



Enrique Llopis, Carlos Marichal, eds. *Latinoamérica y España, 1800-1850: Un crecimiento económico nada excepcional.* Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2009. 295 pp. EUR 22.99 (paper), ISBN 978-84-96467-92-7.

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Economic Ties That Bind

What fate befell the new states that emerged from the wreckage of the Spanish empire? In what ways did the legacy of colonial institutions shape the trajectory of these states after independence? And how did Spain's economy respond to being shorn of its colonies? The edited volume reviewed here brings together several eminent economic historians of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Spain and Spanish America to shed welcome light on these large questions. Although at first glance this research agenda may seem beyond the purview of Atlantic history, it beckons toward a world in which transoceanic connections, at least initially, became attenuated if not obliterated. Nevertheless, *Latinoamérica y España, 1800-1850*, just published by the fine Spanish publisher Marcial Pons, is highly recommended to Atlanticists because of its provocative contribution to long-standing debates and also because it strives to bring the historiographies of Spain and Latin America into dialogue.

In their introduction, editors Enrique Llopis and Carlos Marichal reject the notion that the decades following independence were "lost decades" (p. 11). While conceding that certain aspects of the colonial heritage proved difficult to shake off and that other factors—geographic barriers and, in certain places, poor natural resource endowments—stymied growth, they refuse to accept that these obstacles were insuperable, as other historians have. Pointing to Argentina, Cuba, and Uruguay

in particular, they draw attention to impressive demographic and economic growth rates in certain parts of Latin America. Even in Mexico, they argue, the gross domestic product (GDP) was not as moribund as it is sometimes depicted. In a conclusion echoed by all of the contributors to the volume, Llopis and Marichal protest against the tendency to generalize about "Latin America" as a whole. They even suggest that most interesting research is conducted, sector by sector, at the regional, not the national, level. When such subnational units are scrutinized, the editors argue, older conceptions of Latin America's purported economic backwardness or laggard pace dissipate.

When the editors turn to Spain's economic trajectory in the 1815-50 period, they offer a similar argument. They admit that Spain's growth paled in comparison to, say, that of Britain. But they contend that the peninsular economy had quickened, growing discernibly faster than it had in the eighteenth century. Moreover, they suggest, when judged alongside other southern European economies, Spain's performance was strikingly credible. And, they indicate, the gap between the Mediterranean coast's rate of growth and that of the interior of the peninsula decreased significantly in the decades after the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

The six essays included in the volume follow the arguments sketched in the editors' introduction, though the detail fleshes out ideas to which Llopis and Marichal

can only gesture. The essays make for absorbing reading. In his essay on Argentina, for example, Jorge Gelman warns scholars not to exaggerate the deleterious impact of the wars of independence, pointing to the robust nature of the post-independence economy. Ernest SÁnchez SantirÁ³ makes a complementary point in his essay on Mexico, tossing aside the notion of that country’s desperate condition in the wake of the wars of independence. Instead, he contends, the process of recovery, though slow and wildly varied across regions and sectors, was fairly steady in aggregate throughout the 1830s and 1840s. In what is a tantalizing subplot, he makes the case that Mexico’s economic performance followed the same pattern from the late 1820s until the mid-1850s, thus disputing what he describes as the traditional view which portrays the war with the United States as a crucial conjuncture. In a fascinating essay coauthored with Luis JÁ¼aregui on political economy in the early Mexican Republic, Marichal points out that for much of this period, many facets of the old regime’s fiscal apparatus went untouched and in fact, were increasingly relied on after independence. Many types of colonial taxes were not abolished. Instead, their collection was delegated to state governments. The *alcabala* (sales tax), for example, remained the principal source of income for a large number of Mexico’s states well beyond mid-century. In his essay on nineteenth-century Spain, coauthored with JosÁ© Antonio SebastiÁ;n Amarilla, Llopis lays out a subtle, but innovative, argument for the relatively modest impact of the dissolution of most of the Spanish empire on the peninsula itself.[1] He argues that the timing of Spain’s mild nineteenth-century economic resurgence may be dated from the end of the peninsular war and the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in 1814, a change that he attributes directly to the fact that more land was brought under cultivation. This change occurred, of course, a full decade before the formal end of Spain’s dominion in the Americas, raising the question to what degree the end of empire had an impact on Spain’s economy. We can infer from Llopis and Amarilla’s discussion that whatever ill effects were felt, they were compensated for by Spain’s new productive sectors.

The final essay in the volume is especially stimulating and deserves extended treatment. Written by Rafael Dobado GonzÁ¼lez, it directly takes up the question of the impact of the colonial heritage on post-independence Latin America’s economy. Atlanticists will be familiar with Stanley and Barbara Stein’s observation that “within the variety of the nineteenth-century historical

experience one detects large outcroppings of the colonial heritage, symptoms of its survival under favorable conditions, a claim sustained by the examination of many areas of political, cultural, and economic life after 1825.[2] But what Dobado targets in his analysis is the Spanish empire’s economic legacy. This theme is remarkably topical because, beyond the discipline of history, there remains a deeply entrenched notion that the colonial legacy impeded Latin America’s growth and affected it unfavorably, particularly when compared with the United States. The colonial inheritance is blamed for, among other ills, the persistent poverty and high levels of income inequality that afflicts many Latin American countries today. This alleged connection between Spanish colonialism and economic development, Dobado asserts, is so pervasive that it should be thought of as a “new orthodoxy.”[3]

Dobado examines some of the historical evidence and concludes that the responsibility for Latin America’s growth trajectory cannot be placed squarely on colonialism’s shoulders. Perhaps the most interesting insight he offers is that economic inequality in colonial Spanish America was not higher than in other parts of the Western Hemisphere. Levels of inequality increased dramatically after independence, a change that can hardly be attributed solely to colonialism. Dobado concludes by suggesting that “excessive simplification and generalization” has led to distortions of the past (p. 286).

This is an important collection. It is a reminder that Atlantic historians neglect insights gleaned from economic history at their peril. The end of empire, in both the Old World and the New, undoubtedly unleashed forces whose impact continues to be felt. The aftershock of empire was ubiquitous, often producing insidious consequences. But larger, subterranean, structural trends, Llopis and Marichal remind us, cannot be ignored. In fact, the insights into post-colonial economics offered in Llopis and Marichal’s volume should prod Atlantic historians to consider afresh the colonial institutions whose legacies may have been more varied, and fraught with ambiguities, than we previously thought.

Notes

[1]. The Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba were retained and played a crucial function in both the economy and politics of Spain throughout the nineteenth century. See Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Anti-Slavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833-1874* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).

[2]. Stanley Stein and Barbara Stein, *The Colonial Her-*

itage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Independence in Perspective (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 159.

[3]. Among the authors that Dobado cites as exponents of this "new orthodoxy," the work of Daron

Acemoglu and his collaborators stands out. See Daron Acemoglu, with Simon Johnson and James Robinson, "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation," *American Economic Review* 91 (2001): 1369-1401.

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