



Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America: A New History for a New World

Kathleen Ann Myers

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Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo (1478-1557) wrote the first comprehensive history of Spanish America, "the Historia general y natural de las Indias", a sprawling, constantly revised work in which Oviedo attempted nothing less than a complete account of the Spanish discovery, conquest, and colonization of the Americas from 1492 to 1547, along with descriptions of the land's flora, fauna, and indigenous peoples. His "Historia", which grew to an astounding fifty volumes, includes numerous interviews with the Spanish and indigenous leaders who were literally making history, the first extensive field drawings of America rendered by a European, reports of exotic creatures, ethnographic descriptions of indigenous groups, and detailed reports about the conquest and colonization process. "Fernandez de Oviedo's Chronicle of America" explores how, in writing his "Historia", Oviedo created a new historiographical model that reflected the vastness of the Americas and Spain's enterprise there. Kathleen Myers uses a series of case studies - focusing on Oviedo's self-portraits, drawings of American phenomena, approaches to myth, process of revision, and depictions of Native Americans - to analyze Oviedo's narrative and rhetorical strategies and show how they relate to the politics, history, and discursive practices of his time. Accompanying the case studies are all of Oviedo's extant field drawings and a wide selection of his text in English translation. The first study to examine the entire Historia and its evolving rhetorical and historical context, this book confirms Oviedo's assertion that "the New World required a different kind of history" as it helps modern readers understand how the discovery of the Americas became a catalyst for European historiographical change.

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