The Renaissance in the New World: Printing in Colonial South America

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From the years 1554 to 1579 in Mexico and 1584 to 1604 in Peru, the printed book exhibits a distinctive quality which echoes characteristics of earlier Spanish as well as other European books printed during the first decades of the sixteenth century. The appearance of Renaissance traits in Spanish American books coincides with the presence of two printers in the New World, Antonio de Espinosa and Antonio Ricardo.

My present concern is with the typographical characteristics of Ricardo's imprints as representative of Italian and French Renaissance typography in the New World. It is not my intention, however, to suggest that Ricardo's imprints show exclusively Italian and French influences. While much research remains to be done, Spanish influences have been sufficiently established.¹

Printing began in the New World in 1539, after Juan Pablos, an Italian from Brescia, signed a contract with Juan Cromberger of Seville to print in Mexico City. Some twenty years later, Antonio de Espinosa, a Spaniard from Jaén who moved to Mexico to work for Pablos, began to print on his own. Three other printers worked in Mexico before 1579: Pedro Ocharte, a Frenchman from Rouen; Pedro Balli, a Spaniard of French ancestry who went to Mexico as bookdealer and subsequently printed books; and Antonio Ricardo, an Italian from Turin who printed in Mexico and in Peru and thus became the first printer of South America.

Studies of Mexican and Peruvian typography remained dormant for many years, particularly in the English-speaking world, due primarily to two misconceptions. First, there was the idea that bookmaking in the New World during the colonial period only mirrored printing in contemporary Spain. Representing this frame of mind, Daniel B. Updike makes the following remark in his classic work of 1922:

> Early Mexican and South American typography was, in the main, a colonial copy of printing of that period in the Mother Country. The books bore to the best Spanish printing about the same relation that American colonial work did to the English printing of its time.²

The second misconception was that, in Peru, the press was not very active. Kenneth Haring states that "the press in Lima was never so

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active as that of Mexico, and typographically its productions were generally inferior."

Recently a number of studies of early Spanish American typography have been published. Five works deal exclusively with sixteenth-century Mexican type faces. In the first, Emilio Valton focuses primarily on the gothic characters of Pablos, Espinosa, Ocharte, and Balli, and only peripherally on the roman type faces of Pablos. In the second, Carlos R. Linga deals mainly with the establishment of printing in Spain, the Cromberger house of Seville, and the circumstances under which printing was exported into the New World. In two of his books Alexandre A. M. Stols thoroughly studied both Espinosa’s and Ocharte’s typography. Both works are largely descriptive and do not relate the typography to either local or European history. Finally, Agustín Millares Carlo and Julian Calvo have authored a book on Juan Pablos which thoroughly analyzes his type faces and includes extensive documentation. My own studies include a dissertation and two articles on Ricardo’s typography, including a study of the motifs in the design of illustrated initials used by Ricardo and the other printers of Mexico; but little is done in any of these works to demonstrate the relationship between the European Renaissance and the imprints of Antonio Ricardo.

Historians and bibliographers have been attracted to Ricardo’s life and work for many years. Among the earliest were Antonio Rodríguez de León Pinelo, and Nicolás Antonio. More recently José Toribio Medina, Joaquín García Icazbalceta, Nicolás León, Rubén Vargas Ugarte, Luis Antonio Eguiguren, Alberto Márques Abanto, Aurelio Miró-Quesada, have studied these particular subjects. Americans such as Henry Raup Wagner and Douglas McMurtrie have also contributed to the knowledge about Antonio Ricardo. Wagner updates the works by Medina, García Icazbalceta, and León, while McMurtrie reports on the existence in Brown University’s John Carter Brown Library of a royal mandate printed by Ricardo in Peru entitled Pragmática sobre los diez días del año (1584) which was the first imprint of South America. Until 1968, when I described a second copy in the Houghton Library of Harvard University, the John Carter Brown copy was generally thought to be unique.

The documents dealing with Ricardo’s life as well as title pages and colophons of many of his books confirm the generally held notion that he was a native of Turin, from the region of the Piedmont, in Italy. Eguiguren stipulates, probably correctly, that he was born in 1540. The documents of the greatest importance for research on Ricardo’s life and work are his will, dated April 22, 1586; the codicil he made three days later; the bill of sale of his press; and the inventory of his shop. The will, now housed in the National Archives of Peru in Lima, was first mentioned—though unseen—by Medina, cited several times without bibliographic references by Eguiguren,