

ABSTRACT ONLY**THE SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE
FIRST MODERN COLOMBIAN ASTRONOMER**

Freddy Moreno Cárdenas¹, Santiago Vargas
Domínguez²

Astronomical interest within the current Colombian territory has its roots in the Botanical Expedition of the New Kingdom of Granada, which stimulated the creation of an astronomical observatory in 1803, the first one established in the New World to pursue systematic observations and meteorological studies. After the death in 1816 of its first director, Francisco José de Caldas, during the convulsive independence period, no major astronomical observations were made for decades, with few exceptions. In this work we delve into the contributions of the astronomer José María González Benito (JMGB), main reactivator of the National Astronomical Observatory of Colombia (OAN) in the second half of the 19th century, pointing out his pioneering efforts that put worldwide attention to it, and to his own private observatory. We have collected evidence supporting the fact that JMGB was one of the most important figures in the history of Colombian astronomy, not only due to the advances and discoveries that he achieved as a result of innumerable investigations and projects but also because of his unique sense of patriotism. As director of the OAN and of his private observatory (Flammarion Observatory), JMGB made numerous observations on different astronomical topics, being reports on comets among the most extended ones. In 1893 he observed the comet Rordame-Quénisset, nine days before the observations made from the US and France that were the ones designated as the official discovery. JMGB also observed meteor showers: the Leonids, on 14 Nov. 1867 and 13 Nov. 1899, and an unidentified one he reported on 24 Nov. 1872 in Andromeda. JMGB was a well-known astronomer in Europe and kept continuous communication with his colleague and friend Flammarion. Indeed, JMGB made observations from the Flammarion Observatory that had been completely unknown by the Colombian academic community until found by this research.

¹ Centro de Estudios Astrofísicos - Gimnasio Campestre, Bogotá, Colombia (fmoreno@campestre.edu.co)

² Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Observatorio Astronómico Nacional, Bogotá, Colombia
