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To Defend Our Water with the Blood of Our Veins: The Struggle for Resources in Colonial Puebla. By Sonya Lipsett-Rivera. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999. xiv + 199 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth.)

The history of water in Mexico illustrates a complex of cultural and legal values and sentiments that reveals much about the process of indigenous and Spanish adaptations to the environment. For historians of water, the challenge has always been to discern and appreciate the nuances of Spanish water law while uncovering sufficient case studies that reflect both the subtleties of colonial jurisprudence and the water practices that permeated daily life. Moreover, the interdisciplinary dimensions of water research have provided some of the best studies of that most precious resource, as historians, anthropologists, hydrologists, and legal scholars draw on and share their respective methodologies, conceptual frameworks, and general expertise to fashion a comprehensive set of colonial legal principles and water practices. In turn, social scientists are now better equipped to explain the linkages between communities and the natural world, local power structures, and resource distribution, as well as the relationship between legal theory and daily practice.

Sonya Lipsett-Rivera's monograph, based in part on her doctoral dissertation at Tulane University, is a significant contribution to our understanding of colonial irrigation culture and local power arrangements in the semi-arid environs of the central Mexican highlands. Employing Puebla's countryside as a case study, she interprets a plethora of documentation from various local and national archives and libraries: judicial records, city council minutes, lawsuits, and printed manuscript sources. The author traces the evolution of *poblano* water culture, from its decentralized system of irrigation management in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the centralizing tendencies of the late-colonial period, which saw large landowners introduce informal bureaucracies to consolidate their access to and control of

water resources in rural Puebla. As external markets expanded during the era of the Bourbon Reforms, *poblano* estate owners increased cultivation to meet the needs of a growing regional economy. By doing so, however, these farmers upset the delicate ecosystem, denied water to smaller users, particularly Indian communities, and accumulated so many irrigation rights that they transformed themselves into water monopolists. Viewing the *poblano* countryside within a broad historical context, the author demonstrates that monopolistic practices were achieved not by any one individual at one particular time. Rather, they developed over time, as generations of large landholders continued the same monopolistic traditions that provided previous owners with so much water. These traditions included fostering alliances with local elites, political jockeying, legal manipulation, outright intimidation, and divide-and-conquer strategies. The resource base of many Indian towns and villages, therefore, diminished over time, disturbing the social fabric of community life as material conditions deteriorated.

Lipsett-Rivera conjures images that contrast sharply with Mexico's far northern frontier, where the arid landscape and scarce resources precluded water competitors from successfully establishing any long-term water monopolies. Moreover, Spanish law—in theory—prohibited individuals and corporations from exercising an absolute monopoly over natural resources. That some wealthy Spaniards, or well-to-do Indian communities, were able to circumvent the law reflected the relative strengths and weaknesses of local enforcement procedures rather than any preferred status afforded to them by virtue of their race or ethnicity.

This work fits nicely within the small yet growing research field of historical ecology. Her research complements, for example, Elinor G.K. Melville's work on the environmental history of the Mezquital Valley. The book also carves a strong niche for itself in the historiography of local power relations and political culture during the dynastic transition from Habsburg to Bourbon in Mexico. Within the literature on water, Lipsett-Rivera locates her work somewhere between those who have emphasized how water systems worked—Michael Murphy's research on irrigation networks in the Bajío, for example—and others whose research reveals the social and cultural dimensions of water use within a juridical framework informed by Hispanic law and legal traditions (for example, Michael Meyer's work on the colonial and early national periods of what is today the U.S. Southwest).

The author's discussion of the fundamentals of Spanish water law, however, reveals the difficulties of viewing the Hispanic water regimen through a modern lens tinted by common law notions of water rights rather than through a historical prism whose constituent parts are delineated by civil law. Lipsett-Rivera posits that Spanish water law, as developed in Spain and then brought over to Mexico in the sixteenth century, was based on the doctrine of prior appropriation. She also notes that "antiquity and legitimacy

of ownership were the fundamental basis of any claim to irrigation under the doctrine of prior appropriation" (p. 25). While the author cites some secondary works to underscore the paternalistic dimensions of the Spanish legal system, as well as the Spanish Crown's assertion that Indians enjoyed rights to irrigation, she provides no primary documentation to support her claim that Spanish water law was predicated upon prior appropriation. It would appear that the author confuses prior appropriation with prior use, one of several legal principles that Spanish irrigators, farmers, ranchers, and Indian communities employed to bolster their claims to water rights. Local judicial and political authorities also took into account prior use when adjudicating water disputes, although, once again, it was simply one of many variables involved in the legal process. Thus, the author transposes a juridical concept rooted in common law on a legal principle with foundations in Hispanic civil law. The corpus of Spanish jurisprudence did indeed recognize beneficial prior use of a water source as significant, but it never privileged "first in time, first in right" as common law does. Historians and other scholars of Hispanic law will challenge—with citations from both the statutory and case law—her assertion that Spanish water law was predicated upon the doctrine of prior appropriation.

Sonya Lipsett-Rivera has produced a well-written, comprehensive case study of irrigation culture and local politics in colonial Mexico. The book's many illustrations, maps, and graphs enliven her consistently smooth narrative. Students of colonial water regimes in central Mexico will want to examine her copious notes for important archival leads. The book also deserves to grace the shelves of university and college libraries, especially since its author eschews jargon in favor of language accessible to undergraduates.

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