

## IN MEMORIAM: *Ana María Presta (1953–2024)*

**A**na María Presta, a leading scholar of the early colonial history of Latin America, passed away earlier this year in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She was 71 years old and had retired as an Emeritus professor in 2022 after a long, distinguished teaching career at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. She remained a senior research scholar at the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) in that same city. She had been an active member of the Instituto Ravignani since 1996, and from 2004 she coordinated the Program in the History of Latin America (PROHAL). Ana María Presta was an indefatigable and original scholar and greatly respected as an enthusiastic and effective teacher of both undergraduate and graduate students in Buenos Aires.

Ana María came to the United States to study Latin American history at The Ohio State University, where she received her MA degree in 1992 and Ph.D. in 1997, working under the direction of Kenneth Andrien. Her infectious enthusiasm for learning and lively personality made her popular with the faculty and her fellow graduate students in both the History and Spanish and Portuguese departments (where she did an outside graduate field). Ana María was already a published scholar when she arrived at Ohio State, and she had selected and done most of the research needed for her MA thesis and dissertation. She was both a colleague and a student to her advisor, who relied on her to help mentor the younger graduate students in the program. As a research scholar, Ana María was *formada* (as they say in Spanish), but she loved the opportunity to use the excellent library at Ohio State to read widely and learn particularly what scholars in Europe and the United States had contributed to the field. She was also a popular teacher at Ohio State; undergraduates admired her enthusiasm, deep knowledge of the field, and willingness to spend time helping them through the course that she taught.

Ana María's scholarly and teaching career blossomed after she completed her doctorate at Ohio State in 1997. After graduation she received a position at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, and she established her reputation as a leading figure working on early colonial La Plata (now Sucre), Bolivia. In 2000 she published a path-breaking revision of her doctoral dissertation, *Los Encomenderos*

*de La Plata, 1550–1600*, which she published with the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos and the Banco Central de la Reserva in Lima in their prestigious series on the socioeconomic history of the Andes. This fine book placed the lives of four famous *encomienda* holders in the La Plata region—Francisco de Almendras, Pedro Hernández Paniagua, Juan Ortiz de Zárate, and Polo Ondegardo—within their historical context in the early colonial era. She explained how the *encomienda* was central to the acquisition of wealth and power, portraying these early *encomenderos* as risk-taking entrepreneurs in the conquest era. Over the generations, however, some of these settlers and their families lost this wealth, power, and influence. One of the notable examples she gave in the book was Juan Ortiz de Zárate, who sought his fortune with great success, amassing rich *encomienda* grants and landholdings and engaging in successful commercial enterprises. In 1565 the lure of potentially lucrative new conquests led Ortiz de Zárate to outfit an expedition to settle Buenos Aires, borrowing heavily to fund this enterprise. When he died in Paraguay in 1576, however, the family's wealth and power collapsed under the weight of accumulated debts, a sign of the social instability and economic risks that accompanied the early conquest era. Ana María's scholarly career led her to publish many articles in Spanish and English on the history and ethnohistory of the Andean region over her long and distinguished scholarly career, including two departures from her normal scholarship dealing with the Audiencia of Lima in the sixteenth century. She loved her research, and she conveyed this enthusiasm for research and publishing to her undergraduate and graduate students over the years.

Ana María was a native *porteña*, who grew up in Buenos Aires, and she loved the intellectual and cultural diversity and liveliness of the city. She enjoyed jazz music and frequented clubs where it was played in Buenos Aires, and she even went with fellow graduate students to listen to jazz during her time in graduate school. Ana María also enjoyed the traditional music of Argentina and was known to dance the tango with friends. She had a warm, engaging, and infectious smile, and a winning personality, which attracted people to her circle of friends in Buenos Aires. Given her hospitable nature and love of people, she was known to invite people, both friends and colleagues in the city and foreign visiting scholars, to her apartment where food, wine, and pleasant conversation characterized the convivial evenings. She was equally at home in her visits to Bolivia and the United States. As Kris Lane told me, after an invited speaking engagement at Tulane University, Ana María and he spent a very enjoyable afternoon shopping in New Orleans for an iPad for a colleague in Argentina.

In 2006 Ana María became a post-doctoral fellow in the inaugural year of the Ohio State History Department's Center for Historical Research. During that year she interacted freely with graduate students and faculty, participated in the

seminars and other intellectual activities of the Center, and gave a formal lecture on her research. She also participated in a number of public events in the wider university, especially in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, where she had many friends from her days as a graduate student. Ana María also completed a major article in 2007, which was published as “Undressing the *Coya* and Dressing the Indian Woman: Market Economy, Clothing, and Identities in the Colonial Andes, La Plata (Charcas), Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries” (*Hispanic American Historical Review*, 2010: 90 (1): 41–74). It was a productive and enjoyable year for the students and faculty, and she set a high standard for future Center fellows.

After she left Columbus, Ana María went to Germany to study German and work in the archives. The result of this sojourn was her last article, “Recuperando e interpretando las desiguales sociales en el claustro. La comunidad conventual de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios de Santa Mónica de La Plata (Charcas), 1754–1630,” published in 2023 in the open-access publication V&R unipress/Brill Deutschland Gambh,

Ana María Presta was an enthusiastic and supportive teacher, an excellent research scholar, and a kind, generous, and extremely intelligent member of the academy. While her friends and colleagues mourn that she was taken from us too soon, Ana María lived a full, happy, productive, and meaningful life. Those of us who knew her as a colleague and friend will miss her greatly.

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