arranged the authors in alphabetical order by their last names, not their first. He made use of a thousand articles that Eguiara had left printed or in manuscript, and added two-thirds more. Thus, the *Biblioteca hispanoamericana* contains 3,687 authors. As a result, Beristáin is considered the author of a new work.

“A Bibliography of Spanish-American writers published by José Mariano Beristáin de Souza in 1816 contained 3,687 entries”

Beristáin also defended the ability of the native Mexicans who translated many works from Latin to Nahuatl. They were works full of abstract and sublime ideas, like Thomas a Kempis' *De Imitatione Christi*. Much more in the field of bibliography and in the life of books and print shops exists in Mexico than is mentioned here. However, my purpose was only to compile some novelties connected with classic Mexican bibliographical works. The country that acquired the first printing press on the American continent is faithful to her traditional love of books. Beautiful and useful editions of Mexican classics have recently been published in this area of cultural accomplishment M