RECENT TRENDS IN ETHNOHISTORIC RESEARCH ON POSTCLASSIC AND COLONIAL CENTRAL MEXICO

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THE AZTEC KINGS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF RULERSHIP IN MEXICA HISTORY. By Susan Gillespie. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989. Pp. 272. $35.00.)

AZTECS: AN INTERPRETATION. By Inga Clendinnen. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. 396. $29.00.)

THE AZTECS. By Richard F. Townsend. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992. Pp. 224. $29.95.)

AZTEC MEDICINE, HEALTH, AND NUTRITION. By Bernard Ortiz de Montellano. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990. Pp. 308. $40.00 cloth, $15.00 paper.)

INDIGENOUS RULERS: AN ETHNOHISTORY OF TOWN GOVERNMENT IN COLONIAL CUERNAVACA. By Robert Haskett. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. Pp. 294. $37.50 cloth, $17.50 paper.)

LOS OBRAJES EN LA NUEVA ESPAÑA, 1530–1630. By Carmen Viqueira and José I. Urquiola. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990. Pp. 374. $10.00.)

Ethnohistoric research on late pre-Hispanic and colonial Mesoamerica has proliferated in recent years and shows no sign of diminishing. The six books reviewed here represent a sample of the many perspectives characterizing current research on the pre-Hispanic and colonial societies of Central Mexico.[1] These studies also illustrate how much the

1. For examples, see Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); Serge Gruzinski, *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands: Indian Power and Colonial Society, 1520–1800* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989); Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare, Imperial Expansion, and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); James Lockhart, *Nahuas and Spaniards: Postconquest Central Mexican History and Philology* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press and UCLA Latin American Center Publications, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991); Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University

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gap has narrowed between anthropological and historical research on prehistoric and historic peoples of the Americas. Topics once the domain of anthropologists are now being analyzed by historians, while anthropologists have adopted the subjects and methods of historians. In reading these six books, one would be hard pressed to identify which of the authors are anthropologists and which are historians.[2]

With a single exception, these books focus exclusively on the native societies of Central Mexico. Inga Clendinnen, Susan Gillespie, Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, and Richard Townsend all explore aspects of pre-Hispanic Aztec society,[3] while Robert Haskett examines indigenous society in colonial Cuernavaca. The Viqueira and Urquiola volume is a study of colonial *obrajes* (woolen factories). The colonial textile industry relied on indigenous labor, but Viqueira and Urquiola focus their attention on economic aspects of the textile industry, particularly the ways in which it articulated with the world economic system.

The four volumes that treat pre-Hispanic Aztec society vary greatly in their objectives and methodology and thus will appeal to diverse audiences. They range from Townsend's descriptive and general discussion of the Aztecs to more specialized analyses of specific elements of Aztec society (Ortiz de Montellano's study of medicine and health and Clendinnen's of ritual actions) to Gillespie's hermeneutical analysis of the symbolism in Aztec historical traditions.

Townsend's *The Aztecs* takes the broadest approach and is presented to a general audience as dealing with "the continuing search for an understanding of Aztec culture" (p. 11). The book provides a basic overview of Aztec society that draws on archaeological evidence, historical documents, and interpretations of art and architecture. The study is divided into five parts, beginning with the arrival of the Spaniards and the subsequent fall of the Aztec empire. The second and third parts summarize the political, economic, and military history of the Aztecs. The fourth part explores Aztec religion, and the final part examines daily life and various occupations and offices within Aztec society.

The Aztecs is richly illustrated, and Townsend successfully instills an appreciation for Aztec culture, particularly its art and architecture. He has made every effort to include the most up-to-date information on recent discoveries. Given the goal of presenting a general description of the Aztecs, this book does not attempt to provide any in-depth analysis of many of the debates currently being waged among scholars of Aztec

Press, 1992); and Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991).

2. Clendinnen and Haskett are historians; Gillespie, Ortiz de Montellano, Viqueira, and Urquiola are anthropologists; and Townsend is an art historian.

3. The term *Aztec* refers to a number of culturally related peoples who lived in the Valley of Mexico in the fifteenth century.

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culture. Townsend rarely uses primary documents, relying heavily on the analyses of others. In sum, *The Aztecs* is a general synthesis with all the strengths and weaknesses inherent in such an approach. Although not intended for specialists, it is nevertheless a beautifully produced volume and a fine introduction to Aztec culture.

The Gillespie, Clendinnen, and Ortiz de Montellano volumes will interest a more specialized audience, although they too can be enjoyed by nonspecialists. Each one breaks new ground in analyzing and interpreting Aztec society. In one sense, they are similar in that each author tries to some extent to view specific aspects of Aztec culture from the point of view of the Aztecs themselves. To achieve this perspective, the authors base their analysis on primary documents, particularly those written by native authors or those that cite native informants. All three authors discuss and analyze the sources used, although they do not always concur on how certain sources should be interpreted. For example, the work of Spanish Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún is a major source for Clendinnen and Ortiz de Montellano, who clearly admire his work. Gillespie, however, is more critical of Sahagún's methods and argues that his work "is Spanish as much as it is Aztec" (p. xxxiii).

Although Clendinnen, Ortiz de Montellano, and Gillespie all rely on primary documents (often the same ones), their approaches to reading these documents differ. Clendinnen and Ortiz de Montellano follow a more traditional approach in culling their sources to learn as much as possible about the topic at hand. Ortiz de Montellano employs a standard historical method in seeking independent verification of Aztec health and medicinal practices and beliefs by searching for similar descriptions in unrelated documents. Gillespie takes an entirely different tack in her study of the ruling dynasty of Tenochtitlan, the Mexica capital.[4] Her approach examines the structure of narratives and how it changed to accommodate new situations. Gillespie is less concerned with "historical truth" than with underlying patterns in the many contradictions and inconsistencies characterizing the Aztec historical tradition as recorded in native chronicles.

Of the books examining pre-Hispanic Aztec society, Gillespie's *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexica History* is the most provocative. The contradictions contained in the various documents recording Aztec history are well known. Because most scholars have used these documents to try to reconstruct an accurate chronology of Aztec history, the traditional approach has been to ignore the inconsistencies and look instead for events that appear consistently from one document

4. The Mexica were one of the Nahuatl-speaking groups that constituted the Aztecs (see note 3). They lived in the cities of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco and dominated the Basin of Mexico at the time of the Spanish invasion.

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to another. These events have been interpreted as "true" while those lacking consistency have been discounted. For Gillespie, however, "there are other 'truths' to be found in these documents that deal less with 'history' than with how the natives and even the Spanish conceived of and used the Aztec past to comprehend their present world" (p. xxii). Gillespie focuses instead on the inconsistencies because she believes that "the contradictions take on greater significance than the consistencies" (p. xxxvii). She notes that the greatest inconsistencies revolve around the genealogy of the ruling dynasty of Tenochtitlan. In most cultures, genealogies validate sociopolitical and economic relationships and consequently change as these relationships evolve. Inconsistent accounts of genealogies, then, may reflect disputes about social relationships, with various parties in the dispute accepting the genealogy that corresponds to their particular perspective on a situation. Thus for Gillespie, the differing versions of Mexica dynastic history "reflect profound questions about the nature of rulership as well as major elements of the Aztec worldview" (p. xl).

Interpreting the various accounts of Aztec history is complicated by the fact that all of the documents available to modern scholars were written during the colonial period. Authors of these documents fell into two categories: indigenous elites recalling their past after (sometimes long after) the Spanish conquest or Europeans who relied on interviews with members of indigenous elites. These conditions provided the opportunity—the necessity, in Gillespie's view—for rewriting history.

Gillespie argues that for the Aztecs (and other Mesoamerican peoples), the past was the model for interpreting the present, and the Aztecs therefore manipulated "history" actively to explain their current situation. Cyclical time was reversible and repeatable: history "explained that which had happened as well as that which would be" (p. xxiii). Thus history had to be "amenable to change as required by later events—it is the past that is altered to conform to and to be continuous with the present" (p. xxiii). According to Gillespie, the Aztec historical tradition, as recorded in the colonial period, "was transformed so that it could accommodate the events of the conquest and colonization" (p. xxviii).

In the first part of *The Aztec Kings*, Gillespie explores the role of Aztec "queens"—the wives, mothers, and daughters of the kings. Much of the variation found in the historical narratives revolves around three women who played important roles in Aztec dynastic history because of their associations with the first, fifth, and ninth Aztec kings. Gillespie argues that these women were structurally equal because regardless of the details (which vary greatly from one account to another), they always appear in the dynastic sequence at critical points where one dynastic cycle of kings is ending and the next is about to begin. Gillespie argues that these women were structurally linked to the Aztec mother-goddess as well as to other "women of discord" in the Aztec historical tradition

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(like Coyolxauhqui), whose sacrificial deaths initiated a new phase or cycle in Aztec history.

The second part of *The Aztec Kings* focuses on the fifth and ninth Aztec kings, the two Motecuhzomas, who ruled at the end of generational cycles. Here she explores the ways in which Motecuhzoma I and Motecuhzoma II are structurally related to each other and to an earlier king, Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, last ruler of the Toltecs. Like the three queens, the Motecuhzomas had equivalent positions in the Mexica dynastic sequence in that their rules marked the boundaries (in this case, the endpoints) of dynastic cycles, and ambiguity surrounded the question of their successors. Similarly, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl ruled at the end (or perhaps the beginning and end) of the Toltec dynastic sequence. In a chapter devoted to Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, Gillespie reviews the colonial literature on this figure and concludes that much of his "history" was created by Spaniards and Aztecs during the colonial period and did not reflect preconquest Aztec thinking at all. She argues further that many widely accepted views of the Toltecs are also suspect. In her opinion, the postconquest writing of Toltec history is best understood as part of a continuing process of rewriting Aztec history to explain their defeat by the Spaniards. By acknowledging that the downfall of an earlier empire (the Toltec) was followed by the rise of Toltec descendants (the Mexica), the Aztecs' defeat was presented as inevitable, although the hope remained that their descendants would rise again. Gillespie's final chapter examines how the Aztec calendar was related to constructing sacred history, which was used to address philosophical problems regarding the nature of rulership.

Although many archaeologists and ethnohistorians will remain unconvinced that the search for the "truth" should be abandoned, Gillespie's warning that scholars must be wary of reading Aztec historical texts too literally should be heeded. More important, she demonstrates that by employing a different methodology, Aztec documents can be used to address issues that are not treated explicitly.

In *Aztecs: An Interpretation,* Inga Clendinnen seeks to discover Aztec thought processes, or how "ordinary Mexica men and women made sense of their world" (p. 2). To understand these processes, she examines social actions—particularly ritual actions—because in her view, "observable action [is] revelatory of thought" (p. 6). She thus relies heavily on descriptions of ritual action found in Sahagún's *Florentine Codex.*

Particularly intrigued by what seems to be an inherent discrepancy in Aztec culture, Clendinnen asks how a society with such "high decorum" and "fastidious social and aesthetic sensibility" could also engage in massive human sacrifice (p. 2). A major focus of her research is to discover how ordinary people understood human sacrifice. Like Gillespie, Clendinnen is concerned with more than just "the facts," although she

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accepts descriptions of Aztec ritual life found in colonial documents as true. But Clendinnen undertakes much more than just reporting the facts in moving beyond mere description of ritual action to attempt to discover what the actions meant to those who performed them (p. 44).

Aztecs: An Interpretation is not organized in a conventional fashion using themes and arguments that culminate in an understanding of how the Aztecs viewed the world. Instead, Clendinnen has written a series of essays that she describes as "multiple, oblique, and angled approaches" (p. 11). The first section contains two essays focusing on Tenochtitlan. One describes the official history and formal organization of the city, while the other examines "experiences, associations, and activities . . . which infused life in Tenochtitlan with its distinctive qualities" in an attempt to discover "where the Mexica found their most basic sense of community" (p. 45). Here Clendinnen begins to examine how the Aztecs thought about human sacrifice. Some understanding comes from linguistic analysis. The Spanish word *sacrificio* is actually used to cover three Nahuatl word clusters: one meant those who were to die for the gods, a second involved drawing blood from one's own body as well as notions of debt and obligation, and the third had more to do with public display and giving gifts (p. 74). Thus a concept that Spanish and English encapsulate in a single word was actually far more complex in the original Nahuatl.

The second section of *Aztecs: An Interpretation* focuses on several of the roles played in Aztec society. In addition to analyzing how individuals in these groups fit into Aztec society, Clendinnen seeks in each essay to discover how those playing these roles participated in and perceived the ritual of human sacrifice. The act itself is made more comprehensible by the fact that "the Mexica identified their victims . . . as 'other': those who we are not" (p. 110). Clendinnen pays particular attention to the distinctions between the roles of men as warriors, priests, and merchants and the roles of women as wives and mothers. The Mexica maintained rigid distinctions between what men and women did, but the differences were meant to be balancing rather than divisive.

In the third section, Clendinnen explores the sacred realm of the Aztecs. The first essay focuses on aesthetic expressions—objects, songs, and performances. Whatever the medium, aesthetic expression reflected Aztec perception of the shape and organization of the universe. The next essay examines several dimensions of ritual, again focusing on that most notable of Aztec rituals, human sacrifice. Clendinnen argues that sacrifice served to demonstrate the vulnerability of the human body: for the Aztecs, "acts of state-approved violence were at once part of the complex rhetoric of cosmically sanctioned human power, and, more profoundly, illustrative of the ferocious constraints on the merely human" (p. 262).

Some readers, particularly those less familiar with Aztec culture as a whole, may find the presentation of Clendinnen's study somewhat

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confusing. While she claims that the study is intended for a general audience as much as for specialists (p. 8), readers should be aware that they cannot expect to gain a comprehensive understanding of Aztec culture from this book (although the footnotes provide additional detail). The essays are actually a patchwork of themes and ideas. Yet the book is beautifully written and provides thoughtful insights into how the Aztecs may have viewed the world, and particularly why the practice of human sacrifice played such a critical role in their lives.

Ortiz de Montellano's major objective in *Aztec Medicine, Health, and Nutrition* is to "sketch an accurate picture of Aztec medicine at the time of first European contact" (p. 29). Beyond describing what he believes was an inherently interesting system of non-Western medicine and health, Ortiz de Montellano addresses the question of whether a general weakness in the health of the Aztec population can account for its vulnerability to European disease. He also evaluates the impact of sixteenth-century European notions of health on traditional Aztec ideas and traces the process of syncretism, the ways in which the two sets of ideas were fused to create the system of modern Mexican folk medicine. Ortiz de Montellano also addresses several topics that have received considerable attention in the literature, such as Aztec cannibalism and the question of whether the modern Mexican notions of "hot" versus "cold" are indigenous or European in origin.

Because of Ortiz de Montellano's primary interest in pre-Hispanic Aztec medicine and health, he is concerned with the extent to which colonial sources reflect indigenous rather than European ideas. Concepts appearing in more than one independent source are thought to have the greatest credibility as truly indigenous beliefs, particularly if the belief is compatible with native myths and worldview (p. 32). The test of compatibility is important because for the Aztecs, the "structure and function of the human body paralleled the structure and function of the universe" (p. 36). The primary sources that Ortiz de Montellano finds most useful are Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* (as well as earlier drafts of the Florentine), the *Badianus Codex* by Martin de la Cruz, the work of Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, and Francisco Hernández's natural history. Of these, he considers Sahagún to be "the first and most valid source" (p. 20).

Ortiz de Montellano also evaluates Aztec medicinal beliefs and nutritional status empirically. Aztec medicine is analyzed by determining first whether remedies could have had the expected physiological effects given Aztec etiologic beliefs about illness and then whether Aztec medicinal practices were effective by Western biomedical standards. Aztec remedies for illness reflected their understanding of the underlying cause of the sickness. Ortiz de Montellano finds that the Aztecs attributed illnesses to supernatural, magical, and natural causes (although the Aztecs themselves did not employ these categories). Cures took into account

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both proximate and ultimate causes for illness. Overall, the Aztecs had a good understanding of the physiological effects of the use of plants. Considering Aztec beliefs about the causes of illness, Ortiz de Montellano concludes that their medicines were effective. In terms of Western medical beliefs, however, these medicines were less efficacious.

To assess the overall health of the Aztec population, Ortiz de Montellano reviews the evidence for pre-Hispanic population density and carrying capacity in the Basin of Mexico. He concludes that at the time of the Spanish conquest, the well-fed and healthy Aztecs were living in a resource-rich environment whose population was well below carrying capacity. Based on a nutritional analysis of the Aztec diet, Ortiz de Montellano argues that the contention that Aztec cannibalism came about because of a need for protein is baseless (pp. 85–94).

Ortiz de Montellano's final concern is to review the process of syncretism of pre-Columbian and sixteenth-century European concepts of health and illness. In the last chapter of *Aztec Medicine, Health, and Nutrition,* he attempts to disentangle the various cultural contributions to modern Mexican folk medicine. He also spends considerable effort evaluating the "hot-cold" classification of food and illness in modern Mexican folk medicine, concluding that the "'hot-cold' polarity pervaded Aztec thinking, including concepts of health and illness, before the Spanish came" (p. 221).

Throughout his study, Ortiz de Montellano manages to present an interesting blend of Aztec views of health and medicine together with an empirical evaluation of these views. Much of the empirical data is presented in a hypothesis-testing format, although one senses that Ortiz de Montellano was strongly inclined to believe that Aztec beliefs about medicine would survive any empirical test.

The two books on the colonial period exemplify two fundamentally different approaches to analyzing post-contact Central Mexico. Haskett's monograph takes a standard ethnohistoric approach, focusing on the native population of one region, and presents via extensive use of Nahuatl-language documents a native view of the colonization process. Viqueira and Urquiola's study, in contrast, focuses on a single colonial industry and analyzes it in the context of the world economy. Although the authors were not primarily concerned with analyzing how the obrajes affected native society, readers can learn a great deal about the conditions of obraje workers from their study.

In *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca,* Haskett examines the "reactions of indigenous ruling structures to conquest and colonialism" from the perspective of native elites (p. 4). He has carefully reconstructed the colonial Cuernavaca political and social systems, primarily from information contained in notarial documents recorded by town scribes in the Nahuatl language. Haskett stresses

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the importance and advantages of using native-language documents. Although they have problems of their own, these documents have not been subjected to the ignorance or willing manipulation of translators, both of which can greatly affect the reliability of documents.

Following the Spanish conquest of Central Mexico, what had been the pre-Hispanic state (*altepetl*) of Cuauhnahuac became part of Hernán Cortés's estate. Consequently, the region was not subdivided into encomiendas, nor was a Spanish municipality established. Instead, town governments remained in the hands of Indians.

Haskett examines continuity and change in the political process in colonial Cuernavaca, discussing what is known about the pre-Hispanic period, how the Spaniards attempted to change existing organization, and how native elites reacted and adapted to these attempts. He begins by tracing changes in the electoral process and the operation of town governments. The Spanish-imposed electoral process, in which town officials were elected annually, was potentially disruptive of traditional practices. Haskett finds, however, that descriptions of elections in Cuernavaca closely resemble descriptions of the preconquest process of choosing leaders by consensus (p. 33). Municipal governments were allowed a great deal of autonomy, and town councils had wide-ranging powers—both secular and religious—that remained unreduced in Cuernavaca even in the late colonial period (p. 85).

Haskett turns next to describing the various political and religious officers of the community and their duties. Some evidence suggests that a few pre-Hispanic offices persisted into the colonial period, and descendants of pre-Hispanic officers tended to hold similar posts in the colonial period (p. 96). Most community leaders, however, held offices with Spanish names, although some such posts had pre-Hispanic counterparts. For example, *escribanos* or notaries roughly equaled the pre-Hispanic *tlacuiloque* (p. 110). Those who filled the higher positions of community leadership were typically part of a pool restricted to the ruling elite (p. 123).

In his analysis of the career patterns of officeholders, Haskett examines political status in the larger context of indigenous concepts of social status and hierarchy. Here he demonstrates that a fairly rigid system of stratification existed within the elite officeholding group itself. Access to higher political offices was restricted to the members of the elite who had higher social status: they tended to use the title "don" and to be literate, bilingual, and linked by marriage to other leading families (pp. 132–50).

In the final chapter of *Indigenous Rulers*, Haskett evaluates the impact of Hispanization on the traditional elites. Despite considerable evidence of the persistence of pre-Hispanic elements in the colonial political system of Cuernavaca, native elites did change. Indian elites selectively adopted foreign goods and strategies, and many "successfully

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grafted their preconquest heritage onto the new culture of the conquerors" (p. 195).

Overall, Haskett concludes that Spanish attempts to reshape native governing bodies in Cuernavaca into replicas of Spanish town councils failed. Changes occurred, but despite some superficial similarities, the Indian communities continued to differ considerably from their Spanish counterparts. Throughout the colonial period, Spanish administration was never "effective or inflexible enough to eradicate pre-Hispanic ruling traditions" (p. 199).

Carmen Viqueira's and José Urquiola's *Los obrajes en la Nueva España, 1530–1630* examines the woolen textile factories in Central Mexico as part of the world economic system. This collection of essays examines various aspects of the industry, arguing that the best explanation of the success of obrajes is that they functioned as a response to the need to organize the economy in New Spain in ways that would indirectly stimulate production and exportation of silver. Empirical data on the organization of obrajes allow Viqueira and Urquiola to consider the development of the world economic system from the perspective of New Spain.

The first section of *Los obrajes en la Nueva España,* written by Viqueira, consists of an introduction presenting the theoretical basis for the analysis and three essays focusing on legislation affecting the textile industry, particularly laws regulating indigenous labor. In the second section, Urquiola examines the development and characteristics of the obrajes.

Viqueira's introduction explains why the obrajes of New Spain should be studied in the context of the developing world system. Many scholars have always assumed that a Spanish policy of protectionism opposed the development of manufacturing industries in its colonies. Viqueira argues, however, that the Crown actively promoted the obrajes in New Spain. The underlying reason was to maintain low prices for basic necessities like woolens in order to guarantee the flow of silver from Mexico to Spain. This situation came about because of the unique relationships that arise between the metropolis and its colonies when a colony produces precious metals. This is a basic tenet of world-system theory as it has been defined by Eric Wolf and Angel Palerm.[5]

In the next three chapters, Viqueira reviews official Crown policies and legislation regulating the obrajes. One chapter focuses on the beginnings of the woolen industry in the first decades of colonial rule, and another examines the policies adopted in the late sixteenth century regarding Indian labor in the obrajes. Here Viqueira argues that colonial

5. Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982); and Angel Palerm, *Antropología y marxismo* (Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1980).

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labor policies were initially influenced by pre-Hispanic patterns of labor organization. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, a labor shortage resulting from the demographic decline of the indigenous population was threatening silver production in New Spain. In a third chapter, Viqueira examines the ways in which a new round of policies were instituted in response to the labor shortage.

The second part of *Los obrajes* consists of four chapters by Urquiola that examine in detail various aspects of the woolen textile industry. These chapters are based on copious amounts of economic data, which are displayed in numerous tables and charts that facilitate observing trends. He focuses first on the location, number, and size of the obrajes and then calculates volume of production. Next Urquiola examines the division of labor in the textile industry as well as occupational specialization and salaries. He then evaluates the overall conditions of obraje workers in New Spain relative to workers in other industries and workers in Europe by reviewing the nature of contracts between Indian laborers and obraje owners and by comparing the prices of basic products (like maize and meat) with salaries. Readers may be surprised to learn that the salary levels of obraje workers of New Spain, when expressed in terms of buying power, roughly equaled those of European workers in the late sixteenth century. Urquiola also focuses on the owners of obrajes in attempting to determine the level of capitalization required to open and run an obraje. In the last chapter, he examines the process of buying raw wool and selling the finished product.

In terms of research objectives and methodology, the six books reviewed here reflect the wide range of approaches currently being employed by ethnohistorians. Although some authors have sidestepped thorny theoretical and methodological debates and simply searched the documents for answers to specific questions (Townsend, Ortiz de Montellano, and Haskett), others have chosen approaches that are more unorthodox for ethnohistorians, seeking underlying meaning or structure (Clendinnen and Gillespie) or applying a theoretical model to a colonial industry (Viqueira and Urquiola). Readers will undoubtedly be drawn to some of these books more than to others, depending on their own interests and theoretical or methodological preferences. Each volume nevertheless makes its own valuable contribution to the literature on late pre-Hispanic and colonial Mesoamerica.

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