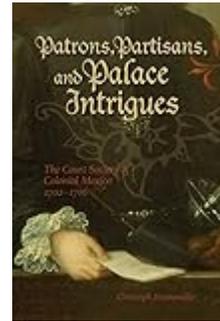


Christoph Rosenmüller. *Patrons, Partisans, and Palace Intrigues: The Court Society of Colonial Mexico, 1702-1710.* Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2008. x + 278 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55238-234-9.



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Nothing New under the Sun? Viceregal Power in New Spain under the New Bourbon Dynasty

This book is a welcome addition to the historiography of power in colonial Spanish America, since it focuses on a topic—the functioning of the viceregal court in Mexico—rarely investigated by colonial historians, although the study of royal and princely courts has been quite popular among historians of early modern European societies for several decades now. The field of court studies has contributed to changing our understanding of the ways in which power and the state operated in early modern societies. Some historians have even contended that the court rather than the state is the institution on which early modern historians of power need to focus, since the impersonal concept of the state had not yet entered the political imagination of the period. As these historians have amply demonstrated, one of the fundamental mechanisms of court power was the creation of networks of patronage and clientelism that helped early modern monarchs and princes maintain their power and authority at a time when the power of formal institutions was not completely objectified and their functioning was often erratic. Christoph Rosenmüller is well acquainted

with this literature and he sets out to demonstrate the extent to which colonial Mexico was ruled in a similar way as its European counterparts. Rosenmüller's work can also be seen as part of a trend among colonial historians that increasingly recognizes that, to comprehend the Spanish domination of the New World, it is necessary to understand how power circulated between the two sides of the Atlantic.

Rosenmüller's study concentrates on a short albeit significant period in the history of the viceroyalty of New Spain, the years of the Duke of Albuquerque's government between 1702 and 1710. Albuquerque, one of Spain's *grandees*, was appointed by the embattled new Bourbon king Philip V to appease pro-Habsburg aristocrats at the Madrid court (his grandfather had been appointed viceroy of New Spain by Philip IV in the 1650s). In that regard, Albuquerque did not represent any break with the past, as he would rule the viceroyalty based on the same principles and practices as his predecessors had for almost two centuries. Those principles and practices are reviewed in the first two chapters of the book, which

can be considered as a general introduction to the political culture of the Spanish Empire and the court culture of New Spain. Chapters 4 and 5 are perhaps the most significant, as in them the author examines in detail how Albuquerque put in practice those principles by developing networks of patronage after his arrival in Mexico that helped him control the territory and sustained his power. The most important way to develop these networks was through the appointment of officials (mostly *alcaldes mayores* or district magistrates, but also treasury and military officials). Albuquerque also established ad hoc alliances with different segments of colonial society, notably with merchants who were heavily invested in the contraband trade. In so doing, he situated himself against the merchants who controlled the Mexican *consulado* (the merchant guild that both in Seville and Mexico controlled the annual fleets and that most benefited from the legal trade system). Rosenmüller's study contributes to dispelling the idea that animosity between peninsular and Creole Spaniards existed in Mexico almost by definition. The author shows how the networks of patronage and clientelism included both peninsulars and Creoles and that the conflicts that erupted in colonial Mexico over political and economic matters were driven by heterogeneous networks and not by a permanent confrontation between peninsular and Creole Spaniards, as the traditional historiography used to emphasize.

In chapter 6, the author discusses the extent to which the inhabitants of New Spain, or at least its ruling elites, supported the new dynasty. Although some historians have argued that there was Mexican support for the Habsburg pretender as evidenced in the existence of several plots uncovered by the viceroy, Rosenmüller rejects this argument and concludes that Albuquerque's allegations cannot be taken at face value, since the accusations of disloyalty had more to do with personal vendettas than with any actual opposition to the new dynasty. An analysis of the sources shows that the allegations of disloyalty to the Bourbon king were actually part and parcel of a clash between two rival networks, one of which received the support of the viceroy. In the course of this clash, the viceroy would end up in conflict with the archbishop of Mexico and with some judges of the *Audiencia* (High Court) of Mexico. But these clashes with the supreme religious authority of the viceroyalty and the justices of the High Court were a constant characteristic of the history of New Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and had very little to do with their actors' loyalty or disloyalty toward the Spanish monarch.

Patrons, Partisans, and Palace Intrigues shows that Al-

buquerque conducted himself in government in very similar ways as his predecessors did and he got involved in the same conflicts with the secular and religious authorities of the viceroyalty as previous viceroys had. But his fall from royal favor sets Albuquerque's story apart from seventeenth-century viceroys. During the entire seventeenth century, no one single viceroy was seriously penalized by the Crown because of the transgressions in which they engaged during their mandates. Although some viceroys were fined large sums as a result of their *juicios de residencia* (the customary judicial review of royal officials at the end of their term of office), the Crown usually reduced greatly or entirely cancelled those fines after the viceroys appealed to the king's clemency. In Albuquerque's case, however, things were rather different: while the judge who conducted his judicial review exonerated him, the Crown considered that the charges against him were too serious for a pardon. As a result, it was suggested to Albuquerque that a donation of seven hundred thousand pesos would help him avoid the embarrassment of his prosecution at Court. Rosenmüller contends that the harsh penalties imposed not only on Albuquerque but also on the former viceroy of Peru, the Duke of La Monclova (in 1705 the Crown had confiscated one million pesos from the estate of the deceased viceroy), can be seen as an example of the reformist impulses of the new dynasty, intent on tightening its control over the viceroys. But it could also be argued that these stiff monetary penalties were just an expedient way to raise large sums of money in troubled times. The author himself argues in the conclusion that Philip V made no effort to restrain Albuquerque's power of patronage, an assertion that belies the idea that the new dynasty wanted to limit viceregal power.

As a general conclusion, Rosenmüller argues that in the period under study we can already observe the reformist impulse that would lead to the more determined reforms of the late eighteenth century, known as the Bourbon reforms. However, the author does not offer much evidence to support this claim, and I would argue that what his study actually demonstrates is that in the first decade of Bourbon rule things changed very little, if only because the new rulers were just learning the particularities of Spanish imperial political culture. They also were busy enough trying to stay in power as the War of Spanish Succession raged on in the peninsula for them to be able to engage in serious reform. Given the interest shown by the author in finding evidence that foreshadows the reformist urges of the Bourbon rulers of the second half of the eighteenth century, the narrow temporal

focus of the book does not help much to make the point. Perhaps this comes as the main shortcoming of the book. Should the author have extended his study to the entire first half of the eighteenth century, he would have been able to get a clearer picture of the changes brought in viceregal government by the new ruling dynasty or lack thereof. The focus on those eight short years becomes even more inexplicable in light of the author's numerous references to the government of viceroys Linares and Casafuerte, who ruled in the 1710s and 1720s. A more il-

luminating study would have included a comparison, for example, between Albuquerque and Casafuerte, who, as the author himself observes, belonged to a new type of viceroy drawn from the ranks of the lesser nobility (*hidalguía*) rather than from those of the titled aristocracy (p. 22). Such a comparison would have allowed the author to clearly discern the extent to which a reformist impulse was already present during the time of Albuquerque's rule.

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