

*The Guarani and Their Missions: A Socioeconomic History.* By Julia J. S. Sarreal. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014, pp. xiii, 335. \$65.00, cloth. doi: 10.1017/S0022050717000390

In the early colonial period, the Spanish Crown contracted Jesuits, Franciscans, and other religious orders to bring dispersed groups of indigenous peoples in the frontier regions of the Americas to live together in single mission towns, where they were taught Catholicism and other European cultural practices. The Guarani missions of the Rio de la Plata region were the most successful among them. Founded by the Jesuits in 1609, they accounted for over half of the population of the entire Rio de la Plata region by the end of the seventeenth century. Their extensive population, territory, and assets transformed them into a regional economic dynamo. The missions' economic success relied particularly on the commercialization of yerba mate, which supplied not only local markets, but also regions as far away as Potosi and Chile. In the late eighteenth century, however, the missions' population fell dramatically and their economy decayed. Conventional accounts attribute the missions' decline to the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish America in 1767. The historiography highlights corruption and the new Bourbon administration as the main culprits, but these works fall short of giving a comprehensive account of their evolution and demise.

This book is the first comprehensive economic history of the Guarani missions. It employs a large range of archival materials to trace their evolution, focusing on elements such as their internal organization, work regime, and the missions' importance in the Rio de la Plata region. Methodologically the author relies on an analytical narrative that emphasizes Guarani agency and their responses to economic incentives. The book is divided in two main parts. The first constitutes a thorough description of the missions under the Jesuits, and the second part explores the causes of their decline. Chapter 1 elaborates on the rationale behind the missions, as well as their foundational years. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the missions' golden years. They describe the missions' physical and economic structure, as well as their governance and impressive place in the regional economy. Chapter 4 explores how the missions contributed to the Jesuit expulsion. Chapters 5 through 8 explain the decline of the missions after the expulsion of the Jesuits and their overhaul by the Bourbon administration.

The book argues that the Guarani approached the missions as an adaptive strategy to reconstitute their broken communities ravaged by epidemics, enslavement and other forms of forced labor. Sarreal explains that the communal structure of the missions, with their shared ownership, collective labor, and redistribution system, should not be understood as an efficient "proto-socialist" structure. The missions prospered, but as opposed to works that highlighted the productivity of Jesuits' rural enterprises in the New World, Sarreal argues that their success hinged on a number of subsidies from both the Jesuit Order and the Crown. The missions' inefficiency became apparent during the Bourbon reforms, when they lost their special privileges, and were confronted with market-oriented policies. Indeed, by 1800 the mission population had fallen by two-thirds from its peak in 1732 and the missions were struggling to survive.

The Bourbon reforms created both winners and losers among the Guarani. Skilled Guarani easily found job opportunities elsewhere. Those that remained in the missions, however, found it increasingly hard to get by. Inequality also increased. The Guarani elite had more control and access to mission resources under the Bourbons than under

the Jesuits. The biggest losers were those who did not have the skills or capabilities to join the expanding market economy.

In contrast to earlier works, this book downplays the importance of corruption in explaining the missions decline. In Sarreal's view, royal officials instituted a system of checks and balances that was relatively successful at curbing corruption, not unlike Bourbon efforts in controlling and modernizing other organizations, such as the Royal Tobacco Monopoly. Overall, the book provides a first-rate long-term analysis of the economic history of the Guarani missions, focusing at all times on Guarani agency and their contribution to the missions' organization and evolution. This is an extraordinary book that mixes a knowledgeable and thorough discussion of the historiography and primary sources with a sound understanding of basic economic theory. This book is a must read by economic historians of colonial Latin America.

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