

Manel Ollé and Joan-Pau Rubiés, eds., *El códice Boxer: Etnografía colonial e hibridismo cultural en las islas Filipinas*, Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2020, 208p. ISBN 9788491683728. €28.

The *Boxer Codex* is the name that has been given to a manuscript anthology of geographical and ethnographical texts currently in the possession of the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana. Consisting of 306 rice-paper folios (612 pages, 197 of them blank), it pulls together material of diverse origin to describe the peoples and places of East and Southeast Asia, and illustrates them with ninety-seven color images. The codex first came to light in 1950, when its owner, the historian Charles Boxer, published a description of it in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*. Scholarship on the codex only began in earnest much more recently, after the manuscript's acquisition and digitization by the Lilly Library, and its publication in several modern scholarly editions. This collection of essays edited by two highly distinguished historians of the Iberian encounter with East and Southeast Asia during the early modern period constitutes the first scholarly volume dedicated entirely to the Boxer Codex.

This particular collection enjoys a high degree of conceptual and methodological coherence. The Boxer Codex is undated and anonymous, but the authors of this collection all share the same premise regarding its origins. They believe it to have been put together in Spanish Manila during the governorships of Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas and his son Luis (1590–1596) by someone close to these two figures. Its purpose was to support their imperial vision, in which Manila figured as a forward base for the projection of Spanish power throughout the region. All of the essays combine close attention to the contents of the Boxer Codex with various forms of contextual evidence to bring the issues of authorship and purpose into greater focus.

An introduction presents the Boxer Codex to newcomers and specialists alike, and places it in the intellectual context of Iberian ethnographical encyclopedias, like the Codex Mendoza and the Codex Casanatense 1889, two contemporary compilations that also served the interest of imperial power. The first essay, by Manel Ollé, develops the collection's assumptions regarding date and authorship, identifying the Codex's multiple layers of authorship and situating it at the intersection of two failed projects – the imperial designs of Dasmariñas and the brief period of Sino-Iberian cultural rapprochement that ended with the *sangle*y rebellion of 1603. That rapprochement was essential to the production of the Codex, insofar as it made it possible for the text's Iberian progenitors to collaborate with members of Manila's resident Chinese community, who were clearly responsible for the illustrations and for a great

deal of the material about China and the Chinese, which includes a traditional bestiary. Joan-Pau Rubiès's essay, the longest and most detailed of the collection, further addresses the question of authorship. According to Rubiès, the person responsible for certain early texts about the island of Luzón deploys an identifiable narrative voice that resurfaces at various points throughout the collection, suggesting that this person was responsible for compiling and perhaps reworking the source materials. Rubiès goes so far as to identify two possible candidates for this person's identity among the retinue of Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas.

John Crossley turns our attention to the obvious involvement of Chinese collaborators, and argues that the Dominican friar Juan Cobo was the most likely person to have mediated between the Iberians and the *sangleys* (resident Chinese) involved in the project. Tsungjen Chen's contribution is the most focused, and perhaps the most methodologically innovative. Drawing on contemporary Chinese documents and on ethnographic illustrations from the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, Chen demonstrates that natives of Hokkien likely informed the production of a particular description of a southern Chinese ethnic group, and perhaps other parts of the codex as well. Isaac Donoso demonstrates that the Boxer Codex serves as an important source for our knowledge of Islam in Southeast Asia during the early modern period, and Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto reviews the constituent texts of Portuguese origin, arguing that they are all part of an effort on the part of the bishop of Malacca, João Ribeiro Gaio, to join forces with the Castilians in establishing a joint center of power in Southeast Asia.

This collection will prove indispensable to the growing number of scholars interested in the Boxer Codex, about which much remains to be learned and said, but it should also draw the attention of anyone interested in early modern imperialism. There is now a substantial body of scholarship demonstrating that Spain's imperial ambitions reached well beyond the Americas to East and Southeast Asia, where the Spanish sometimes collided and sometimes cooperated with the Portuguese in an attempt to create a transpacific Iberian empire. This collection situates the Boxer Codex solidly within that effort, providing us with a vivid example of the ways geography and ethnography were put at the service of empire in the Spanish Philippines, just like they were everywhere else in the Iberian world. In the hands of these contributors, the Boxer Codex ceases to be a mysterious anomaly and acquires a clear position in larger narratives about knowledge and imperial power in the early modern world.

Ricardo Padrón | ORCID: 0000-0002-1038-5528
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA
padron@virginia.edu