

“LA PARTE MAS DIFICIL”:
Recent Works on Nineteenth-Century Mexican History

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- THE MEXICAN EMPIRE OF ITURBIDE.* By Timothy E. Anna. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Pp. 286. \$39.50.)
- ANTONIO HARO Y TAMARIZ Y SUS AVENTURAS POLITICAS, 1811-1869.* By Jan Bazant. (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1985. Pp. 200.)
- THE MEXICAN REPUBLIC: THE FIRST DECADE, 1823-1832.* By Stanley C. Green. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987. Pp. 314. \$29.95.)
- THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO: A LEGACY OF CONFLICT.* By Richard Griswold del Castillo. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. Pp. 272. \$22.95.)
- THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIBERALISM IN LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO.* By Charles A. Hale. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989. Pp. 291. \$37.50.)
- TO THE HALLS OF THE MONTEZUMAS: THE MEXICAN WAR IN THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION.* By Robert W. Johannsen. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Pp. 363. \$25.00.)
- COMUNIDADES INDIGENAS FRENTE A LA CIUDAD DE MEXICO: TENOCHTITLAN Y TLAELOLCO, SUS PUEBLOS Y BARRIOS, 1812-1919.* By Andrés Lira. (Zamora: Colegio de México and Colegio de Michoacán, 1983. Pp. 426.)
- SHAMROCK AND SWORD: THE SAINT PATRICK'S BATTALION IN THE U.S.-MEXICAN WAR.* By Robert Ryal Miller. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989. Pp. 248. \$24.95.)
- EMPRESARIOS, INDIOS Y ESTADO: PERFIL DE LA ECONOMIA MEXICANA (SIGLO XVIII).* Compiled by Arij Ouweneel and Cristina Torales Pacheco. (Amsterdam: Centro de Estudios y Documentación Latinoamericanos, 1988. Pp. 248.)¹
- REGION, STATE, AND CAPITALISM IN MEXICO: NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES.* Edited by Wil Pansters and Arij Ouweneel. (Amsterdam: Centro de Estudios y Documentación Latinoamericanos, 1988. Pp. 232. \$20.00.)²

1. Distributed by FORIS Publications Holland in Dordrecht and FORIS Publications USA in Providence, R.I.

2. *Ibid.*

MEXICO THROUGH RUSSIAN EYES, 1806–1940. By William Harrison Richardson. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988. Pp. 304. \$29.95.)

THE PEOPLE OF SONORA AND YANKEE CAPITALISTS. By Ramón Eduardo Ruiz. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988. Pp. 326. \$35.00.)

BETWEEN THE SUMMIT AND THE SEA: CENTRAL VERACRUZ IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. By Alfred H. Siemens. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990. Pp. 254. \$39.95.)

The U.S. soldiers who invaded Mexico in 1846 under Major General Winfield Scott were guided by William Hickling Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*. No ordinary Baedeker this, for Prescott's history symbolically linked the invasion of Mexico to the conquest of New Spain. Like Bernal Díaz and his companions, the Yankee backwoodsmen were dazzled by the Valley of Mexico. And like the old conquistadores, the new invaders had mixed feelings about Mexico and its people. Mexico was still a land of infinite promise, but that promise had been dimmed by oppression. If only the Mexicans could learn to love republicanism and free enterprise. If only they could shake off the weight of three centuries of papism. If only they could elect good men, as someone later said.

Robert Johannsen interweaves these themes and many more in his perceptive study, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination*. He argues that the Mexican War represented a critical moment in the evolution of nationalist sentiment in the United States. This war was the first to bring large numbers of U.S. soldiers and civilians into contact with a people whose culture was profoundly different from their own. The war's battles were widely reported in the press and were also storied in popular literature and reproduced for mass consumption in the graphic arts. In many ways, Johannsen's valuable account traces the pedigree of a view of Mexico that is still too common in the United States. The apple never falls far from the tree.

The Mexican War was deeply controversial in its day, but by the 1960s, students were reading Henry Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience" as a tract for their own times rather than as a historical artifact of the war with Mexico. Besides, the U.S. public does not agonize over wars the country wins, and it clearly won the Mexican War. Yet in 1846 and 1847, victory was by no means assured. General John Wool, a senior veteran of the northern campaign, later concluded that Mexico—deeply divided by political intrigue—had defeated itself, and many Mexicans shared that sentiment. Zachary Taylor, the "Hero of Buena Vista," was actually a poor battlefield commander, and the Duke of Wellington at first believed that Winfield Scott's invasion could not succeed.

The war was a nasty affair. It produced numerous deserters on both sides, as Robert Ryal Miller illustrates in *Shamrock and Sword: The Saint*

Patrick's Battalion in the U.S.-Mexican War. The history of the U.S. soldiers who deserted and fought with the Mexican Army is better known than Miller allows, but the story is worth retelling. Miller has uncovered a great deal about the deserters, yet their motives remain unclear. Most were immigrants, although not all of these were Irish. Several dozen went to the gallows, victims perhaps of the nativism they encountered in their adopted country. A splendid little war this was not.

It was a watershed nonetheless. In redrawing national frontiers, the Mexican War permanently redefined existing notions of "Mexican," "American," and "Mexican-American," for now political and ethnic boundaries were completely blurred. Richard Griswold del Castillo asks in *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* whether the treaty's guarantees of civil and property rights to Mexicans living in territories ceded to the United States have been respected. Sometimes yes, he concludes, but mostly no. U.S. courts have been inconsistent in interpreting the treaty, while political, economic, and social pressures have frustrated the treaty's original intent. Griswold del Castillo's study also contains a useful bibliographical essay and a consideration of the treaty's impact on the Chicano movement as well.

Economists and Calculators

In the 1840s, citizens of the United States were sure that their country was more productive than Mexico. For example, Mexico had done little to settle or develop California, and the mineral and agricultural potential of central Mexico was going to waste. In other words, the United States considered itself more efficient than Mexico and could make better use of Mexico's resources than Mexico could. Thus the world (not to mention Mexico) would be better off if the United States annexed Mexico. Indeed, this sentiment was echoed by all sorts of visitors to Mexico—even the odd Russian, as William Harrison Richardson documents in *Mexico through Russian Eyes, 1806–1940*. When the Baron Ferdinand Wrangell, the first Russian to describe central Mexico, traveled from San Blas to Veracruz in 1836, he described the nation's "pitiableness" in terms that any Yankee observer could (and often did) employ (p. 40). Consular officials from the United States and Great Britain—their ostensible biases notwithstanding—reproduced Wrangell's judgments chapter and verse. Richardson correctly concludes that few foreigners understood or sympathized with the sources of Mexico's administrative disorder. El Dorado was there for the taking, but native warlords stood in the way.

As Alfred Siemens explains in *Between the Summit and the Sea: Central Veracruz in the Nineteenth Century*, accounts of foreigners generally offered little more than a stylized notion of Mexico's economic potential or the reasons for Mexico's apparent stagnation. Visitors to Mexico, the

great Alexander von Humboldt included, were already the prisoners of expectations that had shaped their sensibilities and circumscribed their imaginations. Most observers concluded that Mexican practices were backward and inimical to prosperity. Commercial potential Mexico possessed in abundance, but foreign intervention of some kind would almost certainly be required to develop it. Siemens's imaginative study finds that the subtext of most foreign writing on early-nineteenth-century Mexico, and especially on its tropical lowlands, were "indictment" and "a long bill of particulars." Mexico was "underdeveloped" and cried out for "modernization," but the Mexicans "could . . . not be considered equal to the challenge" (pp. 205, 207). Foreigners and other outsiders would have to do the deed.

The logic of the proposition—that Mexico was, in effect, a prime candidate for a takeover—is clear enough, whatever one might think of its morality. John Coatsworth's well-known (1978) study amply confirmed what many writers in the United States in the 1840s had observed: productivity in the United States was much higher than in Mexico. But why?

In many ways, the two collections of essays that carry the CEDLA imprint echo part of Coatsworth's argument. Both *Empresarios, indios y estado*, edited by Arij Ouweneel and Cristina Torales Pacheco, and *Region, State, and Capitalism*, edited by Wil Pansters and Arij Ouweneel, assert that Mexico did not stagnate because Mexicans were uninterested in or resistant to producing for the market. Industry and agriculture were amply commercialized and well adapted to the economic environment in which they operated. The lay estates described by Simon Miller, Arij Ouweneel, and Ricardo Rendón in both collections were governed with an eye to costs and profits in the long run and in the short. Merchants diversified in rational ways and sought out political contacts as a means of advancing domestic and foreign trade. The Indian peasantry, as Horst Pietschmann suggests, was itself deeply embedded in a dense network of commercial relations, partly because of state pressure but also because artisan industry and agriculture offered avenues of profit and accumulation. Capitalists all, so it seems.

But if greed was not enough, then what is? Standard economic models look to the labor force and to the stock of capital as key elements in "accounting for," if not explaining, economic growth. Everything else—a grab bag that includes transportation and transactions costs as well as economies of scale—ends up as a "residual" term. Most of Coatsworth's analysis of the "obstacles" to economic growth focused on elements of the residual, although his discussion of the comparative costs of empire had a vaguely macroeconomic feel despite its concern with the burden of taxes and allocative inefficiencies.

The CEDLA volumes do mention the state from time to time, but they do not explore its fiscal and monetary behavior. Yet these factors have

enormous economic implications, particularly for the rate of capital formation and hence for relative productivity. Eric Van Young alludes to consequences of fiscal behavior in his concluding essay in *Empresarios, indios y estado*, but not one of the many contributions to either volume considers fiscal or monetary factors systematically. Van Young's essay, an important discussion of the so-called Malthusian view of late-colonial development, is itself concerned with changes in real wages and the distribution of income. These outcomes are related to changes in national income but analytically are separate matters. Making sense of late-colonial and early-nineteenth-century Mexican economic history requires both a micro and a macro model or equal concern with population, real wages, taxation, the public debt, international trade, and the money supply. Nor can analysts ignore the larger message of the "Brenner debate" in European history, which essentially argues that power matters, if only because its exercise often determines who gets how much (see Aston and Philpin 1985). For instance, no one reading Humboldt (or Andrés Molina Enríquez, for that matter) on the hacienda could at all doubt the relevance of the caution. Politics matters, power matters, and institutions matter, particularly when all three are in a state of flux. The Marxists have always known it, even if economic historians neglect it and social historians have been told to forget it.

Cannibals and Kings

Fortunately, politics, power, and institutions are once more receiving their share of attention, as is demonstrated by Timothy Anna's important study, *The Mexican Empire of Iturbide*. Iturbide's sojourn has usually been portrayed as more of an interregnum than a reign, and an illegitimate one at that. Yet Anna ventures that monarchism was in the air in 1821 and that Iturbide was both its agent and object. The Plan de Iguala was a "brilliant political compromise" that settled the question of home rule but left open the issue of who should rule at home. An unrepresentative and Jacobin Congreso Constituyente frustrated the emperor at every turn.

Anna dismisses the accepted view of Iturbide as a failed autocrat as liberal propaganda. Contrary to what Simón Bolívar said, Iturbide was not simply emperor of Mexico by the grace of God and bayonets, although bayonets were everywhere and Iturbide wanted more of them. Iturbide embodied the nation, or so he thought; but then again, the nation seemingly agreed. In Anna's view, Iturbide was less a Bonaparte than a Mexican Caesar, uneager to wear the crown. Does Anna go too far? Anyone who juxtaposes Jacques Louis David's *Le sacre de Napoleon 1^{er} par le Pape Pie VII* (1808) with the anonymous painting of Iturbide's coronation will be struck by their similarities in form and composition, if not in execution.

Anna is right to take Iturbide seriously, but does he take him seriously enough? Anna's otherwise perceptive account strives so hard for balance as to shade into apology.

In any event, Iturbide's Bourbon state, reconstituted and reformed, fell in 1823. Its fundamental legacies were institutional disarray, the reassertion of regional power, and the emergence of the formerly royalist army as a political broker. For the next twenty years, the questions that troubled Iturbide's empire would surface repeatedly, defying all attempts at resolution.

Stanley Green's *The Mexican Republic: The First Decade* takes up many of the same themes. Like Anna, Green perceives a strong element of radicalism in Mexican politics, and during the 1820s, the Jacobins struggled to liquidate the *ancien régime*. Much of Green's story is a familiar one inhabited by Lucas Alamán, Lorenzo de Zavala, and other well-known figures. Green's view is frankly populist. Zavala and Vicente Guerrero sought to broaden the social base of political power and represented the dispossessed. Alamán and his cronies stood for economic development and coherent administration but were elitist by birth, philosophy, and temperament. Neither group could impose its will on the other, and consequently, a shifting series of alliances, military plots, and appeals for foreign intervention became the order of the day. Indeed, the First Republic anticipated much that was to come and offered an unappealing choice between "democratic" disarray and efficient autocracy. In a sense, liberal and traditionalist thinkers alike viewed Mexico as a nation deeply divided by social and economic tensions. Yet they differed in their visions of how to manage, repress, or compose these divisions. Compromise—the emergence of "elite republicanism"—was not yet on the horizon in the 1820s and 1830s.

Jan Bazant comes to Mexican politics of the nineteenth century with a distinguished record of publication. He is the author of respected works on the rural history of San Luis Potosí, ecclesiastical properties and mortmain, the textile industry in Puebla, and the foreign debt. At first glance, Bazant seems to have chosen an unlikely subject for a biography. Antonio Haro y Tamariz was perhaps no more than a minor figure. Guillermo Prieto called Haro a "little gingerbread man," and the professional politicians of the day regarded him as "an eccentric self-seeker" (pp. 53, 62). But if Haro y Tamariz was something of a tourist, his story is absorbing. He was by turns a Santanista, a republican centrist, and a monarchist in spite of himself. He was a contradictory figure: a finance minister who died bankrupt and a hero of the war against the United States who botched the rebellion of Zacapoaxtla. Haro's checkered career actually reflected the course of politics. Few important events transpired in which he was not somehow involved. Bazant does not speculate on Haro's motives, but opportunism and ambition rather than ideas and interests apparently determined Haro's course. He ended his days a broken man, entering a

Jesuit novitiate in Rome, where he died in 1869. *Antonio Haro y Tamariz* is an excellent biography, but an unsettling one because Haro's actions were frequently mysterious and often inconsistent. If his life is a metaphor for mid-nineteenth-century Mexican politics, historians with a taste for generalization are in for a bad time.

Like Bazant, Charles Hale is a distinguished student of nineteenth-century Mexico, and his earlier (1968) work on Mexican liberalism in the age of Mora is now fundamental. But *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* is, as Hale observes, not simply a study of liberalism in the age of Justo Sierra. It is instead an account of how "liberalism after 1867 became transformed from an ideology in combat with an inherited set of institutions, social arrangements, and values into a unifying political myth" (p. 4).

Hale argues that the doctrinaire liberalism of the 1830s and 1840s succumbed to both political and philosophical pressures. Liberalism had its place, for it rejected the traditional society of Spanish colonialism and viewed the world through modern, skeptical eyes. Yet liberal constitutionalism had proved unequal to the task of nation building. It was "meta-physical" and abstract, and its emphasis on individual rights and guarantees yielded institutions prone to factionalism and disarray. By the late 1870s, after fifty years of internecine strife and foreign intervention, "conservative-liberals" called for fewer individual rights and more security, or less "politics" and more "administration."

Intellectual fashions had changed too. The writings of Auguste Comte and Saint-Simon encouraged a pragmatic view of the world in which disorder impeded the prospects for social and economic progress. "Scientific politics" therefore advocated strong government, rejected popular sovereignty, and encouraged a policy of state planning in economic and social matters. Moreover, such politics emphasized experience rather than theory as a guide to policy. The lessons of the struggle against the French and the problems of the Restored Republic suggested that Mexico needed a firm hand and, above all, order. Thus when Porfirio Díaz came to power in 1876, his government, weak and divided, found its program in scientific politics and its text in liberalism. Scientific politics justified authoritarian government, while liberalism provided the unifying myth and the trappings of democracy.

Progress is one thing, but exploitation is another, as both Andrés Lira and Ramón Eduardo Ruiz suggest in major works of substantially different style and tone. Lira's *Comunidades indígenas frente a la ciudad de México: Tenochtitlan y Tlatelolco, sus pueblos y barrios, 1812–1919* is a self-described "institutional history" of the corporate properties in the Indian districts of San Juan and Santiago in Mexico City. Yet Lira's work has profound socioeconomic implications as well, for it documents the progressive expropriation of Indian lands over the course of the nineteenth

century. Liberals regarded these extensive properties as an anachronism, yet their status remained largely unresolved until 1856, when disentailment began in earnest. In 1868 the old *parcialidades* lost any remaining fiscal attributes, and for the rest of the century, their former lands were given over to subdivision and commercial development. Despite its measured tone—indeed because of it—*Comunidades indígenas* is a disturbing work. The fruit of extensive archival investigation, it is also persuasively argued.

Ramón Ruiz's *The People of Sonora and Yankee Capitalists* takes a critical view of Porfirian "progress" and is to be read not only as a history but as a tract for our times. Daily we are told that free trade and unrestricted investment benefit everyone, although to what degree everyone benefits is no longer much discussed. After all, the socialist economies are in full retreat, as if that somehow made distributive concerns irrelevant.

Mexicans are less credulous. They generally support free trade with the United States but think that Mexico will gain less from the deal. Reading Ruiz's book makes it easy to understand their skepticism. Ruiz vividly describes the cowboy capitalism that U.S. investment underwrote in Sonora in the late nineteenth century. Even then there was in the United States an enthusiasm for "emerging" hemispheric markets, along with a pie-in-the-sky mentality that ignored unpleasant realities. How little we remember.

Ruiz charts the extension of the railroad to Sonora in 1882, the subsequent boom in Sonoran copper mining and export, and the expansion of commercial agriculture in the Yaqui and Mayo river valleys. Investors in the United States got rich, and so did some Mexicans—never mind the despoiling of the Yaqui and Mayo Indians. Few worried about "democratic capitalism" then, and it is still not clear that capitalism leads inexorably to democracy. Ruiz is a dissenter who reminds us—passionately—that economic growth may not improve the distribution of income and wealth, especially in the short run. In countries whose "initial" distributions are badly skewed, it sometimes takes a revolution to do what markets cannot. In this context, Ruiz's earlier work on the history of the Mexican Revolution (1980) forms a logical part of his story.

Conclusion

What then, are we to conclude from this survey? Certainly the links between politics and the economy must be rethought. Mexico underwent a civil war in the early 1810s that may have consumed as much as half of its national income for a time. The legacy of this conflict, particularly in silver mining, had profound consequences. In the 1820s and 1830s, the balance of payments, the terms of trade, and the growth of the public debt conspired to undermine the economic foundations of the state. Iturbide's

Empire and the First Republic found little room for political maneuver because resources were scarce and were increasingly being consumed in unproductive ways. The shift to centralism in the late 1830s yielded distinct economic consequences, but they remain mostly unexplored. In every respect, the war with the United States was an unmitigated disaster, and not just because of territorial losses.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Mexico wrestled with the legacy of the first. Liberalism, discredited as an ideology of nation building, was itself transformed into a justification for expropriating resources from “unproductive” owners, for redistributing wealth, and for establishing authoritarian rule. A desire to emulate successful models of economic and political development presupposed importing capital, ideology, and institutions. Mexico acquiesced in its own account of *inferioridad económica*, recalling what its foreign critics had so insistently maintained. Things would change from this point on.

There can be little doubt that the formula of “order and progress” worked as advertised, but progress was for those who understood the mysteries of the balance sheet and order for those who paid the due bills. Through the work of Mexican historians such as Luis Cerda, we are learning that the Mexican Revolution was, if only in part, an adjustment crisis, the political response to the costs of accelerated investment and commercialization after 1876. As Mariano Otero had observed so many years before, Mexico’s gaining independence was not all that difficult. But staying independent—in essence, governing well—was “la parte más difícil.”

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