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Vera S. Candiani, Dreaming of Dry Land: Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City

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devolving into narratives of victimization nor asserting a triumphant tale of unalloyed native agency. Avoiding facile binaries, she shows what was possible within a narrow range of options. While native peoples were subject to coerced labor, they could modify the form that coercion took. Once brought into the colonial fold, their residence options appeared similarly constrained. Yet they found ways to negotiate some freedom of movement without suffering punitive consequences. In many instances, she shows that native peoples had a thorough and nuanced understanding of legal conventions and could deploy those discourses to their best advantage. Perhaps, most importantly, Roller shows that native practice shaped the evolution of Crown policy, as authorities adapted to the limits that indigenous peoples set. In the end she shows that they acted strategically, were attentive to market incentives, and knew how far they could push the system.

The book's periodization ends just prior to the *Cabanagem*, the popular uprising that engulfed the Amazon from 1835-1840. Roller misses an opportunity to draw clearer connections between the relative lack of open revolt in the late colonial period and the prolonged violent upheaval wrought by the Cabano rebels. Instead, she leaves us with a suggestive epilogue that invites us to further interrogate the disjunctures between official historical narratives and a more fragmentary, elusive, documentary record that yields different and compelling stories.

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Dreaming of Dry Land: Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City. By Vera S. Candiani. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014. xxix + 376 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, index. \$60.00 cloth.)

In this original study, Vera S. Candiani challenges us to take a fresh look at the *Desagüe*, the two-century long Spanish endeavor to subdue the lacustrine environment around colonial Mexico City. Rather than asking why this project ultimately failed to protect the city from flooding, Candiani explores how the "social factors" (p. 7) surrounding this monumental engineering project impacted the decisions made by the thousands of engineers, friars, royal functionaries, and indigenous people responsible for its construction.

The first argument is that the *Desagüe* should be seen as a reflection of elite urban concerns over the safety of their property, rather than a universal concern for the common good. Unlike the indigenous communities of the basin, who saw the interplay between land, water, and seasonal flooding as "fluid," elite Spaniards attempted to "fix" the positions of these two in ways that reflected more "simplified" (p. 291) Spanish modes of land use that

reflected the exchange value they assigned to what the land produced, as opposed to the use value assigned by indigenous communities. The Crown, for its part, pursued two contradictory goals in establishing the system of "two republics" and pursuing the drainage of the lakes, since the former allowed Nahua communities to continue their multifaceted hydrological practices, while the latter disrupted them. Thus, the *Desagüe* "helped Hispanic commercial individual landownership at the expense of indigenous communal landholding" (p. 300) by fixing land and water in ways amenable to Spanish commercial modes of production.

The second argument is that the Spanish retention of Aztec draft labor under the *repartimiento* system meant that labor, although not unproblematic, was constantly available and cheap. Drawing from *Annales* scholars, Candiani sees the Mexican elite with their "rentier priorities" as betraying capitalist development by failing to mobilize capital to develop "national" markets or to "pursue any other economically generative purpose" (p. 308). However, Candiani points out that this did not mean that Spanish engineers were hopeless pre-moderns merely buried in irrelevant classical tracts. In her final and perhaps most interesting argument, she shows that below the class of titled *letrados* were many craftsmen, engineers, indigenous laborers, foremen, and functionaries who were, in their own way, deeply involved in the production and exchange of hydrological knowledge as they toiled in the trenches of the *Desagüe*.

The bulk of this book's evidence comes in the form of correspondence from viceroys, *oidores*, superintendents, and foremen involved in the project. Although the *Desagüe* has received considerable scholarly attention, much of this work has focused on the early development of the project and the immediate aftermath of the 1629 flood. Candiani's book goes well beyond this by looking at the changes in administration during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the influence of the reformist Bourbon monarchs and the Enlightenment, and the fascinating interlude from 1767-1788 when the project in its entirety was handed over to the merchant guild of Mexico City.

The author demonstrates an impressive understanding of the engineering and environmental concepts involved in this project. Candiani's analysis is enhanced by her broad readings on early modern hydrology that demonstrate how, despite its indigenous origins and the indigenous elements it incorporated, the Mexican *Desagüe* was very much a part of the larger European engineering tradition. This book will be useful to a broad range of scholars interested in environmental history, the history of science, and colonial Latin America more generally. Scholars interested in ethnohistory and culture may find the book's class focus a bit limiting, especially considering that, as James Lockhart and many others have shown, the word "communal" obscures more than it illuminates about Nahua land tenure, just as "private" does for early-modern Castilian practices. The persistence of communal indigenous holdings is not only explained by the system of "two republics,"

but also by the many parallels between Nahua and Castilian land tenure practices. Nevertheless, *Dreaming of Dry Land* is an impressive piece of scholarship that is likely to attract scholarly attention for some time.

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