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## Review of Emily Berquist Soule, *The Bishop's Utopia: Envisioning Improvement in Colonial Peru*

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## **BSPHS 40:1 (2015)**

Emily Berquist Soule. *The Bishop's Utopia: Envisioning Improvement in Colonial Peru*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. 287 pp.

Emily Berquist Soule's *The Bishop's Utopia* investigates the career of Baltasar Jaime Martínez Compañón, the late-eighteenth-century bishop of Trujillo, Perú who commissioned the 1,372 watercolor paintings of his diocese that he entitled *Trujillo del Peru*. These vibrant images often serve as illustrations within scholarly texts, but here the author utilizes them, together with the bishop's correspondence, personal library, and natural history collection, to explore the intellectual life and utopian vision of the bishop himself. Berquist Soule argues that Martínez Compañón collaborated with his parishioners to transform Trujillo into a laboratory for regional economic and social improvement. The author insightfully reveals the complexities of regional politics by uncovering the many ways parishioners either supported or resisted Martínez Compañón's plans for his diocese. However, it is less evident that the collaboration the bishop sought with his indigenous parishioners was reciprocated to the extent that the author suggests.

His emphasis on reforming the administration of the church and educating his parishioners mark Martínez Compañón as one of Charles III's "Bourbon prelates," the ecclesiastical equivalent of the Bourbon intendants. He served as the bishop of Trujillo from 1779-1790 and then as Archbishop of Bogotá for the remainder of his life (1791-1797). The bishop promoted longstanding Spanish imperial goals: the inherent freedom of the King's indigenous subjects and their simultaneous need for Hispanicization over the course of a career that would begin with the upheaval of the Túpac Amaru revolt (1780-82) in Perú and end with the Creole-led Pasquinades Rebellion of 1795 in Bogotá. The author represents Martínez Compañón as a priest who favored reforms that were starkly out of step with the objectives of Trujillo's powerful Creoles. His emphasis on the construction of primary schools and Indian colleges and his support for the formation of towns for indigenous and casta laborers (chapters 3 and 4) were resisted by the agricultural elite, the *hacendados*, as a blow to their hegemony over rural labor. The bishop's patent dislike for the *mita* and concern for the welfare of mineworkers would erode his support in the mining sector as well (chapter 5).

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As a counterpoint to his conflicts with Trujillo's creoles, Berquist Soule presents us with Martínez Compañón the naturalist (chapter 6). The bishop set out on his *visita* of Trujillo (1782 to 1785) at much the same time as naturalists Hipólito Ruiz, José Pavón, and José Celestino Mutis were conducting botanical expeditions in Chile, Perú, and New Granada. Unlike these royally sponsored scientists, Martínez Compañón personally funded his scientific projects, using his network of priests and local contacts to create a web of informants and potential collaborators. He also eschewed the Linnaean system of identification supported by the crown, favoring a focus on physical description, geography, and utility, while using indigenous languages, not Latin, to name specimens. And he championed the fecundity and natural diversity of America to counter prevailing assumptions regarding its weakness and degeneration. The author thus places the bishop alongside so-called "creole scientists" of his day, typically American-born individuals who also promoted a vernacular approach to botany and natural history. Berquist Soule creates a compelling portrait of Martínez Compañón as an individual who believed he was working collaboratively with his indigenous parishioners. The challenge here, as always, is the relative silence of indigenous subalterns compared to the copious documentation of the bishop's views. The bishop did receive letters (chapter 4) from indigenous peoples and *castas* requesting his support for organizing towns on hacienda lands, letters that bring us closest to understanding the life the rural poor envisioned for themselves. Some indigenous communities even offered to contribute financially to the bishop's school initiative, although the promised funds may not have appeared. Martínez Compañón also successfully extracted useful information from indigenous informants about local resources, but it is not clear that this was a truly collaborative process, especially when considering the power dynamics associated with the bishop's visits to Trujillo's parishes.

*The Bishop's Utopia* remains a very readable book. The author makes extensive use of contemporary descriptions of Trujillo in order to recreate its setting and context to accompany the bishop's journey through his jurisdiction and ecclesiastical career. Such rich detail, together with twenty-four plates from *Trujillo del Peru*, the full text of two of the bishop's questionnaires to his network of priests, and an extensive section on sources and methods make the book a valuable resource for specialists and a useful monograph to accompany an undergraduate discussion of the Bourbon Reform period or eighteenth-century natural science.

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