

region. R. S. Santley's closing chapter places the case study contributions in a more general demographic context, compares the methodologies developed in the lowland Maya region with those used in highland Mexico, and addresses future research directions.

Each contribution is well endowed with tables although there is little uniformity among the chapters as to what data or reconstruction figures are included. Some chapters include maps, but again there is little comparability among the maps regarding scale, coverage, and topical information, and their quality is uneven. Some chapters also contain tables and graphs of population estimates by date or ceramic period.

The authors and editors explicitly set out to "bring methodological issues to the fore" (p. 12) and to that end they have succeeded. In many places the discussion is narrow and technical, however, and this limits the book's usefulness to non-specialists. Further, many of the same issues and controversies regarding the creation of population estimates from archaeological data are treated anew in each chapter, although the explicit discussion of the relevant assumptions and special difficulties for each regional case is welcome.

A shortcoming of the book is that it is difficult to compare directly population estimates for different regions at a given date. While the editors provide a table of the sequence of relative proportional populations for the various case studies (pp. 34-35) by ceramic periods (Early, Middle, and Late Preclassic; Early, Late, and Terminal Classic; and Early and Late Postclassic), they do not provide Gregorian dates for these ceramic periods, nor do they provide absolute population figures. Similarly, Santley (p. 342) provides a graph of relative proportional populations for several regions by date, but no absolute population figures. Turner's estimates of populations for the most heavily settled central region partly overcomes these objections, but since almost all the contributors do provide population estimates, further clarification by the editors would have been welcome.

The usefulness of this book is also limited by the choice of case studies. Of the sixteen sites and rural regions discussed here, only seven had any settlement in the Late Postclassic (the period immediately before Spanish contact) and, for those that did, settlement was small. A broader selection of cases incorporating more regions and sites, including those that were settled at the time of Spanish contact, would present a more complete picture. Thus, these studies contribute little to understanding population and settlement at the time of Spanish contact, except perhaps to point out the extent of formerly settled territory that was virtually abandoned.

Despite these flaws, *Precolumbian Population History* is a significant and useful book. By emphasising the methodological problems and controversies, it provides insight into the sources of error in the difficult process of estimating populations from settlement remains. Similarly, these case studies point to the complexity of the task and, indeed, to the significance and complexity of pre-Columbian Maya settlement.

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JOHN K. CHANCE, *Conquest of the Sierra: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Oaxaca* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989. Pp. xvii + 233. \$34.50)

An interest in the exploration and depiction of regional diversity, historical geographers may be glad to know, is alive and well in the field of Mesoamerican studies. Defined territorially, the term Mesoamerica applies to a far-flung area which includes central and southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, the westernmost parts of Honduras and Nicaragua, and the Nicoya peninsula of Costa Rica. Given this enormous extent, one might anticipate long-standing awareness of regional diversity, but until recently this has not been so. The reasons for lack of awareness are many, most of them rooted in the fact that research on central Mexico greatly surpasses investigations conducted

elsewhere in Mesoamerica, resulting in a notable accumulation of knowledge about one core region and a patchy understanding, at best, about conditions in a vast periphery. Bit by bit, however, scholars have pushed south from central Mexico to illuminate patterns of land and life beyond the core, especially during the colonial period. John Chance's "historical ethnography" (p. xvi) of the Sierra Zapoteca, an isolated region in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, forms part of this southward drift, and joins a growing body of literature that portrays a markedly different colonial experience from the one that prevailed farther north.

After an introductory chapter sets the scene, five reconstructions examine, in turn, the chronology and institutions of conquest, population and settlement, economic activity, native community organisation, and religion. The five distinct ethnolinguistic groups who occupy the Sierra Zapoteca were never conquered by the Aztecs. When the Spaniards arrived, in 1521, they found the region "in a state of total war" (p. 13), with all three Zapotec groups fighting against the Mixes, the Bixano Zapotecs threatening their Chinantec neighbours. A united Indian opposition was never mounted, but so fierce were hostilities between groups of natives and newcomers that it took thirty-five years of combat for Spanish authority to materialise. Even then, Indian uprisings caused no end of bother, none more so than the Mixe rebellion of 1570, which was directed not just against the Spaniards but against the hated Zapotecs, the Mixes' arch enemies. Chance sketches a particularly traumatic and protracted conquest scenario, one which hampered effective Spanish colonisation considerably.

Villa Alta, the settlement founded by the Spaniards as their base of operation and control, Chance describes as having "a makeshift character more reminiscent of a trading post than a permanent community" (p. 45). No Potosí this place, but rather a dismal, backwater town where a handful of foreign "parasites" were so dependent on Indian labour that, by the end of the seventeenth century, they "still had not learned how to repair the leaky roofs on their houses" (p. 45). Seldom inhabited by more than 150 Spaniards, Villa Alta presided over a region where the native population plummeted from about 345,000 at contact to only 21,500 by 1595. Chance comments that "most of the depopulation can undoubtedly be attributed to epidemic disease" (p. 68), but his sources do not permit a chronology of disease outbreaks to be established. Native population declined into the early seventeenth century. With the withering of the human resource base disappeared all hope of material enrichment, for Spaniards clearly understood, especially in a region of little gold or silver where commercial agricultural options were also decidedly limited, that the Indians constituted the real wealth of the land.

By the time native population began to recover, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Spaniards had devised a system of economic extraction that might never make them wealthy but would certainly make ends meet. Under the *repartimiento de efectos* or *mercancías*, cotton textiles and cochineal dye were produced by Indians compelled to work by brute force, not lured into action by the glitter of the market place. As long as Indian communities delivered the goods, Spaniards left their exploited charges much to themselves, with important consequences, over the long run, for native cultural survival.

Chance has done a remarkable job in combing the archives and weaving his findings into a detailed picture of relations between Spaniards and Indians in a region of Mesoamerica hitherto beyond the pale. What happened under Spanish rule to the peoples of the Sierra Zapoteca is consistently compared, or contrasted, with other parts of Mexico, imparting a fuller, more nuanced sense of historical experience. The overall result is impressive, even if, at times, a rather lacklustre style of writing makes for a plodding, dispassionate read.