

## COLONIAL AND INDEPENDENCE PERIODS

*Rutas de Cartagena de Indias a Buenos Aires y sublevaciones de Pizarro, Castilla y Hernández Girón, 1540-1570.* By PERO LÓPEZ. Transcription, annotation and preliminary study by JUAN FRIEDE. Preface by MARCEL BATAILLON. Madrid, 1970. Ediciones Atlas. Facsimiles. Pp. xiii, 120. Paper.

In the middle years of the sixteenth century, when thousands of Spaniards were engaged in occupying western South America and competing among themselves for its possession, a certain Pero López, as obscure as his name is commonplace, was vainly seeking position and wealth in one region after another from Colombia to Chile. The publication of López' narrative-geographical memoirs, written after his return to Europe, is not by itself a major historiographical event. But it relates to a historiographical turning point which the field as a whole should not let pass unnoticed.

One of the tasks confronting historians of colonial Latin America in the nineteenth century was to discover and publish the major formal writings of the period. There arose a breed of scholars who were more than anything else publishers of documents, at most commentators, whose prestige depended on the scope, excellence or spectacular nature of the documents found. In the twentieth century the vitality has gradually gone out of this kind of activity, as most of the monuments have become available in some form or other. In some Latin American countries a certain type of historian, often a wealthy bibliophile, continues to cultivate document publication almost as a hobby. But there has developed a feeling among many scholars that the remaining unpublished works, often short, informal and of small scope, are merely the bottom of the barrel, nor worthy of serious attention. Another tack has been to try to blow up minor chronicles into major ones. Neither reaction meets the historiographical need. "Minor" writings do deserve serious attention; they have just as much value as major formal writings, but of a different kind. They say far less about the march of events, less in general about outer realities, but more about the mentality and subjective experience of a general populace, in this case Spanish settlers. Juan Friede's present edition of the Pero López manuscript reflects a full grasp of the new necessities.

Friede has chosen to publish a "modernized" Spanish version, one retaining the original wording intact while employing modern orthography and punctuation. In my opinion, his choice was the right one;

such a version serves all the ordinary needs of the historian, can be quickly prepared and printed, and is comprehensible to a wider audience than a fully authentic version would be. The original orthography of an item like this is of no more intrinsic interest than any other hundred pages of text among the endless thousands in the archives.

In his introductory comments, Friede does what all editors of this kind of writing should do, that is, he refrains from overextolling the document's originality or accuracy. He has added many annotations referring to factual errors by Pero López, and warns the reader that many more are left unindicated. He makes clear that the document's contribution to knowledge of external events and conditions is small; here this reviewer would go even further. Friede points out correctly that the work's main value is the direct evidence it provides of Spanish settler psychology; that the writer's lack of official position and the fact that he did not address himself to the authorities are advantages. To Friede, Pero López is an average conqueror. I would agree, in the sense that López was a man of little prominence and a representative of one common type: the *soldado*, the man of above-average pretensions, articulateness and literacy, who must have his own *encomienda* or nothing. But there were other types equally common, from stewards to blacksmiths, and the one represented here happens to be the closest to a Prescott-style, romantic notion of the conqueror.

If we had a dozen writings of this length and informality, from a broader spread of types, we could proceed toward the writing of a quasi-popular intellectual history of the Spanish conquest period, analyzing cultural-intellectual conventions at the important middle level between standard behavior patterns and formal ideology. In the case of Pero López—and he strikes me as typical of ordinary Spaniards I have had occasion to study—the connection with Hispanic universal ideals of life is direct, while, as Friede points out, the concern with the formal ideology and morality of empire is nil. Pero López shows an intuitive, hard-headed grasp of local realities, a capacity for vivid episodic experience, and a near-total misunderstanding or neglect of “larger” issues. In all of this he seems like his fellows. His life and mind are most suggestive evidence of how the Spanish presence in America grew up out of the interaction of an environment with the individual needs and drives of settlers, rather than being planned and carried out by officials or priests.

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