

but in general it adds little to our theoretical and methodological understanding. That, of course, is not the book Kunimoto set out to write, so it would hardly be fair to consider it a failing.

JAMES P. ITO-ADLER, Florida International University

Sajcabaja: muerte y resurrección de un pueblo de Guatemala, 1500–1970. By JEAN PIEL. Mexico City: Seminario de Integración Social (Guatemala)/Centre d'Etudes Mexicaines et Centraméricaines, 1989. Maps. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. 456 pp. Paper.

Despite more than a decade of unprecedented attention to Central America, very few regional or local histories are yet available. It follows that Jean Piel's *Sajcabaja*, an ethnohistory of a minor highland Guatemalan municipality and one of the results of a French cultural mission to Guatemala during the 1970s, is particularly welcome.

But let the reader be warned: this is a great salad of a book, 450 pages of often poorly organized material, without, apart from vague and undefined references to “marginality,” evident theses. It is also irritatingly repetitive. In part this results from breaking the narrative into chronological divisions (preconquest to 1615, 1615 to 1820, and 1821 to 1964), and within each of these treating national, regional, and local history sequentially. Much of the general or national material—particularly the first two hundred pages of the book, which take the reader up to the 1760s—adds little to what is already known and should have been edited severely to focus more clearly on the more original regional and local analysis. Empirical overload threatens. Lists, charts, and tables seem to loom on every page. Some are useful and effective, but others are unclear about their sources (for example, p. 318) or indicate possible misunderstanding of those sources. A table on page 299, for example, confuses the question of economic crisis by lumping together single- and multiple-year statistics. Otherwise excellent maps contain labeling errors; compare, for example, pages 296–97 with pages 346–47. And Piel undermines his own credibility with elementary mistakes such as confusing the Indian inhabitants of Santa María Chiquimula (“chiquimulas”) with ladino immigrants from the Department of Chiquimula (pp. 342–45), or missing entirely the economic downturn after 1800 (p. 233).

Such problems notwithstanding, much is valuable here on topics as diverse as local religion and church-community contacts, disease and epidemics, population, ladino-Indian relations, and inter- and intracommunity conflict. *Sajcabaja* is particularly strong on land tenure and use. Guatemala's archives are rich in little-used land documentation, and the “ground-level” insights available to a researcher who has worked in one locality for an extended period can, and here do, greatly enhance the usefulness of such material. By contrast, Piel's treatment of labor is

egregiously bad and seriously undercuts his claims that San Andrés was “a municipality abandoned to itself” (p. 351) and “one of the ethnographic reserves . . . of Guatemala” (p. 355). While the author several times notes colonial-period labor migration to the Suchitepéquez coast, he misses entirely the forced recruitment from San Andrés after 1880 of dozens and perhaps hundreds of Indians a year to work on piedmont coffee plantations, and the effects of this on the community.

Sajcabaja is a book that all those interested in rural Central America will wish to read. It is regrettable that petty inaccuracies, poor organization, and inadequate editing threaten to vitiate so much worthwhile research. The Centre d'Etudes Mexicaines et Centraméricaines and the Seminario de Integración Social deserve thanks for bringing out this valuable work, but the author and the reader would have been better served by competent manuscript reviewers and more careful editors.

DAVID MCCREERY, Georgia State University

Spirits and Scientists: Ideology, Spiritism, and Brazilian Culture. By DAVID J. HESS. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. Notes. Appendixes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. xii, 260 pp. Cloth. \$29.95.

Brazilian spiritism (Kardecism), a product of nineteenth-century France identified variously as a science, a philosophy, and a religion, has been popular for 150 years, but until now has received little scholarly attention. Students of popular culture may have found it too intellectualized and academic, while those interested in “high” culture have spurned it for its belief in spirit communication and reincarnation. Now, however, in a thoughtful, provocative, and well-written study, anthropologist David Hess has accomplished for spiritism something of what Robert Darnton did for Mesmerism: he has taken it seriously as an intellectual system and as an entrée into contemporary Brazilian culture. The book focuses on spiritist discourse in the writings and public speeches of the movement’s college-educated professional elite. Influenced by the reflexive, dialogic approach in anthropology, Hess situates these discourses within a larger universe of discourse, the “ideological arena” of modern Brazil (p. 6). He explores the ways spiritist thought is shaped by and responds to the discourses of other participants in the arena—the Catholic church, Afro-Brazilian religions, orthodox doctors and scientists, social scientists, and members of international parapsychological and spiritualist communities.

The main body of the book consists of “dialogues” on such topics as insanity, parapsychology, and psychic surgery, in which spiritists’ positions are juxtaposed and contrasted with those of their opponents and contextualized in larger debates. In one such dialogue, concerning the causes and treatment for poltergeists, spiritists dispute with two divergent Catholic ideologues (a Franciscan who favors diabolical causation and recommends exorcism and a Jesuit who defends individual