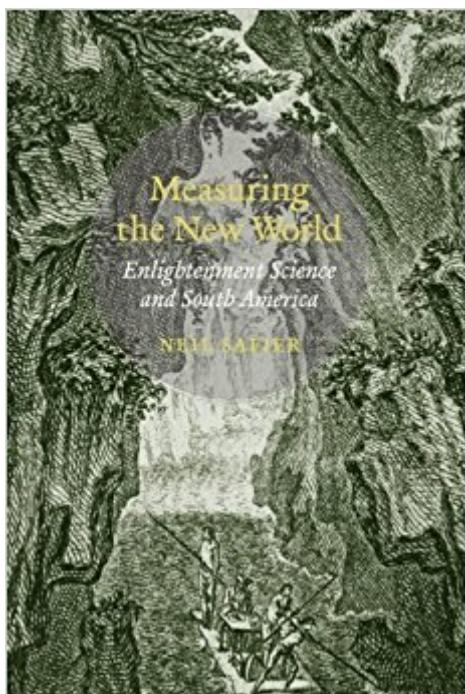


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# Measuring The New World: Enlightenment Science And South America



## Synopsis

Prior to 1735, South America was terra incognita to many Europeans. But that year, the Paris Academy of Sciences sent a mission to the Spanish American province of Quito (in present-day Ecuador) to study the curvature of the earth at the Equator. Equipped with quadrants and telescopes, the mission's participants referred to the transfer of scientific knowledge from Europe to the Andes as a "sacred fire" passing mysteriously through European astronomical instruments to observers in South America. By taking an innovative interdisciplinary look at the traces of this expedition, *Measuring the New World* examines the transatlantic flow of knowledge from West to East. Through ephemeral monuments and geographical maps, this book explores how the social and cultural worlds of South America contributed to the production of European scientific knowledge during the Enlightenment. Neil Safier uses the notebooks of traveling philosophers, as well as specimens from the expedition, to place this particular scientific endeavor in the larger context of early modern print culture and the emerging intellectual category of scientist as author.

## Book Information

Paperback: 408 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press (June 14, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0226733629

ISBN-13: 978-0226733623

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #1,091,215 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #33 in Books > History > Americas > South America > Ecuador #110 in Books > Travel > South America > Ecuador & Galapagos Islands #1095 in Books > History > World > Expeditions & Discoveries

## Customer Reviews

"A deft, thoughtful examination of what happened to European Enlightenment science in an American setting, and of how South America was depicted in Europe as a result of this exploration. What makes Safier's book stand out . . . is the way in which he masterfully expands the range of sites, practices and participants. This is not the story of an expedition, but rather a study of the stories the expedition yielded through words and images." •Daniela Bleichmar, American

Scientist (Daniela Bleichmar American Scientist)"Engaging and illuminating. . . . The book is indispensable reading for anyone interested in fresh interdisciplinary approaches to the science and intellectual history of this era." (Barbara E. Mundy *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*)"Measuring the New World beautifully dissects the 'social and material practices that comprise' what Safier calls 'transatlantic scientific commemorations'. We are fortunate that the University of Chicago Press has produced a book with some 20 color plates and nearly 60 figures that wonderfully illustrate and illuminate Safier's sophisticated arguments. We are indebted to Safier for helping enlighten scholars of both Europe and the Americas on the role of the New World in the construction of modern science and the European Enlightenment." (Marshall C. Eakin *The Americas*)"Safier's engaging and significant book is several narratives in one. It is an important contribution to recent historiographical revisionism centring around geographical readings of (the) Enlightenment. . . . This is an account, finely told throughout, of mapping in the field, of mapping as an uncertain form of topographic depiction and measurement—and of ethnographic classification, since later commentators sought to fix Amerindians as native others even as they were dependent upon them as guides and informants—and of the ways in which eighteenth-century mapmakers had to reconcile different epistemological standards in order to make distant worlds portable in map form.

Safier's book is an important addition to case studies in the social and technical history of Enlightenment mapping as a process that had less to do with the unproblematic extension of European certainty and more with the contingencies of geography, locally, nationally and as networks of transnational exchange and interaction." (Charles Withers *Imago Mundi*)"This is a well-written book, and Safier displays remarkable skill in analyzing manuscripts and printed works in many languages. A meticulous reader, the author is perhaps best at picking apart and cross-referencing widely scattered narratives, letters, commentaries . . . . [Measuring the New World] helps restore the value of Ibero-American Enlightenment science." (Kris Lane *Colonial Latin American Historical Review*)"Safier's meticulous narratives create an impression of the fragility of the networks by which natural knowledge was built in the early modern period. . . . [His] book calls into question the notion that the sciences worked through rigid and efficient systems integrated with the structures of imperial power. . . . He shows how--when we follow objects, people, and texts in their unpredictable peregrinations--we can tell a much more interesting story." (Jan Golinski *Journal of Modern History*)"[This] breakthrough study reconstructs this important historical moment and reminds readers that cartography consisted not only of projection on maps. . . . In uncovering this human agency, Safier provides scholars in history, literature, and cartography with many new

directions upon which to embark in the study of the European Enlightenment and its legacies throughout the transatlantic world." (Jonathan Carlyon American Historical Review)"Measuring the New World offers a refreshing perspective on some of the hidden layers of knowledge production and truth-making in mid-eighteenth-century France and Spain. Neil Safier's study is a tour de force. . . . A valuable contribution to the understanding of Enlightenment science in a broader, but intimate sense and the geographies of reading and writing in particular." (Jorn Seemann H-Net) "A magnificent example of the new science history, informed by cultural and social history and literary theory, and in which "great men" have to share space with the many more humble people, male and female, European and indigenous, who played a central role in the production of scientific knowledge in the early modern era." (Terra Incognitae) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Neil Safier is associate professor of history at the University of British Columbia.

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