

- Ethnohistory
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***Antropología histórica: La Audiencia de Guatemala en el siglo XVI.* Compiled and edited by Alfredo Jiménez. (Seville, Spain: Universidad de Sevilla, 1997. 411 pp., prologue, introduction, bibliography. 4,000 pesetas, paper.)**

In the late 1960s the Spanish scholar Alfredo Jiménez spearheaded an ambitious project in which he and a team of talented students, some now his colleagues, conducted pioneering investigations in the field of ethnohistory, which Jiménez defines succinctly as “historical anthropology” (15). From an academic base in the Seminario de Antropología Americana at the Universidad de Sevilla, the “Seville School” saw fit to focus its attention on the profound cultural changes that marked the colonial experience in sixteenth-century Guatemala. With the bounty of the Archivo General de Indias on their doorstep, and a group of skilled paleographers turning the contents of often recalcitrant documents into more accessible transcribed form, there was no shortage of untapped material from which to fashion doctoral dissertations and then scores of articles and books. The riches of the Seville archive, and those of other Spanish repositories, were supplemented by forays into the Archivo General de Centroamérica in Guatemala City, thus allowing a substantive textual foundation to shape and inform the complex story of how Maya lands and lives were altered by the actions of imperial Spain.

In *Antropología histórica*, Jiménez draws on the labors of seven researchers, himself included, and presents eighteen selections that appeared earlier in print either as self-contained essays in scholarly journals or as individual chapters in monograph-length studies. He divides these contributions into six thematic parts, providing the reader with a short introduction to each part to situate the selections in bibliographic and intellectual context. Part 1, the longest in the volume, Jiménez calls “Modos y maneras de conocer el pasado” and is mostly concerned with matters of methodology and the evaluation of sources. Part 2, “El transfondo peninsular,” outlines the principal socioeconomic features of sixteenth-century Andalusia, with special attention paid to Seville, which for two centuries served as Spain’s strategic gateway to the Americas, channeling people, goods, ideas, and commodities back and forth across the Atlantic from its inland port facilities on the banks of the Guadalquivir. Part 3 looks at the social and economic characteristics of early colonial Guatemala; part 4 examines aspects of the acculturation process; part 5 highlights the exercise of Spanish political power; and part 6 offers a glimpse at the influence of the Catholic Church on native life. First as mentor and later as editor, Jiménez set for himself and his followers a comprehensive goal. The end results reflect well on his initial vision and subsequent stamina to see the project through, especially since most members of the original research team afterward strayed far from the field of Guatemalan ethnohistory.

The whole, not surprisingly, amounts to somewhat less than the sum of its parts, an inevitable consequence of the fact that some contributions have weathered better than others. For instance, the works of Blanca Morell on sixteenth-century Seville, Pilar Sanchiz on ethnic relations, and Elías Zamora on native settlement patterns and resource use can still be considered recommended if not required reading. Less sustainable has been the research carried out on the *encomienda* by Salvador Rodríguez, whose analysis of the operation of this key institution has been superseded by the diligent archival sleuthing of [Wendy Kramer \(1994\)](#). And while the toil of Edward O’Flaherty did bear fruit, as did that of the late [Adriaan C. Van Oss \(1986\)](#), our knowledge of the Church’s impact on Indian ways remains decidedly superficial and sketchy. Several pieces in volumes 2 and 3 of the *Historia general de Guatemala*, edited by [Jorge Luján Muñoz \(1993, 1995\)](#), are the best we can do at the moment when assessing the Church’s role, but the six-volume collaboration can be profitably consulted for other topics also.

For anyone seriously interested in the study of colonial Guatemala, there is no alternative but to tackle, bit by bit, the Seville School’s prodigious output, for which Jiménez provides references in his bibliography. Those more disposed to gaining reasonable familiarity with a body of literature by a more economical deployment of precious reading time, however, may appreciate this retrospective compilation.

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