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Can the Subaltern Speak in Amazonia's Early Modern Cartography?

One of the most intriguing aspects of the mapping and mapmaking productions in and about early modern Amazonia is the role that indigenous societies played in such processes. Unlike the sixteenth-century geographical or continental maps of South America that included either the mouth or the entire course of what was then considered the Amazon River, seventeenth-century mapmakers began to produce topographical or regional maps focusing on different sections of the river. And this change in the cartographic mindset came along the incursion of missionary orders, such as Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits, who started to evangelize both in the headwaters and in the mouth of the Amazon, that is, in the Spanish and Portuguese dominions in South America, respectively.

Although some of these friars had the required cartographic background to participate in the production of such maps and personally started to explore the interior of tropical South America, in Amazonian affairs they were rather neophytes. A close reading of their accounts throughout the region indicate their indispensable reliance on native knowledge, particularly in geographical and hydrographic matters. This, in turn, implies that the mapping or exploratory aspect of the cartographic process, and not the mapmaking or crafting aspect, is the only one that allow us to find and examine those indigenous traits in the cartography of the time. And I was able to propose this thanks to a group of Franciscan maps of Western Amazonia from 1687 archived in the National Library of France.

Yet, the Archive of Indies in Spain contains a map and accompanying papers related to military and Dominican missionary presence in the same region, from 1663. These materials seem to indicate that, despite the reliance on native geographical and exploratory expertise, the Franciscan maps of Western Amazonia were rather built upon the geographic and cartographic information portrayed in those earlier Dominican-military documents.

If this is the case, how can we talk about indigenous participation in the cartographic production in and about early modern Amazonia? What are the necessary traits that would allow us to think and speak about native presence in the production of early maps of the Amazon? How valid is still to inquire about the natives' involvement in missionary-military cartographic production? This presentation seeks to resolve these questions and others related to the indigenous participation in the mapping and mapmaking of early modern Amazonia.



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Map: *Mapa de la tierra descubierta de las montañas de los Andes, ...* Archivo General de Indias, MP-PERU_CHILE,194, 17th century.

