

Social Assistance and Bureaucratic Politics: The Montepíos of Colonial Mexico, 1767–1821. By D. S. CHANDLER. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. Tables. Notes. Index. viii, 239 pp. Cloth. \$40.00.

D. S. Chandler's careful study of Mexican *montepíos*, state-run agencies that provided pensions for the families of deceased government employees, is a welcome addition to the literature on colonial Latin America. The creation of the *montepíos* in the 1770s was an important step in the development of a modern welfare system. Although the pension funds covered a limited group of people—the surviving widows, minor sons, and unmarried daughters of civil servants—they represented a new concept of social insurance. Through them the Bourbon state expanded its responsibility for supporting unproductive members of society, people who had previously been left to depend on their extended families, religious brotherhoods, or private and ecclesiastical charity. Social welfare institutions, which have attracted so much attention from European historians disenchanted with the welfare state, have been largely neglected for Latin America. This tight, well-documented monograph is one of a very few such studies, and the first of an American *montepío*.

Because the *montepíos* touched on many aspects of colonial life, this book has something to interest a wide variety of scholars. It illustrates the intricacies of bureaucratic politics, with the predictable jockeying between American and Spanish officials, both sides trying to maximize their benefits while minimizing their costs. It demonstrates the deficiencies in the colonial economy, for the *montepíos* had a hard time finding reliable places to invest their principal. It shows the politicization of lending, for *montepío* loans (the agencies' form of investment) usually went to those with good government connections. It suggests a tolerance of consensual unions and interracial coupling on the part of officials who had to approve the marriages that conferred pension rights. And, though the book's emphasis is less on the pension recipients than on the pension fund itself, those people occasionally emerge in entertaining episodes of deceptive borrowers, deathbed marriages to obtain pensions, and family feuds that required the intervention of *montepío* officials.

Perhaps this book is most compelling as a cautionary tale for those of us who would rely on our own social security system to furnish pensions in old age. The *montepíos* were constructed just like our system, with pensions paid from a fund to which all eligible employees contributed. They remained sound for the first two or three decades (two, in the case of the small ministers' fund, and three for the larger employees' fund). But then, as the numbers of recipients grew—living to collect much more than the deceased relative had ever paid in—the system went into crisis. Despite progressive increases in the deductions paid in and reductions of pensions from one-fourth to one-tenth of the insured's salary, the *montepíos* simply could not cover their costs. The pension system, already approaching bankruptcy by the opening of the nineteenth century, was dealt a death blow by the

independence wars. Thus the experiment in social insurance lasted only 50 years. Its study nonetheless provides useful lessons for social welfare agencies today, as well as new archival material that deepens our understanding of the expanding state and the functioning of the bureaucracy, economy, and society of late colonial Mexico.

SILVIA MARINA ARROM, Brandeis University

Región e historia en México (1700–1850): métodos de análisis regional. Compiled by PEDRO PÉREZ HERRERO. Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 1991. Graphs. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 263 pp.

As Pedro Pérez Herrero notes in his introduction, regionalism is an important phenomenon in Mexican history, but historians have seldom been careful to distinguish between areas, zones, regions, localities, and territories. If this collection can help to bring greater precision to our thinking and our writing, it will be a step forward. The volume consists of six essays on the theory and methodology of regional studies (all of which were previously published, though several were not in wide circulation or available in Spanish) plus two essays on aspects of regionalism in Mexican history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The dates in the title do not accurately reflect the contents: as in the historiography as a whole, the emphasis here is on Bourbon and Porfirian Mexico.

The six theoretical articles are offered to the reader as tools from various disciplines in the hope that one or another of them might prove useful. Luis González makes an eloquent case for parochial history as closer to the actual lives of human beings. Anthropologist Carol A. Smith's 1976 introduction to geographical models of regional economic systems is a classic summary of central place theory. In the best segue in the book, Eric Van Young brings geographical models together with empirical work on Mexican markets in an essay that illuminates both the theoretical and the practical.

Of course, historians are not the only ones who approach Mexico through regional studies. Guillermo de la Peña reviews the development of social anthropology in Mexico in the twentieth century (up to 1981, when his essay was first published). P. E. Ogden examines the overlapping realms of history, demography, and geography, particularly the French and British studies of family, fertility, mortality, migration, and mobility. Robert D. Sack adds a political perspective emphasizing the importance of authority to the definition of territory. The two essays that round out the collection propose models and hypotheses for investigation in Mexico. Pedro Pérez Herrero reviews the existing theories of solar and dendritic systems and the recent historiography of regional markets in Mexico, concluding that neither model alone adequately describes the variability in forms of market integration in late eighteenth-century Mexico; that the reality was com-