

LATE-COLONIAL MEXICO:
Institutional, Social, and Cultural History

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PUEBLOS DE INDIOS Y EDUCACION EN EL MEXICO COLONIAL, 1750–1821. By Dorothy Tanck de Estrada. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1999. Pp. 665.)

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN LATE-COLONIAL MEXICO CITY, 1692–1810. By Gabriel Haslip-Viera. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999. Pp. 193. \$49.95 cloth.)

LEARNING TO HEAL: THE MEDICAL PROFESSION IN COLONIAL MEXICO, 1767–1831. By Luz María Hernández Sáenz. (New York: Peter Lang, 1997. Pp. 301. \$48.95 cloth.)

TO DEFEND OUR WATER WITH THE BLOOD OF OUR VEINS: THE STRUGGLE FOR WATER IN COLONIAL PUEBLA. By Sonya Lipsett-Rivera. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999. Pp. 199. \$49.95 cloth.)

WANDERING PEOPLES: COLONIALISM, ETHNIC SPACES, AND ECOLOGICAL FRONTIERS IN NORTHWESTERN MEXICO, 1700–1850. By Cynthia Radding. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997. Pp. 404. \$59.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

EMPIRE OF SAND: THE SERI INDIANS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SPANISH SONORA, 1645–1803. Compiled and edited by Thomas E. Sheridan. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999. Pp. 493. \$65.00 cloth.)

A WILD COUNTRY OUT IN THE GARDEN: THE SPIRITUAL JOURNALS OF A COLONIAL MEXICAN NUN. Selected, edited, and translated by Kathleen A. Myers and Amanda Powell. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. Pp. 386. \$39.95 cloth.)

The seven books under review in this essay all contribute to general understanding of institutional, social, and cultural history in late-colonial Mexico, from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. But they do so in varying degrees and regionally diverse ways according to the research interests and styles of the authors. The two books listed last contain English translations of primary source materials suitable for undergraduate or graduate courses, along with excellent scholarly commentaries. When read as a group, these works demonstrate that historical scholarship on late-colonial

Mexico remains vital and innovative precisely because of the diverse interests of its practitioners.

In *Pueblos de indios y educación en el México colonial, 1750–1821*, Dorothy Tanck de Estrada provides a detailed study of the fiscal history of the “*pueblos de indios*,” or indigenous villages that were recognized by the colonial state. As a result of administrative reforms initiated during the Bourbon era, especially beginning with the 1760 “*visita*” of José de Gálvez, more systematic accounting of the wealth and resources of indigenous communities became the norm. Tanck de Estrada acknowledges the distance that existed between the real economy and “the facts” revealed by the accounting procedures of the colonial state, which were used primarily for taxation (p. 152). Nevertheless, the ability of the state to detect cheating remained more or less constant, and this evidence allows for some interesting observations. Moreover, the data generated covered the entire viceroyalty, allowing Tanck de Estrada to make comparisons across an enormous geographical area. Much of *Pueblos de indios* consists of a pueblo by pueblo, region by region discussion of the resources and expenditures of indigenous communities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Tanck de Estrada’s research began as an inquiry into the history of education during the colonial period. Perhaps the most interesting fact to emerge is that the Bourbon state established schools in indigenous regions that were financed by the communities themselves. The explicit intent of these schools was to spread the use of the Spanish language. The Bourbons promoted the use of Spanish to assist their “secularization campaign,” that is, the transfer of ecclesiastical authority from members of religious orders (who tended to know the indigenous languages) to the parish priests and bishops of “the secular church” (who tended not to know them). These efforts gained strength in 1770, when Charles III decreed that indigenous languages would no longer be used (pp. 153, 161, 178). The persistence of such languages into the twenty-first century demonstrates the futility of this eighteenth-century attack. Yet the existence of these schools demonstrates that efforts to suppress indigenous languages—and thus identity and culture—extend far back into the colonial past. Such schools also challenge the dominant understanding that rural education in late-colonial Mexico either did not exist or was provided only by the Catholic Church.

Tanck de Estrada’s research in *Pueblos de indios* also demonstrates substantial indigenous participation in an increasingly commercial economy. The revenues used to finance schools and other expenditures came from many sources, including the rental of lands and natural resources. One example that ultimately led to a famous distillery was the water for irrigation and a mill rented to José Cuervo in Tequila in 1791 (pp. 94, 103). Revenues also found their way into religious festivals, loans to priests, local politics, and the expenses of lawsuits (pp. 449, 459, 520). Responses to the

opportunities as well as the shortcomings of the commercial economy varied by community and by region. Tanck de Estrada demonstrates nonetheless that the pueblos de indios participated extensively in the late-colonial market economy, a reality reflected in the fiscal policies of the late-colonial state.

In *Crime and Punishment in Late-Colonial Mexico City, 1692–1810*, Gabriel Haslip-Viera introduces readers to legal sources in an urban milieu. He provides an intriguing study of the definition, incidence, and punishment of crime in late-colonial Mexico City. The book is based on the careful analysis of “trial procedures, government correspondence, police records, and institutional and notarial records” (p. 4). The first two chapters describe Mexico City in this era and explain the ideology and institutional workings of the late-colonial criminal justice system. Here Haslip-Viera succeeds in demonstrating that concern over crime persisted among the colonial elite and deepened over time.

The next three chapters of *Crime and Punishment in Late-Colonial Mexico City* provide the most substantial data and arguments. Many of the examples and case studies are fascinating (pp. 67–68). Haslip-Viera successfully shows that young adults were the most frequently imprisoned sector of the population (p. 55), that bakers and butchers altered their scales to engage in consumer fraud (p. 79), and that late-colonial Mexican society experienced high levels of interpersonal violence, including the use of torture and corporal punishment by the state. Moreover, caste and class influenced the punishments meted out, with special jails reserved for “gentlemen” and “honorable persons” (pp. 89, 98). Some of Haslip-Viera’s more analytical points are less convincing, however. For example, he spends considerable time discussing “the retreatist lifestyle,” which he defines as “the refusal to submit to the norms and constraints that have been established by society through a pattern of avoidance or withdrawal” (p. 62). Whether crime is always caused by a retreat from societal norms is unclear. One could argue that many of the examples of interpersonal violence cited by Haslip-Viera reinforced rather than rejected dominant values, especially those pertaining to honor, masculinity, sexuality, and patriarchal privilege (pp. 67–72).

In addition, Haslip-Viera’s claim that an alcoholic named Anselmo “appears” to have imbibed “to forget or ‘block out’ the real world” (leading to his frequent arrest for being unconscious on the streets of Mexico City) seems strained or at least incomplete. Certainly, Anselmo lived out his chemical dependency in the midst of a harsh reality. But speculation as to his motives and state of mind remains unsubstantiated. The issue of causation and the extent of choice involved in the lifestyle could be more carefully delineated. Haslip-Viera also demonstrates that convict labor increased in Mexico City in the eighteenth century, becoming the most prevalent form of corporal punishment as torture and execution waned. It remains unclear whether this finding is a corrective to Michel Foucault’s famous interpreta-

tion of the symbolic importance and ritual nature of public execution in this era, as Haslip-Viera claims (p. 102), or merely a local complication. In the end, however, Haslip-Viera provides a fascinating social history of crime and punishment in late-colonial Mexico City.

Luz María Hernández Sáenz focuses instead on the institutions and practices related to medical treatment and (possibly, in this era) healing. In *Learning to Heal: The Medical Profession in Colonial Mexico, 1767–1831*, she details a crucial period in the emergence of the modern medical profession in Mexico. Her capstone dates extend from the founding of a chair of anatomy and surgery in the Hospital Real de Naturales (for Indians) in Mexico City in 1767 until 1831, when medicine and surgery formally merged into one profession (pp. 5, 270). The most significant contribution of this work is to increase understanding of the understudied realm of medical history in colonial Mexico. Hernández Sáenz provides substantial biographical data on individual practitioners and does a fine job of describing the tensions among various amateur surgeons, pharmacists, and healers of many types and the increasingly prevalent professionals certified by the state and accredited by formal university training.

As Hernández Sáenz points out, surgeons were much the inferiors of physicians until well into the nineteenth century (p. 75). The surgeons faced serious competition from barbers and bloodletters, while the physicians complained bitterly about the presence of foreign practitioners. In the third chapter, Hernández Sáenz provides a fascinating overview of the competition between amateur and professional pharmacists, a struggle continuing into more contemporary eras. Her discussion of the “mercury treatment” (p. 138) and other eighteenth-century practices indicates that the professionals did not always provide the greatest relief. The most significant flaw of *Learning to Heal* is a serious lack of copyediting. In addition, some of the more critical arguments—such as the way that professionalization of the medical profession benefited men to the detriment of women (p. 270)—could be more systematically developed throughout the text.

Environmental history has proved to be one of the most innovative realms in late-colonial Mexican historiography, and two fine works in this area have been published recently. In *To Defend Our Water with the Blood of Our Veins: The Struggle for Resources in Colonial Puebla*, Sonya Lipsett-Rivera succeeds admirably in her goal of placing “the environment at the center of the history of social change in the Poblano countryside” (p. x). She establishes the centrality of water and access to water in the social life and political struggles of colonial Puebla. The book opens by recounting the poignant story of twelve-year-old Rafael Antonia, who died on 9 August 1743 after falling into a ravine as she performed her daily chore of retrieving water for her household. Lipsett-Rivera introduces the text that follows by discussing the specifics of colonial Puebla as well as the fact that Puebla is a semi-arid rather than an arid region. The area thus provides an exceptional example

in a study of water's role in history, given that most work done to date has focused on arid regions (p. 2).

In the second chapter, Lipsett-Rivera traces the blending of indigenous and Spanish patterns of water usage during the colonial era. Water usage combined the technology and architecture needed for irrigation with customs regulating access, many of which came from indigenous experience and practice. Over time, an evolving legal system rooted in Roman, Visigothic, and Islamic traditions was redefined in the context of colonial Puebla (pp. 22, 23). The third chapter engages various theoretical models explaining the role of water in the formation of the state in primarily agricultural societies dependent on irrigation and concludes by showing how Spanish land use over time transformed the environment itself.

Lipsett-Rivera dismisses the significance of Karl Wittfogel's model of "hydraulic societies" for Mexico, especially for Puebla. She favors a modified version of the "centralization theory" developed by anthropologists Robert Hunt and Eva Hunt in their study of Oaxaca (p. 39) and the "decentralization theory" pioneered by Donald Worster in his study of Mormons in Utah (p. 42). To summarize these views, historical context and political conflict over access to water can lead to different responses by the state and its eventual transformation. In areas where conflict is intense, usually where population is dense or water is scarce, a water bureaucracy emerges to manage the use of water. But where less pressure exists, more localized and decentralized solutions tend to develop. Based on her study of Puebla, Lipsett-Rivera combines and refines these theses in two ways. In Puebla a process of decentralization and then centralization occurred over the long arc of time from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century due to the decline and subsequent recovery of the indigenous population. Second, rather than viewing centralization as a positive response to local requests, Lipsett-Rivera finds that in Puebla, the locally powerful "water monopolists" helped create a water bureaucracy to impose their will on less-fortunate neighbors. The remainder of *To Defend Our Water* discusses the specific crops planted and methods of using water in the colonial period, the decline and subsequent increase of conflict over water due to demographic factors, the emergence of a class of water monopolists and subsequent resistance, and the way that water use linked rural and urban settings in Puebla. This well-written study will be useful in part or in whole for graduate or undergraduate courses, especially given students' increasing interest in environmental history.

Another monograph revealing the significance of the environment in colonial Mexican history is Cynthia Radding's *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700–1850*. This superb book is a work of mature scholarship, the best study reviewed in this essay. Drawing on extensive archival research, Radding provides a

conceptually sophisticated state-of-the-art discussion of social, cultural, and environmental history. Her investigation centers on the Opata, Pima, and Eudeve peoples of the Sonoran highlands, a distinctive region in one of Mexico's northernmost states (p. 13). One of Radding's primary goals is to reconstruct the "social ecology" of this region. She defines *social ecology* as "a living and changing complex of relations that developed historically among diverse human populations and with the land they occupied" (p. 3). This concept is crucial for Radding. A theme running throughout the entire work is the way in which the physical environment has been shaped by human activities but has also constrained them. This long-term process began with the first human settlements, which were transformed due to the new crops, livestock, agricultural practices, and land-tenure systems of the colonial centuries.

Another primary goal of *Wandering Peoples* is to trace indigenous responses to the imposition of Spanish colonial rule and its replication in the New World. As analyzed by Radding, these responses can be grouped into two complex and overlapping processes, one perhaps more easily understood as cultural and the other as social. Both processes develop over time in relationship to regional social ecology. The first process is the emergence and redefinition of ethnic and subaltern identities, which include linguistic, religious, and economic activities rooted in specific locations. The second process is class formation in a colonial context linked to economic changes, especially shifting patterns of land tenure and the growth of commercial activities responding to increasing market pressures over time. In a colonial context, the lines between ethnicity and class inevitably become blurred, and the meaning of these "social markers" varied in different contexts and situations. One of the real achievements of *Wandering Peoples* is that it maintains a sense of the dynamic qualities of class, ethnicity, and other lived experiences and theoretical categories.

In *Wandering Peoples*, Radding narrates an engaging story based on impressive archival research. The indigenous peoples of Sonora have been inaccurately portrayed as nomadic. In fact, recent archaeological discoveries have revealed a more sedentary lifestyle that involved some foraging. Sophisticated agricultural practices worked out in specific ecological zones as well as long-established patterns of indigenous trade existed prior to the arrival of Spaniards. In Sonora, Jesuit missionaries initially carried out Spanish settlement. Radding carefully debunks the myth of the mission as an autarchic entity, noting that the missions were always integrated into regional and international economies. She also provides ample evidence of coercion and repressive force used by the missionaries (pp. 66–69). Even so, the missions provided a space open to indigenous appropriation for economic and cultural self-defense, and this possibility perhaps explains their persistence into the nineteenth century, long after the Jesuits were expelled

in 1767. The colonial order that arrived with the Jesuits persisted for several centuries, and Radding analyzes this long history with impressive attention to local detail. Her analysis of distinctive cultural understandings of economic activity and the redefinition of ethnicity at the level of household and community in response to colonialism is impressive.

Wandering Peoples is an excellent book, but it is not for the uninitiated. Scholars with an interest in subaltern studies, postcolonial theory, and social or cultural history will learn much from this study. Others might find it to be at least partly inaccessible. With significant guidance, advanced undergraduates as well as graduate students can benefit from reading it. The works of Lipsett-Rivera and Radding demonstrate the salience of environmental history, which will be a growing area of historical study for years to come. Radding's study provides up-to-date engagement with contemporary questions in historical theories and methods that incorporates extensive archival research from an understudied region.

Wandering Peoples is complemented by the first of two collections of primary source materials, Thomas Sheridan's *Empire of Sand: The Seri Indians and the Struggle for Spanish Sonora, 1645–1803*. It contains English translations of Spanish documents detailing interactions between Spaniards and the Seri Indians of Sonora, whose populations clustered on the islands and along the coast of the Gulf of California. As Sheridan indicates, these sources depict the Comcáac (as the groups of Seris whom they represent designate themselves) as "refracted and distorted through European and Non-European eyes" (p. 15). The first step in analyzing the documents is to recognize this reality, a problem for all colonial historiography.

Once their limitations have been recognized, these written sources can be read effectively in conjunction with other types of evidence drawn from archaeology, oral history, and related disciplines. *Empire of Sand* is divided into five sections, and the sources provided trace the long series of interactions between the Comcáac and Spanish missionaries, soldiers, and settlers from 1645 through 1803. These sources will be especially useful for those interested in the history of Sonora, of missionaries, and of frontier regions. As Radding points out, frontier regions are often more integrated into global processes than is commonly acknowledged. For missionary history, the best item is "Father Miranda on the Impact of the Horcasitas Presidio on the Mission Seri's, 1749" (pp. 143–59). This source provides the most intriguing example of the complicated blend of authoritarian paternalism and humanitarian condemnation of colonial abuse that characterized the missionary discourse of the colonial era. I plan to incorporate this document into my undergraduate survey of Mexican cultural history, and it would work equally well in survey courses of Latin American history.

The past has multiple dimensions. In the end, however, history is lived and understood by individuals. One individual in colonial Mexico was Madre María de San José (1656–1719), a mystical nun who entered the Con-

vent of Santa Mónica in Puebla in 1687. At the urging of the Bishop of Puebla, her spiritual director, she became a writer and composed a twelve-volume "spiritual autobiography" detailing her entire life. Unlike her famous contemporary Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, also under the spiritual direction of the Bishop of Puebla, Madre María de San José did not run afoul of Catholic authorities. Rather, her writings reveal the rich mystical tradition of a bygone era that fell within the orthodoxy of her time. Her writings began with memories of her childhood and continued after she became codirector of an Augustinian convent in Oaxaca in 1697. They thus help to fill a void in the Mexican historical record by contributing a distinctive woman's perspective on social life as well as spiritual practice in the seventeenth century.

Although Madre María's writings are useful for social history and literary studies, the most arresting aspect of this primary source is her vivid religious imagery. It is not possible to detail all the examples found in her "spiritual autobiography," but Madre María's world is filled with fiery demons doing battle with her God, a struggle manifested in many ways. At times her visions become explicitly erotic in ways that reveal the class and ethnic biases of colonial society. In one of her visions, for example a demon urged on an orgy of "naked Indians, both men and women," which inspired her to pray fervently. Later, the Lord himself climbed down off the cross, and "He entered inside me and embraced my soul with a very fond and close embrace," claiming that "this is the embrace of a husband and a father" (p. 91). The point is not to inspire ridicule by taking isolated writings out of context. Rather, twenty-first century readers should ponder the reception of these statements in their own time and note that they were evaluated within widely accepted discourses that vary substantially from those dominant in our era. The fine translation of Madre María's writings into English gives undergraduate and graduate students in the United States easy access to an eyewitness account of understudied aspects of colonial life. Editors and translators Kathleen Myers and Amanda Powell also provide superb scholarly commentaries on the difficulties of translation, and they situate Madre María's writings historically and in terms of recent writings on colonial women's history. *A Wild Country Out in the Garden* is a splendid addition to the corpus of writings from and on colonial Mexico.

The works reviewed in this essay all enrich scholarly understanding of institutional, social, and cultural history. At the same time, they vary widely in the historical context of late-colonial Mexico in their research topics, methodologies, and geographical focus. Such diversity allows the authors to provide new insights into colonial Mexican education and economic history, crime and punishment, medical history, environmental history, the history of frontiers and missions, religious history, and women's history. In terms of historiography, they test the limits of historians' knowledge of the past and move it in new directions. This diversity also shows that colonial Mexican history is a flourishing field that will continue to grow.