

## The Science of Useful Nature in Central America

In this ambitious new study, Sophie Brockmann argues that interactions with landscape and environment were central to the construction of Central American identities in the Age of Enlightenment. She argues that new intellectual connections and novel ways of understanding landscapes had a transformative impact on political culture, as patriotic reformers sought to improve the region's fortunes by applying scientific and 'useful' knowledge gathered from local and global networks to the land. These reformers established networks that extended into the countryside and far beyond Central America's borders. Tracing these networks and following the bureaucrats, priests, labourers, merchants and scholars within them, Brockmann shows how they made a lasting impact by defining a new place for the natural world in narratives of nation and progress.

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# The Science of Useful Nature in Central America

*Landscapes, Networks and Practical  
Enlightenment, 1784–1838*

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Sophie Brockmann

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For my parents

## Contents

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<i>List of Figures</i>	page viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Notes on Translations and Names</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations and Acronyms</i>	xii
Introduction: A Kingdom of Vast Extension	1
1 Landscape, Ruins, and Governance	29
2 Networks of Knowledge and Action	58
3 Making Enlightenment Local	91
4 Useful Geography in Practice	120
5 Transforming Environments	156
6 Independence and Useful Nature	194
Conclusions	230
<i>Glossary of Colonial Administrative Terms</i>	235
<i>Bibliography</i>	238
<i>Index</i>	262

## Figures

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0.1	Political map of Central America, c. 1800.	<i>page</i> xiii
0.2	Map of Central American harbours and trade routes.	xiv
1.1	Antonio Bernasconi, Map of the site of Palenque, 1785.	40
1.2	Map of the site of Quiché, 1834.	41
4.1	Map of the coast of Zapotitlan and Suchitepequez, eighteenth century.	132
4.2	Vista of San Fernando de Guadalupe (Salto de Agua), 1795.	138
4.3	Spatial representation of roads in the <i>Gazeta de Guatemala</i> , 1797.	139
4.4	José Rossi y Rubí and Pedro Garci Aguirre, Map of a new road in the province of Suchitepéquez, 1800.	146
5.1	Juan Bautista Jauregui, Plan for a new settlement at Izabal, 1807.	184
6.1	Miguel Rivera Maestre, ‘Carta del Estado de Guatemala en Centro-America. Año de 1832’.	224

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## Notes on Translations and Names

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All translations from Spanish are my own. In translations of Spanish quotations, idiosyncrasies of the text have been reflected as far as possible while making the translation idiomatic and intelligible.

Modernised and English names have been used in the text for geographical locations for clarity where these place names are widely known, for instance Seville and Mexico City. Guatemala City is generally used for the Spanish capital Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, although the designation of Nueva Guatemala is used where it is necessary to make a distinction from the old capital, Antigua, or Santiago de Guatemala.

The names of the modern countries of Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador are generally used to refer to the territories more or less encompassed by the intendancies of Comayagua, León, and San Salvador to avoid confusion with cities of that name. A notable exception is the province of Sonsonate, which is today in El Salvador but was part of the Guatemalan provinces in colonial times.

The spelling of geographical locations has been modernised for consistency, that is Trujillo instead of Truxillo or Trugillo, except when in quotations and titles. Spanish names that appear in different spellings across primary documents have also been edited for consistency.

The names of indigenous language groups and related place names, where these are well known, reflect the modern orthography of indigenous languages rather than the Spanish spelling, for instance K'iché instead of Quiché. In quotations and where paraphrasing a Spanish author's words, the original spelling has been kept, for instance Quiché instead of K'iché.

I have translated some Spanish terms for ethnic and social groups. *Casta* terms such as *indio* or *mestizo* are further discussed in the Introduction.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

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AFEHC	Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centroamérica
AGCA	Archivo General de Centro América. Guatemala City, Guatemala
AGI	Archivo General de Indias. Seville, Spain
AMN	Archivo del Museo Naval. Madrid, Spain
BL	The British Library. London, UK
CSIC	Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid (Publisher)
<i>Gazeta</i>	<i>Gazeta de Guatemala</i> . Ignacio Beteta: Guatemala, 1797–1807
HSA	Archive of the Hispanic Society of America. New York, USA
MP	Mapas y Planos (Archivo General de Indias classification)
RGS	Royal Geographical Society Archives. London, UK
TNA	The National Archives. London, UK



Figure 0.1 Map of Central America showing administrative divisions, regional capitals, and some regional towns, c. 1800. Boundaries drawn after Carolyn Hall and Héctor Pérez Brignoli, *Historical Atlas of Central America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 38.



Figure 0.2 Harbours, major trade routes, and some trading settlements of Central America, c. 1800. Trade routes drawn after Carolyn Hall and Héctor Pérez Brignoli, *Historical Atlas of Central America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 162 and 179.