

*Colonial Latin America*. By Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; fifth edition; pp. 418, ill., maps. £19.99).

The co-authors of *Colonial Latin America* have embarked upon an ambitious project by attempting to cover the entire history of the early Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the New World. Their history is a *tour de horizon*, an overview, rather than an exhaustively detailed account of events. It examines four centuries across a continent three times the size of Europe. *Colonial Latin America* seeks to cover just about every aspect of society and politics in colonial Latin America from pre-Columbian cultures to the struggles for independence in the 1800s. It is perhaps the only widely available English language book of its kind in print – a factor that helps explain its continuous success since its first publication in 1990, particularly in the United States, where campuses are more interested in Latin American issues than their European counterparts. Only one other title has been published recently on this field, *Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History*, edited by Kenneth Mills, William B. Taylor, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 2002), but this is a text-based work for academic use, not intended for the uninitiated.

If the reader is unfamiliar with the subject, this text is a good place to start, subject to some caveats. While the coverage of the time span specified in the title is sound, that of the periods that preceded and followed the colonial period is less so. The opening chapter of the book (‘Amerindian Civilisations on the Eve of European Conquest’) starts with the assertion that ‘most scholars agree that the [Western] hemisphere was settled in a series of migrations across the Bering Strait from Asia’ (p. 1). Debate, however, is far from over on this topic, particularly on the route of entry, given that some sites in South America seem to predate evidence of North American settlement. If the intention was to give a hemispheric perspective, it is also surprising that no mention is made of the now undisputed presence in the continent of Europeans, specifically the Vikings, centuries before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. A more balanced view is offered in the third paragraph by stressing the diversity of pre-Columbian civilizations: ‘Although the Aztecs and Incas are the civilisations best known during the age of conquest, the inhabitants of these empires constituted only a minority of the total Amerindian population and resided in geographic areas that together comprised only a small portion of Latin America’s landscape’ (p. 1). It is even argued that these rarely mentioned peoples, such as the Guaraníes, Aymará and Mapuches, ‘greatly influenced the ways in which colonial Latin America developed’ (p. 1). But the chapter focuses on the Maya, Aztecs and Incas: a real missed opportunity, especially when in Chapter Three (‘Ruling New World Empires’) the reader is told, tantalizingly, that Jesuit missionaries in Brazil promoted the use of Tupí as a common language. This point is reiterated in Chapter Six (‘The Social Economy: societies of caste and class’) which relates the importance of bilingualism, while nothing is said of the Tupí people themselves.

Passages on the Iberian world in the late fifteenth century include plenty of inconsistencies and occasional contradictions. On page 31, for example, it is asserted that 'noble or commoner, wealthy or poor, Iberians preferred to reside in cities, towns, and villages rather than widely scattered dwellings in the countryside'. Then follows a sentence stating that monarchs chartered towns and had to grant them privileges in order 'to entice occupation and settlement'. The book fails to place Spain and Portugal in a European context, so the Iberian Peninsula is portrayed from the outset as a hotbed of intolerance. No attempt is made to explain how Jews, Muslims and other foreigners managed to live in this region, as they demonstrably did. The impression conveyed makes it difficult to understand why, if non-existent before, 'religious tolerance had disappeared by the early sixteenth century' (p. 29). For the same reason, it is almost impossible to contextualize the origins of the debate on the post-Conquest treatment of the American Indians. Those who favoured a more humanitarian approach, such as some Dominicans, including the former *encomendero* Bartolomé de las Casas, are portrayed as outsiders, rather than followers of a tradition of Spanish multiculturalism which, while beleaguered, nevertheless survived both the Reconquista and the American conquest. The book mentions some of their successes, such as the Laws of Burgos (1512) and other legislation aimed at improving the natives' working conditions; but, perhaps because these measures did not suffice to counter the decline in the indigenous population, they are left unexplained, almost as accidents of history.

Burkholder, Professor and Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, has focused his academic research on the role of the ministers of the high courts of Spain and its American colonies from 1660 to 1833. The chapter dedicated to that subject ('Ruling New World Empires'), however, concentrates on the early stages of the colonial administration (1501-1687). The information provided is sound, but the chronological limits adopted foster the idea that little occurred subsequently. Thus, the reorganization of the Spanish colonies in 1776, which resulted in the creation of the viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata, with Buenos Aires as its capital, is neglected. This vital historical moment receives only a passing reference at the end of the book, among topics relating to peripheral economies during the period of imperial expansion, rather than in the chapter that traces the crisis and collapse of the Spanish Empire, where this reorganization had a crucial impact. Buenos Aires was the first Latin American *cabildo* formally to cut links with Napoleon-occupied Spain in 1810. Spanish authority was never again reasserted in the south of the continent. Lyman L. Johnson, professor of the University of North Carolina, whose speciality is the colonial, social, and economic history of Argentina, would hardly have been unaware of this point. It appears as though the sequence of chapters has been determined without a decision having been made as to whether they should be organized according to chronological or thematic criteria.

Burkholder and Johnson periodically update the book, so as to maintain its position at the cutting edge of current scholarship. The benefits of this practice are clear in this latest edition, which contains more information on race, ethnicity, gender, family,

marriage, and popular culture than previous versions. Chapter Seven ('The Family and Society'), while not offering any startling new insights, does succeed in providing a well-informed, wide-ranging account of the impact of inheritance law and the culture of honour in everyday family life, as well as the varied roles of women and children in the colonial societies of Spanish America and Brazil.

One very helpful feature of the book is the inclusion of a glossary of unfamiliar Spanish terms which are shown italicized in the body of the text. Similarly useful is a listing of monarchs of Spain and Portugal from 1454 to 1833. However, the constant updating of the book gives rise to a practical drawback: in this edition, entries in the index do not always correspond with the text. Bartolomé de las Casas, for example, is mentioned in the index as appearing on page 36, whereas the 'Bartolomé' mentioned there is the brother of Christopher Columbus, rather than de las Casas, a vehement opponent of conquest and forced conversion.

Those readers who intend to pursue further research will also benefit from the bibliographies at the end of each chapter. Chronologies are also provided, except at the end of chapters Six to Nine (covering social economy and cultural issues) that, arguably, would have also benefited from a simple timeline. For beginners, provided that they overcome the tendency toward formulaic and somewhat dry use of language (countries, for example, are said to 'contain' people), *Colonial Latin America* is an adequate introduction to a fascinating subject.

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