



# Spanish Colonial Culture

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## The Historical Framework

### The Dual Construction of an Empire

The construction of Spain's overseas empire can be discussed from two standpoints: as the creation of a political entity encompassing millions of square kilometers—a political structure which required, in turn, an infrastructure that made possible the functioning of a colonial society and its administration from the American capitals and from the more distant mother country—; and as the construction or creation of a socio-cultural entity formed by millions of human beings who eventually would develop their own cultural and national identities. In either case, the work was made possible by the advancement of scientific knowledge, the application of new technologies and, also, by the activity of inquisitive and lucid minds able to pose questions and find answers. Also present from the outset were critics whose influence was felt in the Americas in terms of political decisions made in the mother country and whose observations were often reflected by legislation. In spite of the strong centralization of the political system, beginning with the sixteenth century, Spanish America developed its own personality with regional variations which later culminated in the independence and birth of a score of nations.

A political philosophy with high principles which went beyond individual interests and purely materialistic or short-sighted concerns was also necessary. Colin M. McLachlan underscores the importance of these philosophical ideas and of learning, pointing out that

the broadening of the Spanish world to embrace a new continent required an intellectual reordering of reality. . . . Royal officials depended on the manipulation of ideas rather than on force. Humanist Juan de Mal Lara

(1524-1571) thus confidently asserted that a mind represented the most worthy offering one could make a monarch because an empire depended on knowledge. (ix-x)

As a matter of fact, the Spanish Crown—through the Council of the Indies, the supreme organism in the government and management of the overseas kingdoms—stimulated knowledge and information regarding geographic space, natural resources, human population, colonization policies and the foundation of cities. Naturally, scientific interest was closely related to political and economic interests. It is no less true, however, that, in the Spain of those centuries, passion for *knowledge* coexisted with passion for *power*.

The extension of a Spanish empire in America, as a political reality, depended primarily on Spain's nautical capacity. Christopher Columbus' genius and tenacity had the necessary support of Spanish sailors and vessels. The systematic exploration of the American coasts during the sixteenth century, the first voyage around the world between 1519 and 1522 (the Magellan-Elcano expedition), the Acapulco-Manila route and the also systematic exploration of the South Pacific were made possible by the scientific knowledge and the naval technology which made Spain for a long period of time the most advanced nation on earth. The most immediate precedent to this naval capacity was the fifteenth-century cartography school of Majorca. Navigation through the Atlantic Ocean was based on the sailing tradition from southern Portugal and southwest Spain (Huelva). Once the first period of exploration voyages concluded—which depended to a great extent on the intuition of the navigators—Spain developed a true nautical science, linked to astronomy and naval engineering. Communication with the mother country and the administration of a continental empire and of the Philippines, demanded control over sea lanes. The Casa de la Contratación, founded in

1503 in Seville, was responsible for the traffic of passengers and goods between Spain and the New World; among its other functions was the training of pilots in a school that served as a model for other European countries. The level of nautical science in sixteenth-century Spain was so high that treatises on the subject were translated into English, French, Italian, Dutch and German.

In addition to ensuring communication across the ocean and along the American coastline, Spanish colonization was also concerned—in contrast with other colonization such as that of the Portuguese—with deep inland penetration of the territories. In the case of South America, Spain's attention was focused on the Pacific side of the continental divide.

The new kingdoms of the Indies had to surpass their theoretical design and become living and operating realities. Spain devoted herself to the construction of ports, roads and bridges, cities and villages, hydraulic works to control the water supply, mining ventures, agricultural and livestock enterprises and operations to transform raw materials. This physical construction of an empire was a necessity and a result of Spanish policy as well as a challenge for science and technology. Never had so much been planned and constructed, departing from point zero, over such a large space—a continent—in such a short period of time. The natives' experience with the natural environment and their role as labor were very valuable elements, but virtually nothing of the pre-Hispanic infrastructure was put to use. A city as splendid as Mexico-Tenochtitlan was destroyed, and upon its ruins the colonial city was erected. The capital of Perú was no longer Cuzco, but Lima, a city with a new design. Construction of roads in the sense and to the extent found in the states and empires of the Old World had not been developed in America because beasts of burden and drayage were absent from its fauna—with the exception of the llama of limited usefulness—and because pre-Hispanic societies had not utilized the wheel. Solutions by the indigenous cultures to their material needs were, of course, valid and even brilliant within their own contexts, as in the case of the road system of the Inca empire. The Spanish presence, however, meant new and more complex necessities requiring a more advanced technology for their satisfaction.

A case that illustrates the difference between the indigenous and the new colonial situations was the mining industry. The development of metallurgy was very rare and limited in native America, which by the sixteenth century had not reached what is known in Europe as the Iron and Bronze Ages. The Spaniards' disproportionate interest in precious metals resulted in a spectacular increase in the exploitation of mines

which stimulated the development of techniques later introduced in Europe for the handling of minerals.

At the same time that the Spanish kingdoms of the Indies were taking form materially, a society and a culture were developing. Various institutions and individuals contributed to the coming into being and progress of what was the heart of the great Spanish empire. The Real y Supremo Consejo de Indias (The Royal and Supreme Council of the Indies) always maintained a policy that demanded the acquisition of knowledge and of continuous information. Additionally, a multitude of individuals worked in all fields of learning moved either by their own scientific interest or by specific objectives. The friars belonged to this latter group, realizing that in order to fulfill their mission among the Indians they had to further their knowledge of society and culture. In fact, in those centuries the sharp divisions that later divided knowledge into different sciences did not exist. Expressions like "natural and moral history" were common, because a treatise or study of America (the Indies), or one of her regions or of one of its fundamental aspects was inconceivable if isolated from the totality of physical nature, theological and moral questions, science and the customs of the population. Information requested or merely welcome in Madrid was provided by hundreds of officials from the vantage point of their appointed positions and the advantages of their personal experience in the field. These officials had to supply specific information which, in some cases, was of the type used today by the social sciences. The *visita* or general inspection by a high official or a bishop served as a tool to learn about conditions in a province or district or about the operation of an institution. Although their main objectives were economic, as John H. Elliott notes, much was learned and preserved for posterity about native cultures thanks to these bureaucratic procedures:

The *visitas* of royal officials to Indian localities . . . therefore tended to turn into elaborate inquiries into native history, land tenure and inheritance laws; and the reports of the more intelligent and inquiring officials, like Alonso de Zorita in New Spain, were in effect exercises in applied anthropology, capable of yielding a vast amount of information about native customs and society. (1970, 33)

Beyond bureaucratic action which was very important, we insist, however, that the scientific disposition and the lifelong work of individuals in America and from America contributed to a wealth of natural, historical and ethnographic learning that allowed for more to be known about Spanish America than about any

other continent colonized by Europe. With respect to science and technology, the kingdoms or provinces of Spanish America were not colonies in the subordinate and marginal sense of the word, because the foci of investigation were in America in the hands of her own inhabitants. This particular situation is explained by the combination of factors we mention below.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, a significant urban population existed which began to assume the structure of the mother country. Numerous clergy were devoted to the gathering of information and learning, and colleges and universities were founded. In the eighteenth century, academic and scientific institutions of the type introduced in Europe by the Enlightenment were founded in the large cities. In this climate, important scientific expeditions, without the objective of territorial expansion, but for the purpose of gaining knowledge of the land and her people, were sponsored by the Crown. Men of science of different nationalities generally participated in these expeditions. These were the days when modern science was born as well as a true international community of specialists united by the common desire for further knowledge.

### Spain: A Bridge between European Civilization and the New World

Spain's policy for America was to extend her culture over the conquered lands and to incorporate the native population under the Crown. This policy was executed through the application of principles and instruments at the service of what we had called elsewhere "the Spanish colonial model." Spain attempted, in essence, to reproduce in America, in so far as possible, her social and cultural system. A reproduction of this type could never have been exact or complete for many reasons. In the first place, Spain was diverse, and not even the Castilian version of Hispanic culture could have been transported to the New World in its entirety.

The Spaniards encountered in America a very diverse indigenous population and geography, as has been demonstrated by the ethnographic panorama presented in the first chapter of this volume. An ideal project for the acculturation of the Indians existed in the areas of religion, language and the ways of life characteristic of Spain and, more specifically, of the population of the Crown of Castile. By the same token, New World lands were considered an extension of the Spanish space ("the Kingdoms of the Indies"), which the Spaniards could and should populate. A migratory flow from Spain progressively occupied areas explored and conquered by the conquistadors.

The sixteenth century was essentially a period of conquest and the founding of cities. The seventeenth cen-

tury was a time for the consolidation of the new material and social structures and for the growth of the general population (Indians, Spaniards, mestizos, Africans and other mixtures). The eighteenth century was characterized by renewed interest on the part of the Spanish Crown in her American provinces, by the introduction of ideas that emerged from the European Enlightenment, and by important reforms which, to a great extent, were also a result of the new intellectual climate Europe was experiencing. At all times—from 1492 and for more than 300 years—Spain was the bridge between the Old and the New Worlds. The culture that Spain carried to America was the Hispanic version of European civilization, the most brilliant and powerful representative of which was Golden Age Spain. In turn, indigenous cultures also were made known to the Old World. Europe gained knowledge of the existence of many societies with cultures and civilizations that were different from one another and that were the result of traditions thousands of years old. The European discovery of the American continent completed the image of the earth which up to that time had been very limited on either side of the ocean. Through a centuries-old bridge that Spain built—with one support at the port of Seville and many others in American ports—plants, animals, people and ideas, dreams and hopes traveled in both directions. From then on, America has been the dream of millions of Europeans. The gold and silver mined by Indians and black slaves through enormous effort and pain traveled in one direction only. These precious metals transported in Spanish ships transformed Europe by revolutionizing her economic foundations because the gold and the silver ended up in other countries with whom Spain was at war or to whom she was indebted. Potatoes and corn—rather modest crops—likewise changed the European diet and helped overcome the terrible famines that the poorest populations of the old continent had endured periodically.

The New World was also an area where new interpretations of humanity, new concepts of nature, original or renewed ideas in the fields of philosophy, ethics, the "Rights of Man" and international law were put into practice or stimulated. The New World pushed many into dreaming of making a reality of those utopias proposed in Europe by writers like the Englishman Thomas More. This was the case of Don Vasco de Quiroga, bishop of Michoacán. Briefly, America awakened the interest of European intellectuals, offered new empirical bases for the sciences and inspired writers and artists. The Renaissance and Humanism, as its intellectual version, contributed to the discovery of new worlds and to finding new people and cultures unknown in Europe until that time. America, in turn, generously rewarded the Old World, stimu-

lating its intellectual adventure and propelling its economic and social transformation with her natural resources and the labor of her indigenous population. Later, in the eighteenth century, the revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment—which opened the doors to a new age—found on American land, in the north as well as in the south of the hemisphere, fertile soil for development. The emancipation of the American continent was one of the consequences of the social and political climate created in Europe during the last third of the eighteenth century.

It is evident that the encounter between Europe and America and the historic process that is now half a millennium old have been rich in social, cultural, economic and political developments. Nothing has transformed humanity more and in a shorter period of time than the 500 years of interaction between the Old and the New Worlds. The process has been deep and extensive in its results. It has also been painful and tragic for many individuals and communities. The price paid in exchange for the greatest and swiftest revolution in the history of humanity has been, and still is, very high. The ideals of social justice, the principles of respect and tolerance that already moved many sixteenth-century Spaniards to protest, are still ideals to a large extent. But such is humanity and such is its history. We cannot change an iota of the past, but we must try to learn about it and understand better each day. This knowledge will show us in every dimension the pioneer role that Spain played in the construction of modern and contemporary America as a whole. A knowledge of history will be useful for any citizen of the Americas, especially for the hundreds of millions that are tied to the Hispanic tradition that arrived from the peninsula and was transformed, adopted and enriched in America.

Beyond the political events and also the errors and abuses of the past, it is beneficial to contemplate the *relativity* of temporal distance, which, in the scientific, intellectual and artistic areas meant the systematic transplanting of Spanish culture in the natural social and cultural Indian world. It is useful, and it can be gratifying, for many to see themselves as heirs of a tradition and as members of a socio-cultural system that embraces today hundreds of millions of human beings. The following pages attempt to show with deeds and facts the bases of this historical reality. It is a brief outline of Hispanic culture in America, with special reference, for obvious reasons, to New Spain, that is to say, to Mexico and beyond.

It is justifiable in the United States today to look at Hispanic cultural tradition. Hundreds of thousands of “European Spaniards” and millions of “American Spaniards”—as they were called centuries ago—con-

tributed to the growth of the cultural heritage on either side of the Río Grande. This heritage is part and parcel of the society and the global culture of the United States. The strong imbalance found in United States historiography with regards to Spain (Hispanic America) and England (Anglo-America), in spite of the importance that the Spanish model has had for Anglo-Americans themselves, is clearly expressed by the historian Charles Gibson who is well acquainted with both sides of American history:

Spain in America is a substantial subject. In space, time and complexity, it is a more substantial subject than England in America, and it carries the additional difficulty, for English-speaking students, that it is alien and easily misconstrued. Though impressive advances have been made, Spanish America still lags behind equivalent fields of historical investigation. In certain of its topics the overtones are such that we can hardly make any comment without sounding biased. Our ignorance of other topics is abysmal.

The subject interacts with Anglo-American history at numerous points. When the first settlers of Jamestown, refusing to work, spent their energies in a futile search for gold, they were responding not to the conditions of their own colony but to what they knew of the ways that Spaniards conducted themselves in theirs. When they planted tobacco and introduced African Negroes to cultivate it, they were adopting plantation habits developed in the Spanish colonies but still untried by their own countrymen. To patriotic Englishmen like Sir Francis Drake and James Oglethorpe, Spanish America was an immediate and hostile force. Anglo-American geography was itself a consequence of Spain in America, for Englishmen were obliged to found their colonies where Spaniards had not settled or where they had passed by. (xiii)

## The Passing of the Centuries

With strange precision, the passing of each century for the last 500 years in the history of Spain and Spanish America has coincided with great events or signs of change. Christopher Columbus made his discovery voyage and his three subsequent voyages during the final years of the fifteenth and the first years of the sixteenth centuries. The sixteenth century came to an end right after Philip II's death (1598). The two great monarchs of the Hapsburg or Austrian House were fol-

lowed by the lesser Austrians who spanned exactly the seventeenth century. In 1700 there was a change of dynasties with the arrival of the French Bourbons on the throne of Spain. The new situation culminated during the second half of the eighteenth century under the reign of Charles III (1759-1788), instigator of the great administrative reforms in the American kingdoms. The transition between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries was marked by the independence movement which brought the emancipation of continental Spanish America in 1820. In the peninsula the first years of the new century coincided with the invasion by Napoleon's troops and we know the effects that war with the French had upon the independence of the American territories. Finally, the nineteenth century ended for Spain with the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines (1898) which put an end, after a strange war—to say the least—with the United States, to 400 years of Spanish administration in the Western Hemisphere.

### The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The sixteenth century was for the New World an essentially formative period. The activity of the Spaniards in those years was feverish and continuous: exploring, discovering, founding, settling; creating and establishing institutions; trying out solutions and answers to new and unexpected problems. It was a dazzling, dynamic and imaginative century filled with adventures, illusions and also disappointments. During this century the great conquests were effected; great native states and empires fell; and the terrible wholesale death of Indians because of diseases brought from the Old World, and, to a much lesser degree, by war, abuses and errors, took place. It was a century of great polemics among Spaniards and of deep self-criticism.

The two long reigns of Charles V (1516-1556) and Philip II (1556-1598) came after the Catholic Kings had sponsored the voyage of discovery and set into operation the great project of the Indies. So many extraordinary events occurred in Spanish America during the sixteenth century that, had they not been solidly documented, we could say they were fabrications, historical fiction. The sixteenth century is the great century in the history of Spain, for good or evil. It is almost impossible to believe that a country of ten million people, distributed among several kingdoms and crowns, could produce such a number of notable personages, some absolutely extraordinary—navigators, explorers, conquerors, missionaries, jurists, theologians, men of science and of letters, architects, painters, sculptors. Spaniards were present and active at the same time both in Europe and in the New World, and even in the

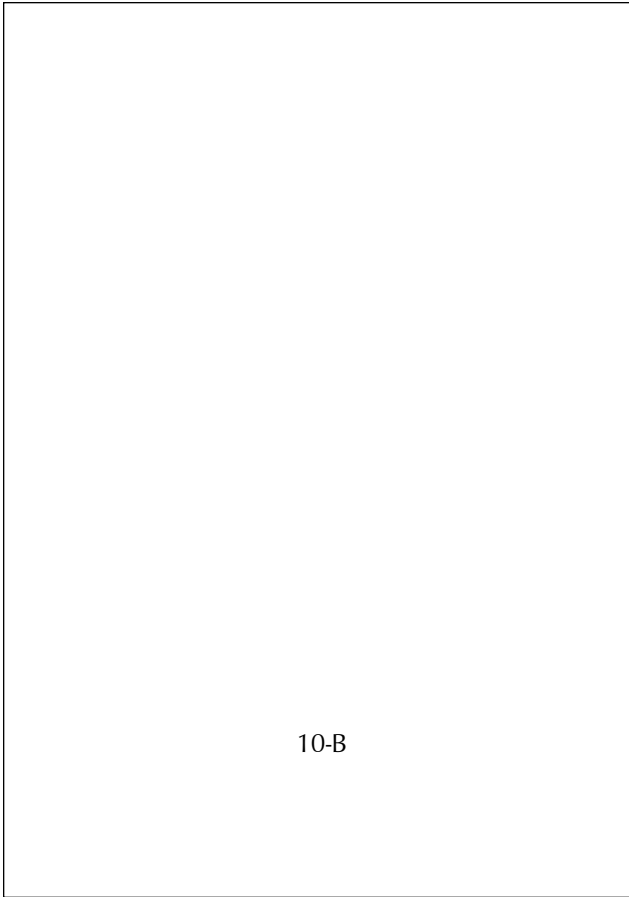
Pacific and the Far East. It is understandable for the Spanish sixteenth century to have drawn the attention of scholars and awakened a special interest among the public at large. Sixteenth-century Spain was powerful on the European battlefields, a champion in the battle against Protestantism, a monopolist of the wealth and commerce of the New World. That Spain, unavoidably, was envied and became a target of other European powers. The price she paid for her power and her errors was the Black Legend which hovers over the history of Spain and the Spaniards. The principal events of the sixteenth century in the New World are gathered in the third chapter of this book which is devoted to the Spanish model of colonization. Let us look now at the historical importance of the following century.

The seventeenth century was a time of relative repose and consolidation of all that had been established the previous century. It was a time for a consideration of what had been achieved and for looking at the tasks that lay ahead. The great discoveries and territorial annexations had ended for all purposes and reference could already be made to a Spanish American



10-A

**Model of an hacienda owner. (Courtesy of the Museo de América, Madrid.)**



10-B

**Model of the son of an hacienda owner. (Courtesy of the Museo de América, Madrid.)**

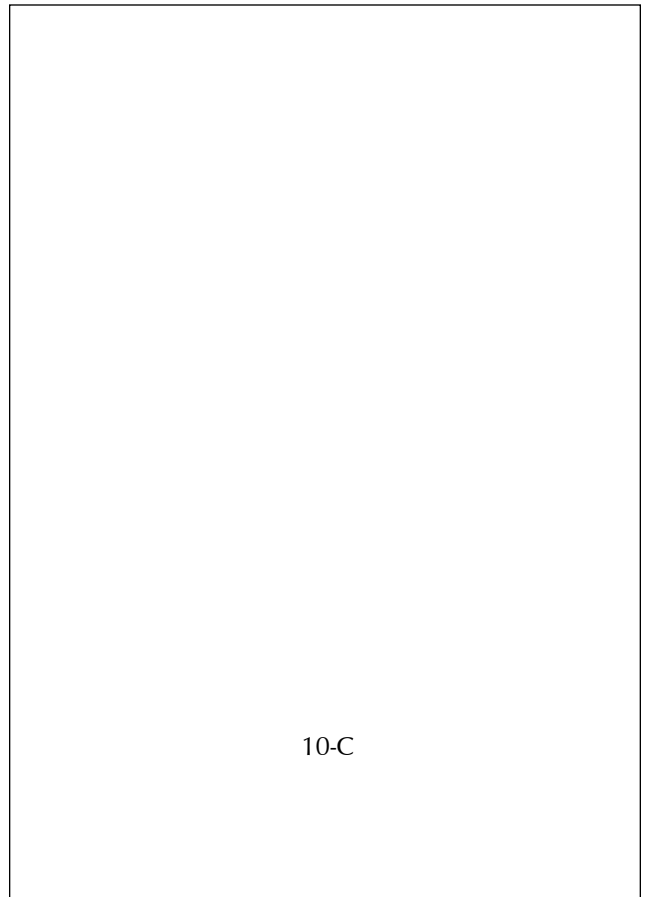
tradition. Communication across the Atlantic and between the different American regions became more difficult because of piracy and the increasing contraband forced the Crown to take restrictive measures. As one of the results of this situation, each of the great American regions had to be more self-sufficient, laying the bases for a regionalization which began to define the different facets of present-day Spanish America.

The waters were stilled during the seventeenth century and events were not so spectacular. Historians have called it “the forgotten century,” gray and monotonous, scarcely visible amidst the many great things that happened before and after. But the seventeenth century existed and its people made history. The roles they were destined to play might have been different, but nonetheless important. The seventeenth century was significant for the expansion of an empire and for the historical foundation of what today are the Spanish American republics. Politics and economics are two great factors that established the character of this century. These factors generated other phenomena which contributed in shaping the century. The weaknesses of

the monarchs—the lesser Austrians who did not exercise their power, delegating it instead to their ministers or favorites—and the burgeoning power of France placed Spain in a difficult political and economic situation that reached serious proportions. By way of contrast, these were the years of cultural splendor known as the Golden Age.

Spain’s operation in Europe was very costly in the midst of an economic depression and rampant corruption. Politics and war demanded increasing economic resources, and the Crown demanded more from an America that was no longer capable of meeting her own expenses.

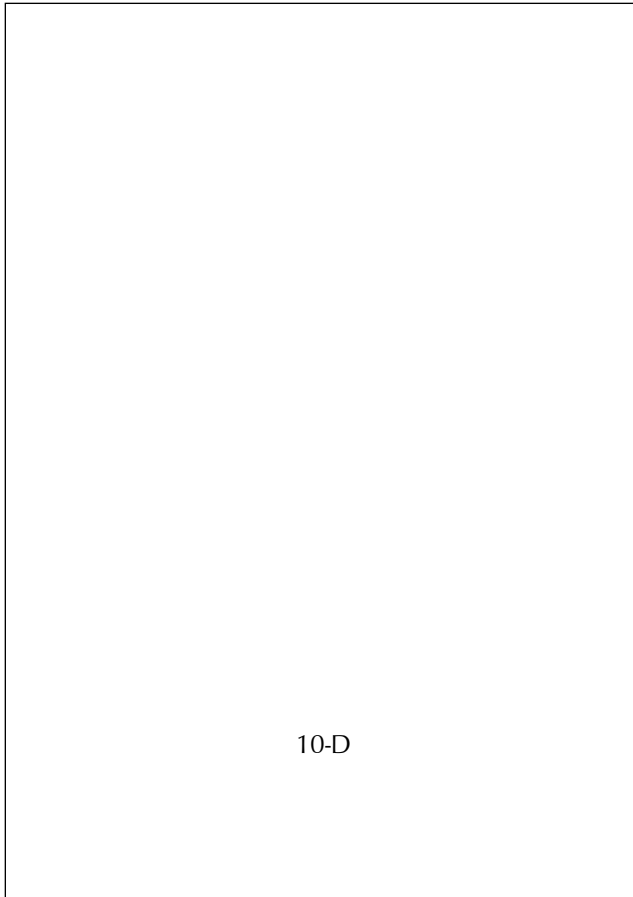
In Europe all were against Spain who derived no profit in the long run from her military victories, peace treaties and pacts. Portugal, from her colossal Brazilian expanse, wasted no opportunity to hinder Spain’s activities or to prosper at the expense of the neighboring lands. Other European powers were still in no condition to openly and effectively attack the Spanish overseas empire. European politics monopolized the



10-C

**A friar, modeled by Andrés García. (Courtesy of the Museo de América, Madrid.)**

attention and the efforts of these nations. America's distant location and the gigantic size of the Spanish territories prevented a formal war of invasion and conquest. The large uninhabited areas north of Mexico were the best defensive frontier for the Spanish centers of population located deep in the interior or on the Pacific side of the divide. There was, however, an indirect manner of harassing Spanish America, utilized systematically by rival nations during the seventeenth century: piracy. What the royal fleets of France, England and Holland could not accomplish was done by pirates and privateers with the approval, at least, of their own monarchs. Some coastal cities suffered repeatedly from attacks and destruction at the hands of these privateers. Another more effective and less costly procedure was to wait for the Spanish ships to come near the coasts of Spain and then seize the precious metals and merchandise they carried. The permanent threat of attack made communications by sea difficult. The small and numerous islands of the Caribbean became excellent shelters and bases for attacks by the pirates. The attraction these islands held for the Euro-



10-D

Model of an indigenous woman, by Andrés García. (Courtesy of the Museo de América, Madrid.)

pean powers brought about the racial and cultural mosaic that the Caribbean is today.

The most outstanding aspects of the economy in the seventeenth century—naturally and by force linked to political and social aspects—can be summarized by the following terms: devaluation of the *encomienda*; sale of public offices by the Crown; and development of the *hacienda* as a system for exploiting the land. The *encomienda* served in the sixteenth century as the formula to incorporate the Indians into the colonial economy and facilitate their evangelization. Indians had to pay tribute to the Crown, but the king assigned them or entrusted (*encomendar*) them to a Spaniard who received the tribute directly under the obligation of using part of this benefit towards the education, Christianization and welfare of the entrusted (*encomendado*) Indians. With the passing of time, the *encomienda* ceased to be a satisfactory solution for the Spaniards due to a combination of reasons: the diminishing number of natives throughout the sixteenth century, a policy more favorable to native labor, loss of profitability of ventures under the *encomienda* system, expiration of the period within which benefits could be derived from a grant made in the early days, or of the number of *encomendero* generations entitled to the same.

Peninsular Spaniards and Creoles looked for other means to acquire wealth or for mere survival. Politics was in their favor because a state heavily in debt and needing easy and quick money carried to shameful extremes the sale of government and administrative offices to the highest bidder, both in the peninsula and America. Prospering through positions related to the *hacienda* was available to a minority in America, but it was financially the most rewarding. Land ownership by Spaniards and the native community began in the sixteenth century with the royal *mercedes* or grants. In the seventeenth century, the great landed properties devoted to farming and ranching were created and consolidated. The *hacienda* has been henceforth more than an economic system, having become early on a social structure or small community in which each member had a well-defined status and role. The *hacienda* consecrated the latifundium, or large landed estate, and the ways of life and social relations still peculiar to large segments of rural Spanish America. The large land owners were the base for a landed and rural aristocracy.

Another seventeenth-century development was that the different regions of America began to resolve their own problems in their own manner. The ultimate cause was the fight against contraband which was eroding the Crown's control and diminishing its revenues. Policing was focused on the important sea lanes that connected the port of Seville with a few American

10-1

### **Present-day states explored by the Spaniards between 1534 and 1542.**

ports, making trade between the different regions more difficult. These, in turn, had to produce what was necessary for subsistence without having to depend so much on outside sources. Additional consequences of the economic crisis were concentration on the more profitable products according to the resources of each particular area and a greater consumption of local or regional products that did not have to be transported across borders. Specialization, often in terms of monocultures, stimulated the process of regionalization and established the foundations of what much later would be the map of the American republics.

Two other social factors characterized the seventeenth century: the growing importance of the *Creoles*, or Spaniards born in America, and the development of urban life. The weight of the Creole sector upon colonial society increased as it grew demographically, and its relations with European Spaniards became more strained. In a world where means are limited and ambitions limitless, interests and expectations of one and the other groups clashed. It was a rivalry between those who arrived from the peninsula wanting to prosper, and with aspirations set on government and power, and those who were

born in America and considered themselves more entitled than anyone else, the Indians included. Aside from Creoles and European Spaniards, there was in Spanish America a considerable population of mestizos and castas, the product of the broad crossbreeding of three large races: Indians, whites and Africans.

With regard to urban life, the seventeenth century saw the growth of many cities established during the previous century. Broad transition was made between the nominal or small city and the true urban center, with a larger population, better design, more and better churches and palaces, plazas and fountains, an increase in the number of shops and other manifestations of a fully urban life. The framework for this entire development was the exuberant baroque style predominant in Europe.

### **The Eighteenth Century**

The eighteenth century also had its own particular traits. As we have said before, the French Bourbon dynasty entered Spain in exactly 1700, even though a civil war was required to resolve conflicts with the pretender to the throne who represented the House of

10-2

**Present-day areas of the United States which previously belonged to Spain.**

Austria or Hapsburgs. The weight of France—the new great European power—was felt upon the destiny of Spain which rapidly began to lose the hegemony she had enjoyed in previous centuries. The overseas Spanish empire could no longer be an immense private preserve where a policy of isolation and monopoly had functioned relatively well. Other European powers began their own expansions on American lands over which Spain had been unable to establish her effective presence. The birth of the United States of America also set into operation a policy of expansion over territories that were nominally Spanish. This process would culminate by the middle of the nineteenth century, although by that time the victim was to be the very young republic of Mexico rather than Spain.

Frequent wars between the great European powers—usually headed by France and an increasingly powerful England—had direct impact on the American continents during the eighteenth century. The pacts signed by the powers and the conditions exacted by the peace treaties that provisionally ended wars were not favorable to Spain. Gibraltar and the Island of Minorca on one side of the Atlantic, and Jamaica,

Florida and Louisiana on the other, give testimony of those losses and whimsical changes of sovereignty which resulted from European rivalries. Spain did not benefit from her friendships or alliances. The significant assistance she rendered the thirteen colonies was never recognized by the United States, the last country with which Spain was at war in the course of her troubled history. From 1898 to this date, Spain has not participated in any other international conflicts. Family relationships between the kings of Spain and France—both were Bourbons—brought about the “Family Pacts” in the eighteenth century, but this family relationship came to an end at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the invasion of Spain by Napoleon’s troops. In spite of a sad state of affairs in Europe, Spain preserved a moral and intellectual energy which found its best channels for action during the reign of Charles III. This monarch knew how to surround himself with competent ministers and stimulate the activity of men of science and of learning representative of the spirit of the Enlightenment. Spain was still a major overseas power and her extensive American empire enjoyed a period that can be quali-

fied in many respects as flourishing. The eighteenth century brought Spanish America out from the previous lackluster century which, to its credit, had allowed the native population to recover and for Creoles, immigrants from the peninsula and the African population to increase.

The regionalization of Spanish America was consolidated in the eighteenth century, and the great wealth and variety of Spanish American traditions that serve to identify today many of the republics through their folklore and popular culture were finally formed in the course of that century. Spain recovered also at this time her interest and aspirations for "the kingdoms of the Indies" which came to be known simply as "Overseas Provinces." In a certain respect, the new century was a return to early times as manifested by a geographic expansion, propelled more by scientific than by political reasons, and the more effective occupation of marginal territories, especially those beyond the Río Grande. The missionary spirit also returned with the evangelizing activities of Jesuits and Franciscans in the north of Mexico, the Southwest and California. This large geographic space came to be called the *Internal*

*Provinces*. The *Far North* as seen from Mexico, served in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the stage for a true frontier epic.

Spanish policies were also very active in the areas of the administration and government of the Overseas Provinces. Population increase and a more effective occupation of the area demanded a more complex and expeditious organization. Geopolitics also favored reforms and innovations due to the fact that Spanish America was increasingly threatened by her traditional European rivals. In the sixteenth century two viceroalties were established, New Spain in North America and Perú in South America. In 1739 the viceroyalty of Nueva Granada with Bogotá as its capital was created, and in 1776 the viceroyalty of Río de la Plata with Buenos Aires as its capital was established. That same year all the territories in the northern part of Mexico which are today part of the United States were grouped together under the term of Provincias Internas. It is proper to observe how at such a late stage Spain still sustained an active policy giving attention to her American provinces. The zeal for founding cities, characteristic of Spanish colonization, continued during this

10-3

A scene from colonial Mexico, eighteenth century. (Courtesy of the Museo de América, Madrid.)

century. Significant cases are San Antonio, Texas, at the beginning of the century; San Francisco in 1776, the year of the independence of the United States; Los Angeles in 1781, and many other California cities.

Spain's renewed interest in her American provinces was of a strong economic nature and in keeping with the spirit of the day: rationality, technological development, commercial spirit, the pursuit of happiness and progress. New techniques were applied in the exploitation of mines, although production had been greatly curtailed by the scarcity of minerals and by a more protectionist policy towards labor. The latifundium was consolidated as the predominant form of land exploitation, especially in Mexico. Cattle and horses, brought from Spain centuries before, became the basis of a rural economy. Plantations of sugar cane, cacao and other tropical products were another important version of the latifundium, although they had to engage in pitched competition with the non-Spanish islands of the Caribbean and Brazil. Some crops became part of international commerce, and mercantile companies devoted to overseas traffic appeared. The old Spanish commercial monopoly began to disappear and a relative degree of economic prosperity brought about the emergence of social classes with an orientation more akin to the spirit of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the Creoles developed an increased interest in titles of nobility and in the external symbols of a lesser nobility that attempted to compete with the titles that viceroys and other high officials brought from Spain. Another aspect of this new situation, typical of the second half of the eighteenth century, was a Spanish migration from regions that until that time had no great participation in the American venture. Groups such as Basques, Asturians, Catalans, Valencians possessed professional experience and a strong business orientation. It was a migration of a skilled workforce whose traces and descendants are still in evidence today in many American republics.

Spanish American demography in the eighteenth century can be summarized as follows. There was a general and constant increase in the population due fundamentally to internal growth since migration from the peninsula was more important in terms of quality than in quantity. Likewise, there was an increase in African migration due to the greater demand for labor by haciendas and plantations. Racial mixtures that formed a complex landscape of castas had little impact in the course of ordinary affairs. The important categories were the peninsular Spaniards and the American Spaniards or Creoles, the Indians or Natives and the blacks. mestizos were many. They stood for the triumph of the diversity of castas since it became increasingly difficult to classify an individual in exact terms

according to the proportions of different races he embodied. There were no absolute values, instead, values were increasingly relative, because each individual's position was determined in relation to the rest and depended on two different points of view: one's own and the other person's. Other social or economic factors were of importance so that blacks, although slaves and theoretically of a lower social class, could enjoy a better status than Indians if they were part of the domestic unit, living very close to their masters, and performing tasks of a certain degree of responsibility in the household or the hacienda.

What was very clear in the complex eighteenth-century society was the rivalry between European Spaniards and American Spaniards or Creoles. There was hostility in all spheres and competition to occupy official posts was a constant factor both in the civil administration, the clergy and the academic world. When Spaniards arrived they were disposed to exact the greatest benefit possible from the new situation. Creoles considered themselves more entitled and, in many respects, they enjoyed the advantage of their experience as Americans. Demographic evolution totally favored the Creoles whose number became overwhelmingly superior to that of peninsular Spaniards. Several factors strengthened the position of the Creoles: the acquisition of lands or the legalization of old properties by means of the procedure of *composición* or payment of a certain amount to the Crown in exchange for an official title of property; the purchase of official positions until this procedure was abolished; and the acquisition, also through purchase, of titles of nobility. However, their behavior was ambivalent. In spite of their self-pride and disdain for peninsular Spaniards, the aspirations of the Creoles pointed clearly to ways of life defined from Spain. Creole women preferred peninsular Spaniards as husbands. This increased rivalries but also continuously reinforced Spanish standards within the Creole world. On the other hand, the Creole's purity of blood was relative since crossbreeding took place from the first century and after so many generations very few could deny the presence of at least a few drops of Indian or black blood in their Creole veins.

## Humanities, Science and Technology

### Language and Literature

The language that Spain brought to America was the language of Castile, with a predominance during the first and decisive decades of the colonization of the Andalusian modality or, more specifically, the dialect of Seville. In turn, the language of the Conquistadors and

settlers was enriched by many native words which passed on to all the European languages. The division of Spanish America into regions resulted in variations, especially phonetic; moreover, the national cultures offer today a wealth of idioms that have broadened extraordinarily the expressive possibilities of Spanish. Nevertheless, the basic unity of the language is amazing. It makes it possible today for more than 300 million speakers in twenty nations to communicate perfectly well.

That four Spanish American authors were granted the Nobel Prize in the last 25 years, added to the fact that another three authors born in Spain have received this same award since 1956, underscores the preeminent place of Spanish-language literature. If Spanish was the great instrument for the expansion and maintenance of the Spanish empire, there is no doubt that this language is today the agglutinating element of the various heirs of the old Hispanic cultural tradition.

The accounts of explorers and conquerors were the first manifestations written about the Spaniards in America or about America. Christopher Columbus wrote in beautiful Castilian the surprise and pleasure he felt upon seeing the first islands and the first "Indians." The conquerors who skillfully handled both the sword and the pen were many. Never has another empire produced the quantity and quality of narratives and descriptions by the protagonists of historical adventures. Accounts of the conquests, lands and its inhabitants predominated during the first half of the sixteenth century as should be expected. Outstanding are Hernán Cortés' letters to the emperor, Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Shipwrecks and Commentaries* and the epic poem *La Araucana* by Alonso de Ercilla on the conquest of Chile, a country that values it as its national poem. Regional and general histories that combined natural with political history were also numerous and of high literary quality. Likewise, numerous were histories written by friars concerning the activities of their respective religious orders included abundant data on the land, the Indians and the activities of the Spaniards. A significant factor was that the authors of these historical-literary and scientific works included European Spaniards, Creoles and mestizos.

In the seventeenth century, the great Baroque century, literature and all the arts reached a high level of excellence in America. The maturity of the institutions and the already important urban population fostered a rich cultural life connected always with the mother country. In this context three very different authors, united by the common use of the Spanish language which they handled to perfection, should be mentioned.

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**Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, famed seventeenth-century Mexican writer.**

Garcilaso de la Vega, known in Spanish literature as "El Inca," was born in Cuzco in 1539. He was the son of a Spanish captain and an Inca princess, a cousin of the last ruler of the Inca empire. Garcilaso de la Vega was educated in the old capital, according to the standards of a Spanish gentleman. At the same time, he became acquainted with his mother's culture and with the history of his indigenous ancestors. When his father died in 1561, he traveled to Spain and spent virtually the rest of his long life in the city of Montilla near Córdoba. He is buried in Córdoba in a chapel he built. The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega was a very cultured man who translated León Hebreo's poetic works, *Diálogo de amor*, from Italian to Spanish and who wrote *La Florida del Inca*, the history of Hernando de Soto's expedition, and was also the author of the *Comentarios reales*, the history and legends of his maternal people, and of a second history with the title of *Historia general del Perú*. Garcilaso de la Vega was a contemporary of Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) and was born less than ten years after the conquest of Perú by Pizarro. This allowed him to become acquainted with Inca civilization while it was

still transpiring before his very eyes and to hear from his mother's lips descriptions and facts. This author is an outstanding example of the incipient mestizo population of the time in Spanish America.

Very far from Perú and several years apart, we find one of the greatest playwrights in Spanish literature: Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, born in Mexico City around 1581 and consequently a contemporary of Lope de Vega (1562-1635). Ruiz de Alarcón received his early education at the University of Mexico where the humanistic and classical formation that characterize his work was imparted. He was scarcely 20 years old when he left for Spain. There he studied at the University of Salamanca. Back in Mexico he continued his university studies and shortly afterwards he returned a second time to Spain where he was employed in the royal administration. Ruiz de Alarcón was the author of many *comedias*, plays, in the style of the period and displayed the same degree of excellence as the great dramatic works of the Golden Age.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz belongs entirely to the seventeenth century. She was born in Mexico in 1648, entering a convent of Jeromite nuns in the capital of the

vicerealty at a very early age. Her life and works were exclusively linked to Mexico where she achieved great fame, first because of her intellectual precocity and her physical beauty, and, secondly, because of her literary production and erudition. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is an excellent representative of Spanish Baroque literature and outstanding in all its genres: theater, poetry, autobiography and spirituality. An avid reader of Spanish authors and influenced by the Baroque poet Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561-1627), her great contemporary author in Spain was Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681), although the Mexican poet's life was much shorter. She died in 1695 a victim of an epidemic.

Generally speaking, the Golden Age of Spanish literature comes to an end with the death of Calderón de la Barca in 1681. The eighteenth century was very different and its literary creativity very poor, both in the peninsula and in America. Nevertheless, scientific works as well as institutions fostered by the Enlightenment were important. The scholarship characteristic of this period was also manifest in the proliferation of periodicals. The interest of American authors in their own land, landscape, people and customs was also remarkable during this century. Some of the historical and literary works of this period are the forerunners of the rich Spanish American national literatures which have gained worldwide acclaim in the twentieth century.

## Books and Education

The dissemination of scientific knowledge from Spain and its development in America was effected by means of two basic instruments: books and education. The first printing press to arrive in the New World was set up in Mexico City through the efforts of its first bishop, Fray Juan de Zumárraga. Here, in 1536 the first book was printed in America. The chief objective of the press was to produce catechisms and other religious texts as well as grammars of the indigenous languages. The purpose was to satisfy the great demand on the part of the friars whose work was rapidly spreading throughout American lands.

Although, numerous textbooks arrived from Spain, colonial society's taste for fiction rendered the book trade an important business. Novels of chivalry, amorous and picaresque literature were in great demand in the new kingdoms. So fluid and prosperous was the book trade between the peninsula and the New World that the printing houses would rush their editions to Seville to meet the schedule of the fleets sailing for the Indies. Many copies of the first edition of the *Quijote* arrived at American ports in 1605, the same year the remarkable work by Miguel de Cervantes was published. Because of the demand and for

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Nobel-prize winning Mexican writer, Octavio Paz.

business reasons it was not unusual for many books to be distributed in America earlier than in the peninsula.

Among the already repeatedly mentioned activities of the Inquisition in America was the censorship of books that were to be shipped from Spain. During this period the Church exercised rigid control over dangerous reading matter and forbade or restricted it. It is true, however, that censorship by the Inquisition was focused on books affecting faith and church doctrines. It paid little attention to works of literature or of pure entertainment both widely sought by peninsular and American societies. Besides, official control over passengers and merchandise was never efficient enough to prevent many exceptions and violations. Books of philosophy and all the various sciences printed both in Spain and France arrived in the homes of many Spaniards and Creoles and in the hands of scholars. Colonial society was up-to-date with the currents of thought and the advances of scientific knowledge in Spain and the rest of Europe. During the eighteenth century, there also existed a fluid communication between intellectuals from Spanish America and their European and North American colleagues. The Jesuits from the Paraguay *reducciones* or missions—where the study of the heavens, natural sciences and music was stressed—shared their experiences with intellectual centers as distant as the Russian city of St. Petersburg.

This flow of communication explains conditions found by baron Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) during his long tour through Spanish America. The German scientist was repeatedly surprised to encounter the high level achieved by science and technology in a colonial world officially isolated, and to a large extent ignored by Europeans.

Spain always zealously protected her commercial monopoly. Attacks by pirates and privateers and the constant threat of rival European powers favored a policy of secrecy. Consequently, most Europeans with the exception of the scientific elite were unaware of the intellectual and scientific development in Spain's overseas provinces. For various reasons, chiefly censorship and bureaucratic slowness, important treatises on the New World written by Spaniards in the sixteenth century were not published or distributed in their day. Consequently, Europe had no knowledge of these works until the nineteenth century when they were discovered in old archives or libraries. The lack of direct and objective information on the Spanish action in America enabled negative propaganda, such as the *Black Legend*, to endure and spread. The unfortunate outcome of these factors was, and still is today, the persistence of a negative and very poor image of Spain, whose elite sectors, to the contrary, had attained remarkable cultural and scientific levels in

America. Europe was geographically very distant, but in cities such as Mexico, Bogotá, Quito, Lima, Buenos Aires and many others, intellectual life was rich and dynamic.

From the sixteenth century forward, educational centers proliferated in the kingdoms of the Spanish Indies. The philosophy and criteria that prevailed in these institutions were commensurate with the times and supported Spanish policies. It could not have been otherwise. The friars devoted themselves intensely to the education of the natives as part of their specific task of evangelizing. This necessarily entailed the broader task of acculturating the Indians into Spanish culture. Special attention was additionally placed on educating the children of the native nobility and other "principal Indians" deemed worthy of respect or of certain privileges. In this manner centers like the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, founded by the first bishop of Mexico for the education of native children, were established.

Higher education soon became a priority, because if Spanish colonial society was going to be an extension of the mother country, adequate educational centers to form Spaniards and Creoles had to exist. The first two universities in the Americas (Mexico and Lima) were founded in 1551, only thirty years after the conquest of Mexico by Cortés and less than twenty years after the conquest of Perú by Pizarro. The date of foundation is significant with relation to other colonial processes on other continents. The oldest university in the United States territories is Harvard, established almost a century after the University of Mexico.

## Architecture and Painting

The earliest and most tangible manifestation of the dissemination of Spanish culture in America was the foundation of cities and the erection of great religious and civil structures. The imprint of colonial urban life and architecture has not been erased or weakened by either time, social and political upheavals or frequent earthquakes in large areas of the continent. Colonial architecture, furthermore, kept up with peninsular styles in an effort to transplant to America Spanish ways of life in their correspondent physical frameworks. In a matter of decades, beautiful churches, chapels and convents sprang up throughout Mexico. Still today some of these early structures such as those in Yuriria, Tepeaca, Xochimilco, Cholula, Tepotzlan, Acolman stand framed by the awesome Mexican landscape.

In the first years of the sixteenth century, gothic buildings—a medieval style which had virtually died in Europe—were erected in Santo Domingo, the first European city founded in America and today the capital of

the Dominican Republic. The cathedral, several churches and the *alcázar*, or “The Admiral’s House” are examples. Religious architecture in Mexico during the sixteenth century was as abundant as it was brilliant. The Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian and Jesuit orders tried to outdo one another in erecting convents and churches aimed at the evangelization of the natives. This grandiose and sumptuous scale corresponded to the indigenous preference for the large ceremonial buildings of pre-Hispanic days. This is one of the reasons for the monumental proportions and lavishness of colonial religious architecture. The buildings also took into account practical principles such as large spaces to accommodate the masses of neophytes, and defensive military features to serve as shelters in the event of raids by non-pacified Indians. These fortified churches had their precedent in Extremadura and Andalusia where, not long before, the population lived in frontier lands and under constant threat from the Moors.

Renaissance architecture came into play in the building of great edifices in America at the same time that this style, which followed the gothic, flourished in Spain. In Mexico, especially, the structures were monumental, exceeding contemporary needs and projecting towards a future when cities were to outgrow their modest beginnings. The cathedrals of Mexico, Mérida, Guadalajara and Puebla, directly inspired by Andalusian cathedrals, particularly the cathedral of Jaén, belong to the last third of the sixteenth century. In 1563, the same year that work began on the Escorial—the most grandiose example of Spanish architecture—construction of the Mexico City cathedral, the largest church Spain built in the Americas, also commenced. The zeal to build spread throughout the rest of America, although in the viceroyalty of Perú it lagged by several years proportionate to its belated conquest when compared to Mexico.

The eighteenth century saw the triumph of the Baroque. This style was especially evident in the facades and the interior ornamentation of many structures whose construction began much earlier. The devotion of the people—often backed by the wealth of mining cities such as Taxco, Zacatecas and Guanajuato—favored the abundance and exuberance of religious architecture in Mexico. Hundreds of churches and cathedrals were erected in Mexico and still stand today as centers of religious activities. In many cases these places attract thousands of faithful who make pilgrimages to visit their images. Guadalupe and Zapopán are examples.

Civil architecture kept pace with its religious counterpart. Public buildings such as government palaces, *audiencias* for the administration of justice, city halls or *cabildos* as well as palaces for the powerful or houses

for wealthy families contributed to urban splendor. The sturdy and beautiful buildings are today the historical center of many cities from Mexico to Perú. Some Spaniards returned to the peninsula wealthy and had magnificent mansions built in their places of origin—sometimes a modest town—and whenever possible displaying over their front doors coats of arms earned in America. Historical and social factors created a remarkable similarity between such cities as Castile, Extremadura and Andalusia and American colonial cities. This likeness is evident in the two great ecological and urban variables: on the one hand, cities in the interior located in temperate or cold highlands and, on the other, coastal cities, seaports in warm or tropical lands. We find examples of the first in Castile, Extremadura, central Mexico, the Colombian highlands, Ecuador and Perú. To the second group belong cities in the lowlands of Andalusia—from Seville to the Bay of Cádiz—on the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, both on their islands and on the coasts of Colombia and Venezuela. The attacks by English, Dutch and French pirates forced the construction of



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**A painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe by Juan de Villegas, eighteenth century.**

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**Panoramic view of Mexico City during the nineteenth century.**

walls and fortresses in the Caribbean ports. These constructions, masterpieces of military engineering, are today in Puerto Rico and Cuba an important part of their historical and artistic legacy.

Two general assertions can be made concerning Spanish colonial architecture: There is the intervention of both peninsular and Creole masters in close and constant communication across the ocean, the presence of native elements in handicrafts and ornamental motifs taken from the American flora and fauna.

In the north of Mexico, and beyond the Río Grande, important construction also took place, although more modest as would correspond to poor lands with small native and Spanish populations. This architecture was even more conditioned by the geography and the history of marginal territories belatedly colonized. In the absence of stone and timber, *adobe* was the most utilized material. In this context it is interesting to note the use of adobe in regions such as Castile, Extremadura and the American Southwest which again resulted in that family likeness among many towns and villages. Churches in the northernmost regions of New Spain have a more marked defensive character, required by perilous conditions on the frontier. The *presidio* was a mandatory structure in these lands since it sheltered the soldiers charged with repelling raids by nomadic Indians. Still further to the north and west, the Franciscans erected their famous rosary of missions. Their characteristic style, incorporated into the cultural legacy of California, bears the name of Franciscan mission architecture.

The Church had always utilized painting as a didactic tool without neglecting esthetic and ornamental values. Native American cultures also made use of color and form to express their view of the cosmos and their pantheons. At either side of the ocean the basis of pictorial art was the same: the walls of religious and civil buildings, sculptures and books or *codices*. Aside from the human figure, other common elements were the flora, fauna, landscape and fantastic or imaginary representations.

The Spanish friars took immediate advantage of the didactic values of both traditions. Professional native artists played an important role in the copious and unceasing pictorial work undertaken in the New World. The paintings, as is obvious, are predominantly religious in theme. Colonial painting in Mexico had its start in the capital city's Franciscan convent and its study center of San José de los Naturales. The first native painters were trained at this institution and would subsequently scatter throughout New Spain to produce a large and excellent body of work. The same phenomenon was repeated in South America, so that in time the Cuzco and Quito schools of painting became famous.

The history of colonial painting in Spanish America corresponds in tone with the colonization process. Important Spanish painters worked and taught in Mexico, and even artists from Italy and the Low Countries came to work in America via Spain. The prosperity of the new cities was a strong attraction for these artists. The commercial trade in paintings and sculptures

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**Plaza de Armas (El Zócalo), Mexico City, nineteenth century.**

chiefly produced in Seville—where the great figures of Spanish art worked in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—carried to American churches and convents first-rate works, enriching the artistic patrimony and inspiring both Creole and native artists. In this manner, the American kingdoms learned and assimilated European art styles, from the late Gothic, the different phases of the Renaissance to the fullness of the Baroque. It is interesting to observe how the Mexican tradition of mural painting and polychromy has existed from Pre-hispanic days (with examples as extraordinary as the Teotihuacan paintings), to the great twentieth-century muralists. In between lie the fertile colonial centuries which filled hundreds of convents and churches such as Actopan, Tetela del Volcán and Huejotzingo, and of course, the religious and civil buildings of Mexico and Puebla with mural paintings, altarpieces and sculptures.

### **From the First Treatises to Scientific Expeditions**

During the first decades of the sixteenth century, the authors of works about America were the conquerors, friars and government officials, fascinated and stimulated by New World realities and problems. A few names, chosen from a long list, give eloquent testimony of the passion for learning which America inspired and maintained for centuries in men endowed with an extraordinary capacity to observe and describe.

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1478-1557) had a long experience in America, participating both in political activities and scientific pursuits. He was the first to receive the official appointment of General Chronicler of the Indies, which allowed him to receive documents from conquistadors and officials under orders to provide him with information. His interest in the New World began perhaps in his adolescence in Barcelona where he was living when the Catholic Kings welcomed Christopher Columbus after his first voyage. Fernández de Oviedo made six journeys from Spain to the Indies, the first in 1514, a confirmation of the mobility sixteenth-century Spaniards enjoyed and the continuous communication which existed between Spain and the new American territories. He was the author of the *Historia general y natural de las Indias Occidentales*, first published in Seville in 1535. This work is the product of his personal experience in the Antilles and Central America and is a triple treatise on natural history, political history and ethnography, in one single work.

The Jesuit José de Acosta was an admirer of nature in the Americas and a scholar of indigenous cultures. He combined his religious activities with his intellectual pursuits, demonstrating a remarkable capacity for work and unusual talent. He lived almost 15 years in Perú, spending the next two years in Mexico and later returning to Spain where he died. His *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, published in 1590, is an extraordinary work because of its comprehensive view of nature and the modernity of its rational and analytical

method. Acosta was a pioneer in geography and zoology, sciences he combined to classify and describe the American fauna. In confronting the controversial question of the origin of man in America, Father Acosta offered a theory based on his geographical knowledge and a most rigorous reasoning. His explanation coincides with facts discovered later by science. This Jesuit father was not led into the absurd theories of some nineteenth-century scientists, instead, he anticipated by several centuries the conclusions of modern archaeologists and anthropologists.

Scholars of the two most advanced cultures in Mexico (Aztec and Maya) owe an enormous debt to two friars who, with a full command of the indigenous language, penetrated the totality of the culture, especially the highly enigmatic area of religious beliefs. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590) went to Mexico in 1520 where he lived and worked intensely for sixty years. His perfect knowledge of the Nahuatl or Mexican language, interest in Aztec culture, work methodology and ability to place himself in someone else's circumstances produced an exceptional body of work. His *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, written first in Nahuatl and later translated by himself into Spanish, amounts to an encyclopedia of Aztec culture, with careful, accurate descriptions of religious beliefs, scientific knowledge and customs. This Franciscan friar added to his personal experience the accounts and responses to his questionnaires by native informants who, because of their age, had lived in Mexico prior to Cortés' arrival. He systematically compared information from different sources or places in Central Mexico and personally checked his work, always seeking exactness in data and objectivity. The creation of his methodology has placed Bernardino de Sahagún in a relevant position in the history of anthropology, "His experiments, undertaken directly or indirectly to address this concern with the nature of description, led to the first examples of modern ethnographic fieldwork and narrative, thereby genuinely making him the first modern anthropologist" (Klor de Alva et al. 35).

Diego de Landa (1524-1579) was a different type of personality. Yucatán was the stage for his activities. There are two well-defined periods in his life. During the first, driven by religious zeal and a desire to eradicate idolatry by the Indians, he ordered important samples of Maya culture destroyed. After a trip to Spain, he returned to Mexico as bishop of Yucatán with a different attitude towards indigenous culture. Convinced of the need to know the culture and surprised by the remarkable achievements of Maya civilization, he devoted himself to their study and to the reconstruction of texts that had been destroyed a few years before. Almost everything we know today of the pre-

Hispanic Maya is owed to the *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, the original text having served several historians before it fell into oblivion. In 1863 a version of this work by an anonymous author, probably dating from the seventeenth century, surfaced at the Royal Academy of History in Madrid. As recognized by modern archaeology, the knowledge that Landa had of the language of the Maya of Yucatán, their hieroglyphics and their complex calendar has allowed for significant inroads into this very difficult field. The following quotation from one of the leading authorities on the matter acknowledges the work of the religious men among whom Diego de Landa occupies a privileged position: "It is our good fortune that the early Spanish missionaries were accomplished scholars, and that owing to their eagerness to understand the nations they wished to convert to the Cross they have left us with first-class anthropological accounts of native culture as it was just before they came" (Coe 155).

Next to individual works written by government officials or sixteenth-century friars stand reports requested by the Council of the Indies. Outstanding among this output of systematic information is a project derived from Philip II's interest in a global and, at the same time, detailed view of the overseas kingdoms. This was the origin of the *Relaciones geográficas*, consisting of the surprisingly modern approach of compiling the answers to extensive questionnaires. In a first attempt made in 1569, surveys consisting of up to 37 questions were received in several American provinces. In 1570 a 200-question survey was distributed, and in 1573 another with only 135 questions. Finally, with the benefit of experience, in 1577 a form with 50 questions, on the basis of which a report was to be drafted, was sent out from Madrid. During the following years, the texts of the *Relaciones geográficas* began to arrive in Madrid. If in their day they served to gain a better knowledge of the American territories, today they are a rich source of information for the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. A specialist in Spanish history makes the following observation regarding this work:

Spanish officials in the Indies were bombarded with questionnaires. The most famous of these (although by no means the earliest) were the ones drafted in the early 1570s at the instigation of the president of the Council of the Indies, Juan de Ovando, to elicit a large amount of detailed information on the geography, the climate, the produce and inhabitants of Spain's American possessions. There was no obvious reason why a method of inquiry designed for the New

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**Andrés Bello, an outstanding Hispanic American intellectual of the nineteenth century.**

World should not be applied in the Old World too; and in 1574, after Juan de Ovando had moved to the presidency of the Council of Finance, a similar investigation was launched in Castile. (Elliott 1970, 36-37)

During the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries—in a remarkably mature society—men of science were so numerous that their learning afforded the Spanish colonies a high academic level. Many were Creoles, some outstanding. Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora was born in Mexico City in 1645. He was a nephew of the great Baroque writer Luis de Góngora, and his wide range of interests led him to devote himself to philosophy, history, mathematics, astronomy and engineering. Sigüenza y Góngora occupied the chair of mathematics at the University of Mexico, was granted the title of Royal Cosmographer and was in communication with European scientists. Modern critics consider him one of the most illustrious men that Mexico has produced. Another outstanding Mexican who lived in the eighteenth century was Juan Antonio

Alzate, who experimented in the fields of physics and natural sciences. Alzate used in his investigation the *Transactions* of the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, he translated several works by Benjamin Franklin and edited with other colleagues several newspapers devoted to science and literature. In 1772 the *Mercurio volante*, the first medical magazine published on the American continent, appeared.

Scientific activity during the eighteenth century spread throughout all of Spanish America. José Celestino Mutis, born in Spain in 1732, was intensively active for a long period of time. Mutis taught mathematics and astronomy, but his great contribution was in the field of botany. He bore chief responsibility for the *Expedición botánica* which for many years had as its purpose the study of South American flora north of the equator. Mutis, a contemporary of Linnaeus, had prestige in Europe, and among his disciples were Creoles such as Francisco José de Caldas, later the director of the Astronomical Observatory of Madrid, established in 1802 at Mutis' instance. Another of his Creole collaborators was Francisco Antonio Zea who also left for Spain and was appointed director of the Madrid Botanical Garden. Mutis' work on Colombian flora, illustrated with magnificent color drawings, is today a basic work for specialists.

The long life of Andrés Bello (1781-1865), one of the most outstanding figures in Spanish American culture, encompasses the Spanish period and the republican period. Bello was born in Caracas; he lived in London for nineteen years, and in Chile, where he died, for 36. Bello's life was an excellent synthesis of the history and destiny of the American continents in their Hispanic dimension. He participated in politics and was very close to Simón Bolívar during the decisive years of independence. He was a cultivated man who knew several languages. At a scholarly level, he was interested in Spanish medieval literature, was an expert in Spanish grammar and wrote excellent literary compositions praising his American lands. Intellectual curiosity led Bello to fields as diverse as history, education and philosophy. His great objective was the cultural integration of the young Spanish American nations on a foundation of respect for individuality and in connection with universal culture.

Perhaps the most significant examples of the spirit of the Enlightenment in Spanish America were the scientific expeditions organized by the Crown, sometimes in coordination with France or with the participation of scientists from other European countries. Between the years 1734 and 1744, French and Spanish scientists remained in South America as members of an expedition sent by the Academy of Science of Paris. Among its objectives was the exact measure-

ment of the Earth and determining whether it was a perfect sphere or flattened at the poles. These measurements were performed in territories of the present-day republic of Ecuador. The coasts of the American continents were also the object of considerable attention on the part of eighteenth-century scientists. These expeditions strengthened what was known up to that date and reached remote points such as Alaska and the South Pacific. The Royal Scientific Expedition to New Spain (1785-1800) had as a result the establishment of the Royal Botanic Garden in Mexico and this mission expanded its field of action to California, the Northwest, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Central America.

Alejandro Malaspina, an officer in the Spanish navy, headed an expedition which between 1789 and 1794 made a lengthy and fruitful tour. The two ships from this expeditions sailed from the Spanish port of Cádiz towards the South Atlantic, reaching the Río Plato region and, proceeding south along the coast, sailed around Cape Horn to the Pacific Ocean and covered all the American coast to Alaska, sailing south to the Mexican port of Acapulco afterwards. From this point, the two ships went to the Philippines, making stops at several Pacific islands. The amazing trip continued to New Zealand and Australia. From Sidney, the scientific expedition traveled to Perú and finally returned to Spain after five years of scientific research.

With these eighteenth-century expeditions, the American continents came under the scrutiny of European scientific observation. As had been the case with sixteenth-century Spaniards, America awakened the interest of researchers, who, in turn, paid back the favor with important discoveries. The vastness of Spanish America was open to the international scientific community, and the Crown, especially during the reign of Charles III (1759-1788), enthusiastically sponsored exploration and research, though without sufficient recognition. As Iris Engstrand notes,

One does not readily associate the history of New Spain with Europe's great age of cultural enlightenment; yet Spain's scientific achievement in the Americas during the late eighteenth century resulted directly from the advancement of knowledge in European centers of learning. The hope of the Spaniards, however, unlike certain of the French philosophes, was that the discovery and application of useful knowledge improve life in a practical way. (xi)

Translated by Silvia Novo Pena



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