

PUSHING THE BORDERS OF LATIN AMERICAN MISSION HISTORY

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- THE CHACO MISSION FRONTIER: THE GUAYCURUAN EXPERIENCE.* By James Schofield Saeger. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. Pp. 266. \$50.00 cloth.)
- ANÓNIMOS Y DESTERRADOS: LA CONTIENDA POR EL SITIO QUE LLAMAN DE QUAYLA, SIGLOS XVI–XVIII.* By Cecilia Sheridan Prieto. (Mexico City: CIESAS/Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2000. N.p.)
- LABORING IN THE FIELDS OF THE LORD: SPANISH MISSIONS AND SOUTHEASTERN INDIANS.* By Jerald T. Milanich (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999. Pp. 210. \$26.95 cloth.)
- FROM SAVAGES TO SUBJECTS: MISSIONS IN THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST.* By Robert H. Jackson. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe/Latin American Realities, 2000. Pp. 151. \$48.95 cloth.)
- AFTER “THE YEAR EIGHTY”: THE DEMISE OF FRANCISCAN POWER IN SPANISH NEW MEXICO.* By Jim Norris. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000. Pp. 212. \$39.95 cloth.)
- ART ON THE JESUIT MISSIONS IN ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA, 1542–1773.* By Gauvin Alexander Bailey. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. 368. \$65.00 cloth.)

Since the early 1990s, scholars have purported to create a “new mission history” different from the triumphal, institutional, and Spanish-biased history that characterized much of earlier mission and borderlands historiography.¹ Recent work has emphasized the “indigenous” past of the missions, especially in terms of their demographic, socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural aspects, with particular attention to changing ethnicity and identity in the mission populations.²

1. See my critique of borderlands history in “New Spain’s Far North: A Changing Historiographical Frontier?” *Latin American Research Review* 25, no. 2 (1990): 226–35.

2. See, for example, Erick Langer and Robert H. Jackson, eds., *The New Latin American Mission History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), and Cynthia Radding,

These trends are reflected, in varying degrees, among the works considered here, in spite of the fact that their geographic reach is enormous, ranging from the northern and southern poles of the Spanish empire in the Americas to Asia, and that some are archivally based analyses of specific topics or groups while others offer larger syntheses. Nonetheless, common themes emerge: the enduring state of conflict in frontier areas and the instability of missions; the diversity, multiplicity, and mobility of indigenous groups, their ecological environments, and their resource bases; the divergent interests and goals of Spaniards (missionaries and civilian officials) in these areas; the degree and nature of change in mission populations (demographic, ethnic, religious, and cultural); and the ability of scholars to interpret the past of mostly nonliterate "others." I offer here brief individual synopses of these monographs (that will not do justice to their density), followed by an analysis of their contributions to current mission historiography and debates.

Two of these studies use extensive documentary sources to consider frontier areas populated by largely nonsedentary peoples. In *The Chaco Mission Frontier: The Guaycuruan Experience*, James S. Saeger gives us the results of his intensive study of Guaycuruan peoples of South America's Gran Chaco. He concludes from his examination of ethnographic sources and Spanish records that Guaycuruans exercised a great deal of choice in their use of missions, taking issue with those historians who see missions as fundamental instruments of conquest.³ Rather than institutions that coerced and ultimately wiped out indigenous populations, these Jesuit missions were transitory spaces that allowed hunter-gatherers to adapt to changing conditions and resources and to retain elements of their religion and culture, even as some became artisans and herders. In another twist, Saeger argues that the economic and political power of *caciques* was enhanced through their affiliation with missions. Guaycuruans adopted varied migratory strategies, and they benefited from the horse and other European material introductions to continue to wage war with other groups as well as engage in new patterns of regional trade. According to Saeger, the periodic desertion of missions rather than epidemic disease provides the main explanation for demographic lows. In the violent and changing conditions (including those produced by their own degradation of the environment) of this eighteenth-century frontier, Guaycuruans took advantage

Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700–1850 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

3. In fact, Saeger directly engages the arguments advanced in David Sweet, "The Ibero-American Frontier Mission in Native American History," in Langer and Jackson, eds., *New Mission History*, 1–48.

of the material benefits and respite (e.g., dietary enhancements and more security for women) offered by missions, more or less as they saw fit. Because the Gran Chaco contained no great riches in terms of minerals, fertile lands, or large populations to exploit, Spaniards deployed little effort to dominate the region before the nineteenth century.

Cecilia Sheridan Prieto sees the experiences of the nomadic hunter-gatherers of New Spain's northeast very differently in *Anónimos y desterrados: La contienda por el sitio que llaman de Quauyla, siglos XVI–XVIII*. In her study of the hundreds of nonsedentary bands of the Coahuila desert (Quauyla), Sheridan emphasizes the long and violent conflict to dominate space that characterized the contact between Indians and Spaniards, demonstrating that Franciscan missions were largely ephemeral in this context. As does Saeger, Sheridan Prieto looks closely at the environment and use of natural resources in the pre-contact period. Both ethnohistorians provide detailed ethnographies that belie the traditional characterization of hunter-gatherers as "savages" or ahistorical *chichimecas* (in the case of Mexico). Sheridan also gives a good deal of attention to changing Spanish imperial policies and local politics in the struggle to dominate the region where Spaniards would concentrate on cattle raising in the absence of the silver that impelled the conquest of northwestern New Spain. Her analysis highlights the roles of missionaries, presidial captains, and Spanish governors. In the end, the secular conquest of the region *a sangre y fuego* was far more important in determining the fate of indigenous groups than was mission congregation. In contrast to the ambitious local officials and presidial captains, Sheridan characterizes the Franciscans as would-be protectors of the Indians, especially in their attempts to shield them from enslavement and *encomienda*. In a manner similar to Saeger, she argues that missions offered temporary zones of refuge and intelligence gathering for native bands, but in the case of northeastern Mexico, the missions were much less stable due to frequent Franciscan reorganization (from different Franciscan missionary provinces), to the continuous warfare and raiding of indigenous groups, and to Spanish attempts to appropriate water and native labor. Ultimately for these groups, missions did not provide the means for ethnic persistence or accommodation. Instead, natives struggled to maintain their autonomy by amalgamating with other groups, enlarging bands of thirty to more than three hundred members who continued to hunt and raid, taking advantage of the horse and of the herds of cattle that increasingly populated the region. But by the end of the eighteenth century, their total numbers had been reduced by 98 percent, the high death rate produced by a combination of warfare (including extermination policies mandated by local governors), environmental degradation, disease, and changes in cultural and material life. Thus, aggressive resistance by these peoples to the violent conquest by

Spaniards resulted in their almost total annihilation. In this equation, Sheridan counterposes the genocidal conquest by secular Spaniards to the more benign missionary enterprise that failed.

Two of the books under consideration here also focus on the missionary enterprise but in more global and synthetic terms as they are designed for classroom use as well as to draw attention to other colonial pasts of the United States. Both books contain bibliographies but no source notes. In *Laboring in the Fields of the Lord: Spanish Missions and Southeastern Indians*, Jerald Milanich recapitulates much of his previous work and that of others to provide a useful introduction to Spanish missions in Florida. In this area where neither Jesuits (in the sixteenth century) nor Franciscans were successful in establishing a stable mission enterprise, Milanich classifies the attempts of missionaries to acculturate Indians as a relatively benign form of colonialism. Some advances were made by Franciscans in the seventeenth century among Timicua, Guale, and Apalachee groups who already practiced agriculture, but competing demands among Spaniards for Indian labor, disease, rivalries among European colonial powers, and indigenous rebellions and regional warfare/raiding resulted in the destruction of all the missions by the second half of the eighteenth century. Relying on published ethnohistories, Milanich provides brief descriptions of the culture and natural environment of contacted native groups, but as an archaeologist he has been mostly involved in efforts (retold here) to locate mission sites and to reconstruct their physical features and material life.

In *From Savages to Subjects: Missions in the History of the American Southwest*, Robert H. Jackson also synthesizes much of his previous work on Californian mission demography and production while drawing on published studies of missions in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona to give an overview of mission history in the area that is today part of the U.S. Southwest. For Jackson, however, missions were coercive and genocidal instruments of colonialism that eradicated culture and provoked demographic collapse. The latter (especially in Alta California) derived not only from epidemics, but also from the separation of men and women in living quarters, unsanitary conditions, exploitation of labor, and corporal punishment. Because he is dealing with such a large area and because the data are uneven for different provinces, his generalizations are somewhat overreaching, although he does note significant differences among the mission areas. For example, he finds that more religious syncretism took place in the missions of New Mexico and California than in those of the Pimería Alta and Texas. He also notes differences in ecology, preconquest organization, natural resource bases, and economic productivity, based on the wide variety of topics covered: demography; labor; social control; resistance; migration, flight, and vagabondage; mission architecture and material life; the nature of economic production;

evolving Spanish policies; and relations between mission populations and others, both native and non-Indian. His conclusions regarding ethnic and cultural change emphasize indigenous losses and the failure of missions to create stable Indian communities. He suggests, without much explanation, that there was an emerging but underdeveloped caste system in these areas by the time of the demise of missions. And he also posits that where indigenous populations were larger (as in New Mexico and California, where more agriculture was practiced in the precontact period), there was greater retention of traditional material culture. Because the data are uneven and because he is dealing with such diverse native groups, the generalizations are far-reaching and do not always apply in specific cases, but the book provides an introduction to the topic and a useful counterpoint to the sanitized view of missions perpetuated in the United States.

The final two works under review here emphasize the missionaries themselves. In *After "the Year Eighty": The Demise of Franciscan Power in Spanish New Mexico* Jim Norris has produced a prosopography of Franciscan missionaries in New Mexico that details how their power declined after the Pueblo revolt of 1680. Using primary sources to examine the period from Diego de Vargas' reconquest of New Mexico to the implementation of Bourbon reforms in 1776, he explains how expanding civil and military authority, as well as the internal squabbling and weaknesses of the missionary enterprise itself, resulted in a feeble mission regime that allowed Pueblo culture to evolve more independently (although he does not focus on the syncretic, especially in terms of religion, culture that emerged). In chronicling the breakdown of Franciscan power, vis-à-vis both civil and diocesan authorities), Norris emphasizes the friars' lack of preparedness in language and experience, their incapacity for dealing with the rigors of frontier life, their frequent transfers from one mission to another, and their willingness to accept more Puebloan practices, as well as the Spanish policies that encouraged settler populations and frontier defense against Indian raiders and other colonial powers. This study also provides close-ups of the personal motivations and failings of individual friars, priests, and secular officials, although there is little emphasis on the Puebloans' ties (commercial and cultural) to the complex network that brought them into contact with other Indians and Spaniards.⁴ Because the latter is not the intended focus of this study, Norris' work fits more squarely into the genre of ecclesiastical history albeit more critically developed than the work of his predecessors.

4. For this perspective, see James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

A much less critical portrait of missionaries is presented in *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542–1773* by Gauvin Alexander Bailey, where the strength lies in his reconstruction of Jesuit missionary art and architecture in Japan, China, Mughal India, and Paraguay. Only in the latter area has much of this sacred art survived, but Bailey carefully analyzes the markedly different political spheres in which the Jesuits labored to perpetuate Christian concepts through visual representation. In trying to unify such diverse efforts, Bailey emphasizes the Jesuits' willingness to engage in global partnerships with the "other" and the creative potential of cultural convergence. Art is the bridge that connects Christian concepts with local vernacular traditions, creating dialogue and conversation (the terms he prefers rather than juxtaposition, syncretism, and hybridity in reference to cross-cultural blending). In de-emphasizing the spiritual aims of relatively powerless Jesuits in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japan, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China, and Mughal India, where they hoped to first convert the ruler and then his subjects, the author can argue the Black Robes were effective in the international spread of a cultural exchange that was more experimental and innovative (*il modo soave*) than the efforts of Franciscans. Bailey's research in archives and museums across the world has yielded an array of examples of Jesuit devotional art in sculpture, prints, engravings, paintings, and architecture (inspired in Renaissance and Italian traditions). Because European art emphasized figural representation and naturalistic art, Japanese and Chinese literati saw it as barbarian. Muslim rulers in India (especially Akbar) were more receptive to Christian iconography that could be used in legitimizing genealogy and their right to rule (Bailey's research in this area is most impressive). But in all these cases where Christians were persecuted, the effects were ephemeral.

In contrast, Bailey differentiates these efforts from the Jesuit missionary regime in Paraguay, in which he finds the most prolific art enterprise undertaken by the Jesuits. Here (in a context that really resists comparison with the others), he details the ways in which the Jesuits accommodated to Guaraní art styles (schematic and geometric) that were integrated with dance, music, and daily oratory through and analysis of the visual art produced by mostly Guaraní artisans. Bailey acknowledges that in this case the Jesuits had imperial backing and more power in dealing with a less complex society, but he argues that the Guaraní were able to "indigenize Christianity" (154) in art.

Bailey's emphasis on Jesuit and European sources produces a picture that is heavily triumphal and little nuanced regarding the responses of "others." He does cite studies of indigenous responses to conversion in more populated areas of the Spanish empire, but he does not seem to be aware of the "new mission history" in peripheral

areas of the Americas, whose insights would be helpful to his analysis of cultural exchange.⁵ Still, this work is delightfully impressive in its recovery and description of visual art in quite different Jesuit “missions” throughout the world.

All of these works contribute to mission historiography, whether in its cultural, religious, social, economic, political, or ethnic features. Although widely different in foci, they all address the goals of the missionary endeavor and the degree to which it succeeded or failed. In all of the cases, missions emanated from the Iberian expansion of the early modern world, varied in its attempts to dominate peoples and trade. Franciscans and Jesuits were agents of this expansion, and their spiritual goals were tempered by the power of their rulers. In Spanish-American frontier areas where secular power expanded slowly over time, missionary efforts were closely related to, and even circumscribed by, those of the crown. Imperial policies aimed to create Christian, sedentary populations from which labor could be extracted, a feat more difficult to achieve among more dispersed, semi- and non-sedentary peoples in the fringes of empire. Missionaries were not infrequently the advance agents of the crown in these areas, and their presence not only provided moral justification but also lent itself to forcing indigenous peoples into alien or different systems of capital exchange in trade, production, and labor. For the most part, these studies reinforce Herbert E. Bolton's characterization of the mission as the preeminent frontier institution, although they do not characterize it as isolated from the rest of Spanish society.

They also tell us that the activities of missionaries produced very different results in advancing their aims, whether they proceeded from *il modo soave* or a high degree of coercion. Certainly these authors differ on the question of the nature of the missionary conquest and the degree to which it was “violent” or “peaceful.”⁶ To what extent was it complicit in the domination of indigenous labor and the eradication of culture? Were missionaries protectors of Indians or perpetrators of genocide (either biological or cultural)? Jackson takes the most extreme

5. Although most of these studies focus on other areas, they are particularly useful in analyzing Jesuit relationships with indigenous peoples. Barbara Ganson's keen archival research is particularly relevant to his study, although her book-length study was published after Bailey's, *The Guaraní under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

6. On this question, see the postcolonial textual analysis of José Rabasa, in *Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier: The Historiography of Sixteenth-Century New Mexico and Florida and the Legacy of Conquest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), who argues that colonial writings on these areas are part of a culture of conquest that effectively moralized terror.

position, seeing both Jesuit and Franciscan missions as part of the larger panorama in which Indians were subjected to horrifically inhumane treatment in the appropriation of their labor, even through slavery, or exterminated if they would not cooperate. In contrast, Saeger argues that the mission regime accommodated indigenous resistance and cultural survivals. For Sheridan and Milanich, missionaries were less coercive than their military and civilian counterparts but their efforts were fleeting, given the frontier violence perpetrated by both Spaniards and indigenous groups themselves. According to Norris, after the Pueblo rebellion, Franciscans in New Mexico were much less aggressive in the efforts to eradicate native beliefs, and this, when coupled with their own internal weaknesses, facilitated the evolution of a syncretic culture. From a more singular focus on art, Bailey characterizes the Jesuits as humane, generous, and tolerant in their evangelizing efforts across continents.

No matter how spiritual their goals, none of the missionary regimes described here created stable, homogeneous communities of obedient subjects, although in Spanish America they did hasten the incorporation of indigenous peoples into the Spanish world. One of the questions begged by the comparison of these books is whether there were differences between the Jesuit and Franciscan missionary programs, and how this might have affected their outcomes. Few answers emerge here, but it is clear that proficiency in Indian languages varied over time and space within both orders; the Jesuits may have had a slight edge as has been conventionally posited (and Norris's study of the Franciscans in New Mexico reinforces the notion of their language deficiencies), but by the eighteenth century very few Jesuit missionaries in northern New Spain could preach in Indian languages. Jesuits were apparently transferred less frequently between missions than Franciscans. The two orders imposed programs of directed social change that used similar tactics to substitute Christian for native practices and beliefs and to force changes in labor relations and production, and they both employed corporal punishment to try to effect change. Staffing missions was a problem for both orders, but the Jesuits were better supplied and served by their hierarchy.

Although internal weaknesses plagued both orders in varying degrees, what is more striking about their attempts to incorporate less sedentary peoples is the violence of the frontier milieu in which they operated. Most of these works emphasize the state of conflict that continued to characterize these frontier zones, produced by rivalries, warfare, and raiding within and between indigenous groups, and between Indians and non-Indians. This state of insecurity, along with precontact patterns of transhumance and colonial demands for labor, stimulated a constant movement of peoples in frontier areas. These migrations were

limited of course by the availability of zones of refuge and the intensity of Spanish extractive pressures, but mobility was enhanced by Spanish material introductions such as horses and cattle, resulting in new patterns of transhumance as well as shifting alliances among ethnic groups (including the ethnic soldiers who served Spaniards in their campaigns against Indians). What is also apparent in these works is the multiplicity and diversity of indigenous peoples in frontier areas; it is hardly surprising that they used a variety of alliances and migratory strategies, raiding, warfare, and flight to subsist, resist, and to accommodate to Spanish demands and trading patterns.

The question of the nature and extent of changes and exchanges produced in missions preoccupies all of these authors, whether ethnohistorians, archaeologists, social anthropologists, or art historians. In varying degrees (less in the last two books, which are not focused on the native populations) they consider how transformations occurred in social, economic, environmental, religious, cultural, ethnic, or gendered terms (although only Saeger and Jackson pay much attention to the changes in gender roles). Several factors emerge as having crucial importance in the ways native peoples dealt with missions, but only by looking at how they operated in conjunction with other factors can we gauge their impact. For example, forms of preconquest social organization that emphasized warfare and raiding were employed to resist Spaniards but their effectiveness varied, depending on other factors such as environmental change; the impact of epidemic diseases; the natural resources available to either side; and the degree of conflict between Spanish civil, military, and religious authorities. In some cases, indigenous peoples used missions to their advantage, acquiring status and resources; in others, they suffered in oppressive labor regimes. In all cases native populations declined in mission zones; here the authors disagree as to the primary causes, among them, epidemic disease, flight, low fertility rates, and inhumane treatment. In varying combinations, these factors combined to produce different patterns of ethnogenesis although none of these authors uses this term to signify the processes through which indigenous/colonial peoples disappeared, evolved, or came to identify themselves ethnically. These were complex processes of cultural and biological blending and *mestizaje* that cannot be seen solely in terms of the traditional/modern dichotomy.⁷

7. Several historians have devised different conceptual frameworks for understanding these transformations in missions, all of them related to the concept of ethnogenesis. See Radding on social ecology in *Wandering Peoples*; Ganson on transculturation in *The Guarani under Spanish Rule*; and Deeds on mediated opportunism in *Defiance and Deference in Colonial Mexico: Indians under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

Instead, they must be studied from the multiple perspectives of social, economic, religious, and cultural change. From the works reviewed here, we can conclude that empirical research in these areas is still very much alive in mission historiography; there is less concern in these books with new theoretical and methodological approaches. Yet there is a much more marked emphasis on indigenous peoples and their relationships with non-Indians, although it should be noted that ethnohistorians are not in agreement about the degree to which scholars can hear an Indian voice through the preponderance of Spanish sources (here Saeger argues most strongly that this is possible).

So where is "mission" historiography today? Certainly it has come a long way from the pro-Spanish, triumphal biases of the past. We have much more detailed information on both the missionaries and the native peoples they contacted, and we are moving toward a much better appreciation of the changes and exchanges that took place in mission areas. A great deal is still to be done, especially in the areas of environmental and gender history, but "mission" scholars have delved much more deeply into the history of precontact societies, the differential impacts of conquest, variations in Spanish extractive pressures, comparative demography and epidemiology, the availability of zones of refuge, and the changing ethnicities and identities of peoples living in mission areas. The so-called "new mission history" is more attuned to historiographical trends in Latin American social and cultural history and, from its special vantage point on the frontier, is ideally poised to undertake innovative methodological and theoretical explorations of a multi-bordered past.