

diseases transmitted by Europeans to the Americas and a demolition of the myth of 'a highly destructive post-Columbian pandemic of syphilis' in Europe (p. 244). Alas for Montezuma's revenge! Some of these themes are pursued further by Linda Newson in her comprehensive discussion of the demographic collapse of the native populations of the Americas. After a critical survey of the various estimates of the pre-Columbian levels, she carefully evaluates other factors (the impact of conquest, the disruption of customary ways of life, forced labour, general European brutality) besides those unfamiliar diseases which brought about so fearsome a destruction of humankind.

The book is rounded off with a scrappy essay by Warwick Bray on the well-worn theme of the impact of the New World on the economic and intellectual life of Europe. This covers much less ground than might be expected, taking, for example, no account of the new oceanic commerce which sprang up between Europe and the New World and its profound repercussions which were already making themselves felt by the mid-1600s. Instead, we have a somewhat breathless chronicle of various new commodities introduced into the Old World from the Americas, amongst which it is surprising to encounter salt cod, a staple of European commerce (chiefly from the North Sea and Iceland) for centuries before Columbus. The remainder of the chapter, steering clear of such unsavoury consequences of empire as racism, follows the course already well charted by writers such as J. H. Elliott (*The Old World and the New, 1492-1650*, which first appeared in 1970) and Grafton et al. in *New Worlds, Ancient Texts*, to reach the unexceptionable and familiar conclusion that Europe viewed the New World through the haze of its own preconceptions and appropriated the Americas to its own ends. All in all, rather more substance might have been expected from so august a body as the British Academy commemorating so notable an event.

Pembroke College, Cambridge

G. V. SCAMMELL

OAKAH L. JONES, JR. *Guatemala in the Spanish Colonial Period*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. Pp. xxi, 344. \$38.95 (US).

MORE HAS BEEN written about Central America over the past two decades than at any time in the region's long and turbulent history. Most of what recently appeared in print did so in response to necessary efforts to come to grips with the political crises of the 1980s, the deep-rooted causes of which are commonly acknowledged. Ongoing problems in the region only highlight the need for solid, accessible works that serve to communicate between the scholarly community and the general public, especially works that seek to

illuminate present conditions by examining the legacy of the past. The goal is worthy and vital. Successful execution, though difficult, is not impossible, as the work of Robert Carmack, James Dunkerley, Walter LaFeber, and Carol Smith admirably attests.

To his credit, Oakah Jones, Jr. tries hard, but falls short of the mark on a number of counts. There is, first, his unfortunate knack for factual error, troubling for the specialist, deluding for the reader unfamiliar with the terrain. He is just not careful enough with the basics to earn one's confidence when tackling complexity. One example must suffice. In terms of colonial-period geography, Soconusco was eventually 'lost' by Guatemala not to El Salvador (p. 164) but to Mexico, where it today forms part of Chiapas. There is, second, his penchant to recount history in conventional institutional terms, predictable to the initiated, dull and monotonous to the novice. A good deal of what Jones has to say is also rather antiquated, many of his topics having been subjected to considerable revision over the past ten to fifteen years. Just as 'the ruins of Kaminaljuyú' (p. 12) no longer lie 'on the outskirts of today's Guatemala City' – they have long since been absorbed by the capital's relentless urban sprawl – so, too, have the fields of Maya archaeology and ethnohistory undergone a radical intellectual revolution since the fossilized depiction of them in the author's opening chapter.

What the reader gets, therefore, is not a stimulating, cutting-edge synthesis but traditional, mouldy fare, from the 'personal combat' (p. 20) in 1524 between Pedro de Alvarado and Tecúm [sic] Umán to Guatemalan independence from Spain in 1821, a move brought about 'by a small portion of its people serving its own interests, not by the majority of the population, who were never consulted' (p. 263). In between conquest and secession, Jones leads us through lugubrious discussions of administration and government, the role of the Church, ethnic relations, land and labour, settlement and colonization, economic development, social and cultural life, demographic trends, natural disasters, and military preoccupations. Three hundred pages of text pass as wearily for the reader as three hundred years of history must have done for the Maya.

If any country warrants more engaged treatment, it is surely Guatemala. More than twenty years have passed since Murdo MacLeod published his landmark work on Spanish Central America. MacLeod's contribution endures as the premier history of the region available in English, but even he would acknowledge that the time is ripe for more innovative, if not alternative, interpretations of the Central American colonial experience. Numerous options exist from which to glean potential inspiration: Inga Clendinnen, Nancy Farriss, Grant Jones, and Robert Patch have written with flair and insight on the lowland Maya; William Fowler, Carolyn Hall, and Linda Newson have done the same for those parts of Central America inhabited by

non-Maya peoples. Two ambitious Spanish-language projects are also available, the six-volume *Historia General de Centroamérica* orchestrated by Edelberto Torres-Rivas and the five-volume *Historia General de Guatemala*, assembled under the far-sighted stewardship of Jorge Luján Muñoz. All these works contain a wealth of new information as well as fresh approaches to the study of history. Central America, Guatemala in particular, stands only to benefit from future attempts to distil the essence of scholarly research into manageable, palatable form for public as well as academic consumption. What Jones endeavours but fails to accomplish is still deserving of attention.

Queen's University

W. GEORGE LOVELL

DAVID DELISON HEBB. *Piracy and the English Government, 1616-1642*. Aldershot, UK: Scolar Press, 1994; dist. Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company. Pp. xv, 303. \$76.95 (US).

IN GENERAL, THIS book is a significant contribution to our knowledge of early-modern British maritime, administrative, and political history. In particular, it is vigorously written, rigorously researched, consistently interesting as to the narrative, sharp and pointed as regards the analysis. Accordingly, I both enjoyed and profited from reading it. Nothing in what follows is intended to – nor should it – detract from its author's achievement. Yet I found myself in lively disagreement with his ideas and assumptions from the first page. Here Hebb makes three categorical assertions. First appears a discursive emphasis on the conventional 'legal' distinction between piracy and privateering; second, a claim that in the popular historical imagination, the English are thought of as a people much given to piracy; and third, the (therefore) ostensibly revisionist reading is advanced that – at least in the period under review – they were in fact much more the victims than the practitioners of piracy.

None of these premises seems completely sound, and the author's insistence (in his title and throughout) on use of the ethnocentric term 'English' is only part of the problem. The legal distinction referred to is slippery because it is essentially a political construction produced by a partisan-nationalist historicism and having validity only within this culture. It is no accident that it crystallized with the appearance of parties and the Whiggish generation of a proto-Jacobite 'other' (it was very unformed in the earlier seventeenth century). The word 'privateering' itself was coined by a Welshman whose career and fortune were tied to the (relatively) new Anglo-British state. At the risk of implying a species of political correctness to which I do not necessarily subscribe, it may be argued that the 'privateering-piracy' distinction also forms part of the privileged discourse of western European