
REVIEW ESSAYS

RECENT STUDIES ON EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO

John C. Super
West Virginia University

COLONIAL ENTREPRENEURS: FAMILIES AND BUSINESS IN COLONIAL MEXICO CITY. By JOHN E. KICZA. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983. Pp. 290. \$24.95.)

HACIENDA AND MARKET IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO: THE RURAL ECONOMY OF THE GUADALAJARA REGION, 1675-1820. By ERIC VAN YOUNG. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981. Pp. 388. \$30.00.)

TIERRA ADENTRO: SETTLEMENT AND SOCIETY IN COLONIAL DURANGO. By MICHAEL M. SWANN. (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1982. Pp. 444. \$25.00.)

MISSIONARIES, MINERS, AND INDIANS: SPANISH CONTACT WITH THE YAQUI NATION OF NORTHWESTERN NEW SPAIN, 1533-1820. By EVELYN HU-DEHART. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1981. Pp. 152. \$19.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper.)

THE VICEROYALTY OF NEW SPAIN AND EARLY INDEPENDENT MEXICO: A GUIDE TO ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE ROSENBACH MUSEUM AND LIBRARY. Compiled by DAVID M. SZEWCZYK. (Philadelphia: The Rosenbach Museum and Library, 1980. Pp. 139.)

Mexico City excited the late-eighteenth-century visitor as much as it does today's tourist. It was a vast place, spreading outward daily, influencing life far beyond its boundaries. It was the largest city in the hemisphere—then as now, a complex physical and social environment where flashes

of color, smells, and languages intermingled at a bewildering rate. Beneath the surface, giving coherence and order to the bustle of daily life, was a social and economic structure that is only now beginning to be explained.

North from Mexico City, the eighteenth-century traveler headed into open land, most of it long since tamed and brought under cultivation, but still refreshingly expansive after the closeness of Mexico City. Cities such as Querétaro, León, Celaya, some almost as old as Spain's claim to Mexico, lorded over the countryside. One of the most important of the towns to the northwest was Guadalajara, the capital of a rich region known for its fertile fields, commerce, and mines. By the late eighteenth century, changes in agricultural production were beginning to alter social and economic life in the region.

North from Guadalajara, the physical and social landscapes changed. Lands were less fertile, population centers smaller and scattered, the conflicts between Europeans and Indians more frequent. Due north of Guadalajara was Tierra Adentro, a land of vast horizons far from the opulence of Mexico City but continually linked to it by the *camino real*, a heavily traveled road in all seasons. This was the land of missions, mines, presidios, and small agricultural settlements. The large cities such as Durango, Parral, and Chihuahua were only small towns compared to the cities of central Mexico, but they still had their own internal complexity and distinctiveness.

Northwest of Guadalajara were Sinaloa and Sonora, provinces encompassing coast and mountains, deserts and cool river valleys. But most of all, they were like the other provinces of the north, lands where missionary efforts and colonization plans responded to silver discoveries and Indian attacks. In Sonora, the Yaqui had an especially interesting past, submitting, then rebelling, and in the end, maintaining their cultural unity as a people.

Four of the five books under review are set within these different areas of Mexico. None of them claims to be a regional or provincial history, but all demonstrate the importance of location in understanding the processes of change in eighteenth-century New Spain. John Kicza's *Colonial Entrepreneurs* studies the "great families" of Mexico City, the social and economic elite who influenced life in the capital and provinces. Eric Van Young's *Hacienda and Market* illustrates the close relationship between city and region, outlining how changes in the city influenced agriculture and social life in the countryside. Michael M. Swann's *Tierra Adentro* is ambitious in geographic and thematic scope as it attempts to show the relationships between space, population change, and social structure in Nueva Vizcaya. Evelyn Hu-DeHart's *Missionaries, Miners, and Indians* is more direct and tightly focused, concentrating on Yaquis and Jesuits in Sonora. Taken together, these four works offer

examples of current scholarly interests and accomplishments in eighteenth-century Mexican studies. Much like a Mexican meal that is prepared by cooks from different regions with different skills, the results are interesting, at times exciting and very satisfying; at other times, however, the guest eats only out of duty and respect for the host.

Kicza's work, with its emphasis on elite composition and urban economic organization, can be described as a combination of social and business history. Despite its title, it is not a study of entrepreneurs in the sense that one might expect. It makes little effort to use the literature on entrepreneurial behavior to explain the business attitudes and practices of the elite in Mexico City. Motivations, aspirations, risk-taking, and perceptions of opportunities are problems not carefully discussed. The work concludes that the elite was not "nonentrepreneurial" in business because they combined speculation with safe investments (p. 228). Diversity, with at least some investment in land because of its security, was a principle of business practice in the eighteenth century, much as it was in the sixteenth century.

Part I of the book defines the "great families" as those with resources exceeding one million pesos (about one hundred families); beneath them were families whose wealth exceeded one hundred thousand pesos (about four hundred families). These families protected their social position through intermarriage, their economic position through absorbing fast-rising competitors, and their political position through titles, bureaucratic appointments, and military offices. The impression given is of an elite that was cohesive, interrelated, driven by common interests, one that dominated local society and directly influenced life in the provinces.

Commerce in its many different forms provided the main opportunities for the elite. Population increases combined with a revival of silver mining contributed to the strengthening of a commercial system that linked Mexico City to the markets of both the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. Competition for control over the trade spurred Mexico City merchants to use their control over credit, family ties, and agents more effectively.

How this revival of trade directly affected the fortunes of the elite is not entirely clear. Kicza says little about the origins of family wealth and how the new opportunities (and new risks) affected the fortunes of the elite. He does make an important point that the elite was primarily creole and did not feel threatened by a rapidly rising peninsular class, even though the *peninsulares* dominated international trade. Kicza disregards "the belief that there existed some sort of competition and resentment between the creole and peninsular members of most families . . ." (p. 147). Apparently, squabbles and conflict did not threaten the cohesiveness or business organization of the elite.

Much of the book describes late-eighteenth-century commercial life. Kicza recognizes that artisan and manufacturing enterprises were as important to commerce as the warehouse enterprises and the smaller retail and specialty stores, although their particular place in the changing commercial system of the city is not always made clear. More important to his discussion is the control that Mexico City merchants maintained over a trading network that extended far into the provinces. Goods in the provinces flowed through Mexico City merchants because provincial traders seldom had the capital to buy directly from overseas markets. Lack of specie was a major problem for the small merchants as well as for the international trader, increasing the dependence of both on credit. Working through traveling merchants or through companies, merchants of Mexico City maintained "a commercial domination over most of the country" (p. 77).

An important section of the book analyzes the administration of commercial houses, emphasizing the history of *los cajeros*, a general term applied to store personnel, not owners. Those few cajeros who prospered did so by becoming store managers, then partners, and finally (with luck and skill), owners. This pattern, which probably applies to all levels of business, should not be overemphasized, however. Not all cajeros had the special training, mobility, and disdain for creoles associated with the nephews of some peninsulares who rose to dominate trade.¹

Kicza successfully interweaves social and economic themes, adding new insights into the behavior of the elite. Even stripped of its social information, his book still would be a good study of business organization, with particularly useful comments on credit, factors, companies, and administration. With the organizational features of business in the capital clearly understood, historians can now move on to questions about profits, changing practices, and the precise relationships between business, politics, and society. All merchants, from those who sold a little bread and cloth to the great international traders, attempted to control markets and prices. Even at the level of the corner grocer, a continuous, dynamic political struggle centered on efforts to improve profits. Conflict, changes in markets, and political decisions all influenced profit and preoccupied colonial merchants. In late-eighteenth-century Mexico in particular, when the winds of fortune threatened and thrilled many, businessmen thought often of these problems. With Kicza's work as a foundation, historians can now study these issues more carefully.

Instead of concentrating on groups and their activities as Kicza does, Eric Van Young focuses on institutions, patterns, and change. His objective is to analyze the relationships between an increase in population, the growth of urban consumer demand, changing land-use pat-

terns, and the impact on rural Indian communities in late-eighteenth-century Guadalajara. He accomplishes this objective in a mature and systematic way, contributing in every chapter much that is new and interesting.

Central to Van Young's analysis is the question of provisioning the provincial capital. He argues that the changes in the countryside in the late eighteenth century were responses to an increasing consumer demand for the products of farms and ranches. The evidence on rural change is convincing, the trends well illustrated and placed within meaningful contexts. The evidence on urban change, particularly on consumption patterns, is less clear. His argument might have been improved had it been possible to demonstrate actual shifts in consumer tastes and in the quantities of different foods consumed.

Wheat and its primary by-products, flour and bread, illustrate the problems of analysis. To meet the increased demand for wheat, lands previously used for cattle and maize were converted to wheat in the late eighteenth century. Accompanying the rise in wheat cultivation were increased investment in land (especially in irrigation), closer management of agricultural resources, and tighter control over the labor force. These developments were responses to a seven- or eightfold increase in the consumption of wheat and flour in the city between 1750 and 1800. This figure represents a sharp increase (about twice as sharp as the population increase), and if it was triggered by local urban demand, then eating habits and income distribution deserve elaboration. This explanation is particularly important because maize prices were increasing faster than wheat prices, which in turn should have led to increased maize production. In the case of meat, Van Young suggests that higher prices did not lead to increased production because consumers could not afford to eat more meat, even at lower prices.

One of the problems in sorting out changing supply and demand is the lack of consistent data. For meat, the author has good price information, but for wheat, he is forced to rely more on quantity figures than on prices. Another problem is chronology. Much of the data presented on quantity and price increases are for the post-1770 period, but the time of fastest growth of the city of Guadalajara was from 1760 to 1770, when its population doubled to 23,394. During the next twenty years, it increased to only 28,250. Another, more difficult problem is explaining the nature and extent of changes in consumer demand, which will probably require more than price and production data to unravel.

Van Young concludes that it is this changing, increasing urban demand that prompted the commercialization of agriculture, the displacement of maize and meat, the integration of Indian peasants into a more oppressive production system, and the ultimate "ever-increasing impoverishment among the mass of rural inhabitants during the last

century of Spanish domination" (p. 268). David Brading concludes his work on agricultural changes in the Bajío on the same note: "In the years before 1810, the labouring classes in Mexico experienced a decline in their standard of living."² If higher prices for staples actually meant a decline in the standard of living (instead of, say, more specie in circulation), Indian peasants were caught in the paradoxical situation of benefiting (at least nutritionally) from being absorbed into the ever-expanding hacienda because, as both Van Young and Brading note, haciendas continued to provide food rations for their workers.

Van Young's study is undoubtedly one of the best examinations of agriculture and population change in Mexico. All the problems are not yet resolved, but he goes a long way in advancing the discussion. Although this review has focused on his discussion of provisioning, it should be emphasized that his observations on estate organization, labor, credit, capital, and ownership patterns are also important contributions to understanding colonial Mexico. Van Young's book is a good one and will continue to be read and discussed for its sophisticated analysis of the evidence and for its interpretative insights.

Michael Swann's approach to *Tierra Adentro* differs from those used by Kicza and Van Young. His interest is space, and the influence of space on settlement, population, and society. Specifically, he studies the region known as Nueva Vizcaya, which later became the states of Chihuahua and Durango. Much of the discussion depends on evidence from the city of Durango, and the final two chapters study changing residence and social patterns in the city. The tone and style of the work are evident in the preface: "A principal concern is with areal relationships, with patterns and trends at different geographical scales and different levels of organization" (p. xxviii). It contains little of the feel of the soil and the lay of the land that those who grew up reading traditional historical geography might expect.

Swann brings together a substantial amount of archival material and an enormous amount of secondary literature to fulfill his objectives. First, he summarizes the geographic background and historical development of Nueva Vizcaya, concentrating on the effect of agriculture and mining on settlement patterns. Here he includes a useful nine-stage model of colonization in the mining areas. Second, he details the changes and variations in migration, fertility, and mortality in one region of Nueva Vizcaya. Included is a careful study of the different characteristics of the population, such as race, sex, age, marriage, occupation, and household. Third, he outlines the "ecology" and "morphology" of the city of Durango, in other words, the social aspects of residence patterns and the demographic, occupational, and physical changes in the city.

The bulk of the primary data for the study comes from the late eighteenth century, although assumptions are often made about earlier

periods. Geographic mobility and racial intermarriage, for example, are proven for this period, but whether these phenomena were something new is not known. The questions of movement and social change, apparently so significant for studying the northern frontier, are critical to the analysis, but mainly in an intraregional sense. The influence of links between the region and those to the south on social development are not carefully studied. Swann does prove that the concept of "frontier," if it is to be applied to Durango, must be used carefully because so many exceptions to traditional usage exist that the value of the term for the late eighteenth century is questionable.

An enormous amount of valuable data are set forth in many fine maps, charts, and tables in the book. Swann employs the data to make some interesting observations on space and historical change within the context of the northern frontier. Mexican studies must now await a systematic integration of the new breed of historical geography with traditional Mexican historiography.

Evelyn Hu-DeHart's study differs from the others in various respects. Its purpose is easily defined, its style narrative and readable, its length a short, but adequate, one hundred pages compared to Swann's four hundred. She sets out to explain why the Yaqui were able to maintain their cultural identity during four centuries of Spanish and Mexican rule. She finds the answer in the success of the Jesuits in maintaining control over the Yaqui by insulating them from the dangers of secular society while giving them political and economic stability. But as she makes clear, Jesuit success served Yaqui intentions. From the sixteenth century, "Yaquis demonstrated a practical flexibility and tended to seize the initiative in establishing their relationship with alien groups interested in them" (p. 20).

After describing the establishment and operation of the mission system among the Yaqui, Hu-DeHart analyzes the Yaqui revolt of 1740 and the subsequent decline of Jesuit influence that resulted in their expulsion in 1767. According to her analysis, the Jesuits must shoulder much of the blame for the erosion of their power. Insensitive to secular demands and critical of Indian needs, the Jesuits eventually provoked what they feared most—secularization. Meanwhile, the Yaqui began working intermittently in the mines, which quieted demands for their complete absorption into the Spanish social and economic system.

If Hu-DeHart could have elaborated on the "Yaquis' own characteristic flexibility and ingenuity in meeting new circumstances," her study would have been improved. This cultural trait is crucial to her portrayal of the Yaqui, but the evidence for it and how it changed over time requires more discussion. Hu-DeHart nevertheless tells the story well and provides the perspective needed to place the history of the Yaqui and Jesuits in a broader Latin American context.

The final book under review is David Szewczyk's *The Viceroyalty of New Spain and Early Independent Mexico: A Guide to Original Manuscripts in the Collections of the Rosenbach Museum and Library*. Readers not familiar with the collection will find helpful comments in the introduction, which hints at the fascinating origins of several of the Mexican manuscript collections in the United States. The Rosenbach collection is best known for its Cortés manuscripts, but is perhaps more useful for its documents on social and economic history. Marriage registers, Inquisition proceedings, powers-of-attorney, testimonials on Indian uprisings, and much more are found in the collection. Szewczyk obviously knows the documents well and understands the needs of researchers. The result is a good guide, particularly useful in its careful summation of each document and complete index.

The different emphases in these books hinder attempts to generalize from them about Mexican history. Given the different objectives and sources, few common themes are discussed. What does emerge is a series of perspectives on the implications of change in the eighteenth century. Increases in population, mining, and trade undoubtedly contributed to changes in social and spatial relationships, although in ways that varied according to local circumstances. Each of the works concentrates on selective problems in attempting to describe the changes and interpret their consequences. They produce many new insights into the nature of change in Mexico rather than a new vision of Mexico before independence.

Three impressions come to mind in trying to summarize these books. First, the richness, diversity, and excitement of eighteenth-century Mexico are confirmed, as is the growing sophistication of Mexican historiography. Second, attempts to offer an integrated, interpretive account of eighteenth-century Mexico (much less the entire colonial period) become ever more challenging the more that is known. Third, despite the contributions of new techniques and questions in social and economic history, one misses cultural history, in the sense of shared beliefs characterizing different groups in the past, when it is neglected. Perhaps the next major advance in understanding colonial Mexico will come when the "patterns" and "processes" so important to scholars today are reconciled with the thoughts and beliefs that motivated people yesterday.

NOTES

1. David A. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763–1810* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 109–12.
2. Brading, *Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío: León, 1700–1860* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 199.