

Geographies of Risk

An Exhibition of Early Modern Conceptions and Representations of Risk

Curated by Mariselle Meléndez, Eleonora Stoppino, and Javier Irigoyen García

In the sixteenth century, the word "risk" was associated with non-human factors such as storms, floods, earthquakes and epidemics. Within this context, risk was connected to feelings of danger, chaos, and fear. With the Enlightenment, a scientific notion of risk emerged which implied, as Deborah Lupton suggests, "a new way of viewing the world and its chaotic manifestations, its contingencies and uncertainties." The modernist conception of risk looked at human actions as a primary cause of unanticipated results or undesirable events. As such, the ultimate goal of individuals in power was to manage the necessary conditions that would avoid uncertainty, indeterminacy, and risk. Issues of control, management, and calculation became three important factors in determining what was at risk. This exhibition at the Rare Book & Manuscript Library offers examples of how risk has been represented since early modern times to the eighteenth century. From the various images of new lands and new populations, in all their threatening seduction, to the study of volcanoes and their menaces to human settlements, the volumes in this exhibit trace a history of the management of populations, nature, the state, and the self as a form of risk-taking by travelers, geographers, scientists, and men and women of letters.

I. GENDER AND RISK

The threat posed by newly discovered lands and populations, like the threat posed by an unruly subject, has often been represented through the image of a woman. As both exotic personifications of new fertile continents, and adventurous heroines of their own private lives, women can embody the risk of an unknown other. Hence, their representations remain ambivalent, in a precarious balance between desire and fear, between a risk worth taking and a deadly siren.

Case 1

1. Montanus, Arnoldus. *De Nieuwe en onbekende wereld*. Amsterdam: J. Meurs, 1671. Q. 917M76n.



Arnoldus Montanus (1625-1683), a Dutch minister and Headmaster of Latin, devoted his prolific writing production to the geography and history of far away lands in the Americas and the Pacific. In *The New and Unknown World: or Description of America and the Southland*, Montanus describes some of the most important voyages to the Americas and Australia, depicting the risks and dangers of such transoceanic encounters. He also focuses on the natural history of these countries and the religion and manners of their inhabitants. The book was engraved by the Amsterdam bookseller and engraver Jacob van Meurs; all illustrations pertain to the Americas.

2. Bry, Theodor de. *Das sechste Theil Americae*. Oppenheim: 1619. Q.910.8 B84i:G 1619.



The famous Flemish goldsmith and engraver Theodor de Bry (1528-1598) was also a recognized bookseller, and editor who, along with his sons Johann Theodore and Johann Israel, engaged in the profitable publication and illustrations of manuscripts pertaining to the conquest and colonization of the Americas and the East Indies.

Das sechste Theil Americae is a compilation of what he called the great voyages to the Americas, including the voyage of Jacques le Moyne to Florida, Thomas Hariot's expedition to Virginia, Girolamo Benzoni's travels to the West Indies, Central and South America, and the accounts of Jean de Lery, Antonio de Herrera, Ulrich Schmidl, Joseph Acosta, and Sir Frances Drake. Although De Bry never visited America, he vividly depicted and recreated the violence of risky encounters between Europeans and indigenous people in the Americas through the use of copper plate engravings.

Case 2

3. Carli, Gian Rinaldo. *Private disavventure d'una donna di vero spirito*. Lucca: Benedini, 1750. IUQ 04226.

Recently rediscovered, this is the second extant copy of a book that risked complete annihilation. The biography of the spirited Countess Paolina Rubbi, written by her husband, Count Gianrinaldo Carli (1720-1795), had been doomed to destruction by its own author. The Count, who narrated his wife's life shortly after her death at the age of twenty-five, judged his own work too daring and asked the editor to burn all existing copies. Until January 2010, there was only one known copy,



preserved in Lucca, Italy. Countess Paolina's risky story is now known to be at the University of Illinois.

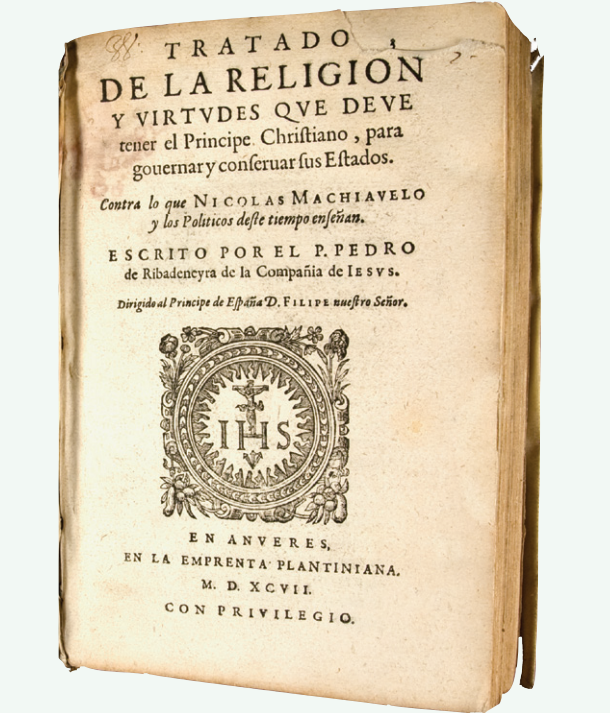
II. POLITICS AND RISK

How is risk to be accounted for in political discourse and practice? How does it serve to frame decision-making? Early modern political treatises abound in terms such as caution, prudence, and the assessment of risks. In their aim to achieve conciliation between reason of state and the religious and moral foundations of political legitimacy, they set the basis for the modern form of the state at the crossroads between decision-making and public perception.

Case 3

4. Ribadeneyra, Pedro de. *Tratado de la religion y virtudes que deve tener el principe christiano, para gobernar y conseruar sus estados*. Antwerp: Plantiniana, 1597. IUA 10627.

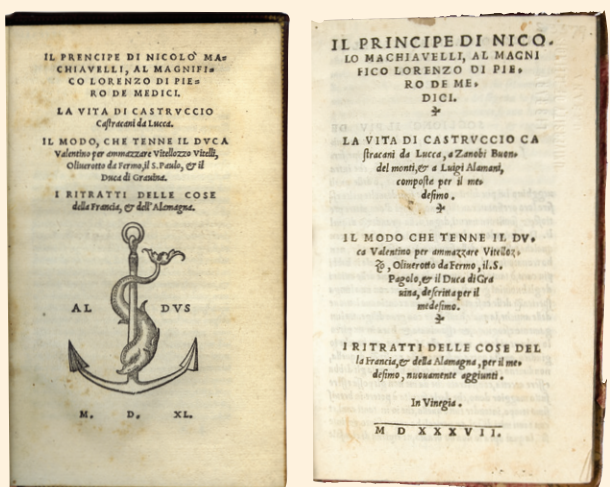
Pedro de Ribadeneyra (1526-1611) was a Jesuit thinker and writer. As the subtitle of his work states, "Against the teachings of Nicolas Machiavelli and the politics of our own time," Ribadeneyra aims at rebuking Machiavello's influential *The*



Prince, outlining the political conditions under which reason of state is compatible with Christian values.

5. Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Il prencipe di Nicolò Machiavelli*. Venice: Aldo, 1540. IUA 08301.

6. Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Il prencipe di Nicolò Machiavelli*. Venice: [Zanetti?], 1537. 853 M18op 1537.



Two early editions of Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, one of the

foundational texts of modern political theory. Machiavelli (1469-1527) wrote the treatise while excluded from political life. Managing *fortuna*, the ever changing mutation of the objective situation, is the skill that the prince, entrepreneur of risk, must deploy. Machiavelli's famous book is not only one of the riskiest books of all time, forever accused of corrupting morality, but also a manual about how to control the unpredictable future through political virtù in the spirit of the Italian Renaissance.



7. Valadés, Diego. *Rhetorica Christiana ad concionandi et orandi usum accommodata, vtriusque facultatis exemplis suo loco insertis*. Perugia: Petrutium, 1579. 808 V231r.

Diego Valadés (1533-1582) was a Franciscan missionary in New Spain. His *Christian Rhetoric*, a theological treatise

enriched with several engravings, addresses the need to preach Christian doctrine to the native inhabitants of America. Through his insistence upon combining textual and visual messages, Diego Valadés deals with the risk of reproducing doctrine: how to convey orthodox teaching and how to help with the memorizing of it, how to prepare the Indian body to accept Christianity, and how to identify those elements in native societies that are willing to receive Christian doctrine.

III. PIRACY AND RISK

Tricky and risky negotiations and adventures, amicable but sometimes volatile transactions, violence, robberies, unexpected attacks on coastal areas, and the imposition of fear and threat constituted crucial elements of piracy narratives. The Americas, or so-called "New World" served as perfect scenarios for British, French, and Dutch pirates, privateers, and buccaneers to engage in risky encounters with the aim to acquire riches. However, the Barbary coast and the Pacific coasts also represented centers of piracy. To engage in the business of piracy represented an act worthy of the risks taken, as it entailed a profitable business in which illegality was considered an acceptable means of commercial and diplomatic exchange.

Case 4

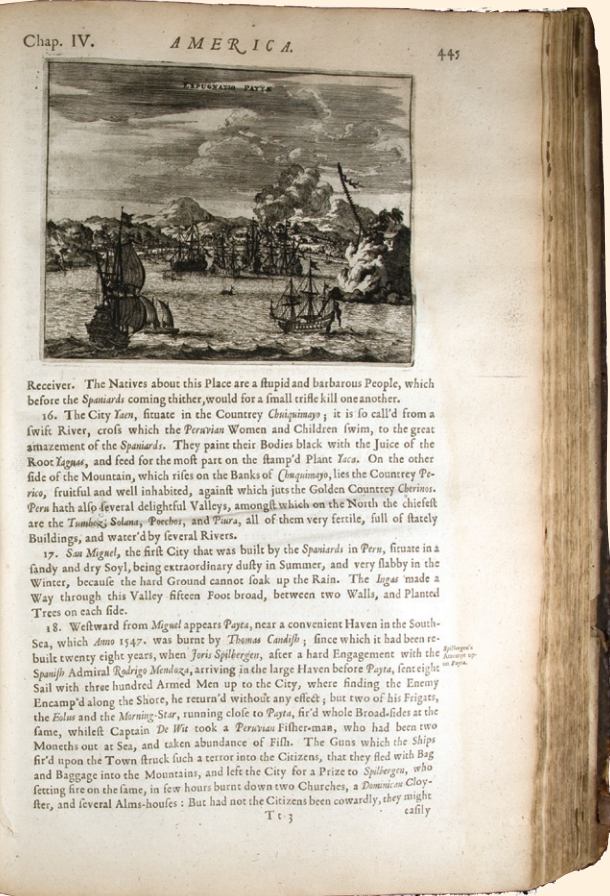
8. Exquemelin, A. O. *Bucaniers of America*. London: Croke, 1684. 910.4 Ex7aE cop.2.

This book is considered the most important work written on piracy during the seventeenth century. It was



first published in 1678 in Amsterdam. Exquemelin (c.1645-1701) himself was a French privateer who was sold to the West India Company of France, and, after gaining freedom, settled in the Caribbean, namely on the island of Tortuga along with Henry Morgan. This book describes the adventures of the different buccaneers who roamed the Caribbean islands and the coasts of Central America and includes their violent attacks, their risky endeavors, and their encounters with the inhabitants of these territories. It also offers descriptions of all these lands and their population.

9. Ogilby, John. *America*. London: Ogilby, 1671. IUZ 00139.



Ogilby's *America* is basically a translation of Arnoldus Montanus's, *De Nieuwe en onbekende wereld* (Item 1). Ogilby added information and maps pertaining to the colonization and the territories of North America. Ogilby (1600-1676), a Scottish translator and cartographer, declared himself the author of the work. The work is divided into three books. The first part captures the most important voyages and expeditions to the Americas. The second consists of descriptions of the Caribbean and North America (including Mexico), while the third centers on South America. The 122 engravings included in the book offer a visual depiction of how American cities and eastern seabords were always prone to risky encounters.

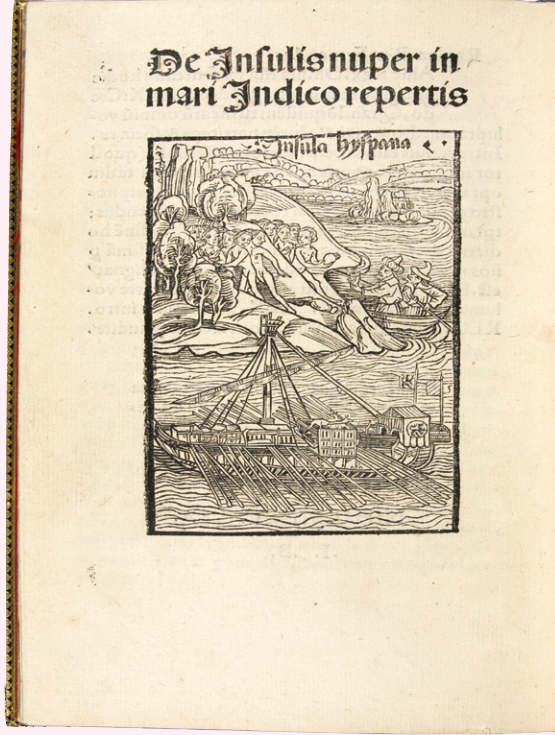
IV. EXPLORATION AND RISK

Exploration, conquest, and commerce are privileged fields for gauging risks in the early modern period. As large territories are being integrated into new political and global economic systems, travelers, historians, and cartographers inform entrepreneurs and rulers on how to gauge economic potentialities and risks. Inversely, the initiative for exploration and the production of knowledge about discoveries is informed in most cases by private investment and potential profitability.

Case 5

10. Verardi, Carlo. *In laudem Serenissimi Ferdinandi Hispania[rum] regis Bethicae & regni Granatae obsidio, Victoria, & triu[m]phus*. Basel: Bergmann, 1494. Incunabula 973.15 C71e:L 1494.

This incunabulum contains the text *De insulis nuper in Mari Indico repertis*, Leandro di Cosco's Latin translation of Columbus's letter to Luis de Santángel, bound with the historical drama in Latin prose



by Carlo Verardi (1440-1500) about Ferdinand's 1492 capture of Granada. This edition of the *De insulis*, like the one printed in Basel the previous year, contains five woodcuts purporting to be the earliest pictures of the New World. The moment of the encounter represented here portrays at the same time the potential for gain and the

threat of the radically alien.

11. Polo, Marco. *Chorographia tartariae*. Leipzig: Grosseus de Jungern, 1611. 915 P76lGm.

This is one of the most influential translations of Marco Polo's *Travels* into German, by Hieronymus Megiser (ca. 1554-1618), scholastic, linguist, and historian. It is decorated by vignettes that depict the customs of the Asian lands visited by the Venetian explorer,



domesticating through exoticism the risks of the unknown.

Case 6

12. Saavedra Fajardo, Diego de. *Idea de un principe politico christiano, representada en cien empresas*. Monaco: Enrico, 1640. Emblems 863 S12oi 1640.

Diego de Saavedra Fajardo (1584-1648), was a Spanish diplomat and writer. His *Idea of Christian Political Prince* is a collection of emblems that aims at instructing the ruler on the political behavior compatible with Christian doctrine. In the emblem "Minimum eligendum," Saavedra Fajardo applies the image of the dangers inherent to exploration and navigation to illustrate



how political action resides in choosing the lesser risk. On the other hand, the author warns the King that failing to choose constitutes the worst of risks.

13. Bry, Johann Theodor de. *America*. Frankfurt: Hoffman, 1617. Q. 910.8 B84i 1617.

Johann Theodor de Bry (1561-1623) was the son and successor of Theodor de Bry. From his father he learned the art of engraving and settled in Frankfurt to continue his father's business. This volume consists of an abridgement of the great voyages to the Americas and contains hand-colored illustrations.



V. MANAGING NATURAL RISK

From natural disaster to disease, natural risk is hardly foreseeable. Still, when such an event occurs, it gives cause to a wide repertoire of discourses on how unnecessary risk has been taken, how it could have been avoided, and how to prepare for the future. Thus, natural disasters serve not only as opportunities to study how humans manage risk, but also how societies conceptualize risk as a rhetorical tool for their own policing.

Case 7

14. Spallanzani, Lazzaro. *Viaggi alle Due Sicilie e in alcune parti dell' Appennino dell' abate Lazzaro Spallanzani*. vol. 1. Pavia: Comini, 1792-97. 508.45 Sp19v.

Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-1799), the Italian biologist and physiologist who pioneered the study of biogenesis before Pasteur, traveled widely across the Mediterranean. In 1788 he visited Vesuvius and the volcanoes of the Lipari Islands

and Sicily, and recorded the results of his researches in this large work, published four years later. Spallanzani's volcanoes, extinct, dormant, and active, embody natural risk and its indissoluble link with human settlement.

15. Ulloa, Antonio de, and Jorge Juan. *Voyage historique de l' Amerique Meridionale*. Amsterdam: Arkste'e & Merkus, 1752. 918 U11rFm.

Ulloa and Juan were part of a scientific expedition organized by the French Academy of Sciences to study with precision not only the shape of the earth but also to measure the longitudinal meridian at the Equator. The expedition was authorized by Phillip V in 1735, under the leadership of French geographer



and mathematician Charles Marie de la Condamine. The book was originally published in Spanish under the title *Relación histórica del viaje hecho de orden de su Majestad a la América Meridional* (1748). The account relates their observations in South America, including their views on geography, natural history, the inhabitants of these territories, and the risky negotiations that took place there.

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