



Kris Lane. *Quito 1599: City and Colony in Transition.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002. xx + 288 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-2356-9; \$23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8263-2357-6.



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Variety and Ambiguity in Colonial Quito

In a standard history of the Spanish kingdom of Quito, in the colony of New Spain, one would expect to find an account of the Inka empire, its conquest by the Pizarros, the establishment of a colonial government, and the political and economic incorporation of the region into the Spanish Empire. Suffice it to say that *Quito 1599* is not that kind of history: the galleons and conquistadors of Philip II's world empire are barely part of the scenery. Instead, we find an entirely different cast of characters. In Kris Lane's *Quito*, an *audiencia* judge commissions a portrait of an Afro-Amerindian man and his sons, and a former slave petitions the king to recognize him as governor of a small coastal province. A penniless Flemish tradesman invests in wine and amasses a fortune, while a bedraggled band of shipwrecked Spaniards and African slaves wanders through the coastal jungle for weeks and a wealthy widow considers an agreement to produce textiles on her Quito estate for the mines at Potos. What do they have to offer, these minor figures who inhabited a small and faraway corner of Spain's great empire during a brief window of time? A great deal, as it turns out: Lane has given us a sort of history inside out, a kaleidoscopic collection of fragmentary stories and glimpses into indi-

vidual lives that nevertheless bear out his argument that in many ways "Quito's experience was but the empire's in miniature" (p. 167).

Each chapter begins with one of these colorful fragments, and then steps back to explore the network of relationships, interests, and motivations behind it. Lane has constructed the book as "a series of narrative journeys," each overlapping in some way with the rest (p. 21). This all becomes rather convoluted, but so is the history itself, and Lane does it credit by not oversimplifying or neglecting any of the perspectives involved. Chapter 1 illustrates the challenges of colonial administration through Quito's repeated (and generally unsuccessful) attempts to gain control of the small coastal province of Esmeraldas, the domain of a motley band of shipwreck survivors, escaped slaves, and local indigenous peoples. Chapter 2 turns its focus to African slavery in the city and provinces of Quito, a topic that has not yet received much attention from historians. Lane's brief foray into this territory yields a valuable sketch of the origins of African slavery in Quito (and the geographical origins of the slaves themselves), the wide variety of slave occupations, the

possibilities for acquiring freedom, and how slaves were perceived and described by their owners and sellers.

Chapter 3, a journey through Quito's indigenous communities, is particularly valuable for its resistance of simple Spanish/native categorizations. Though in the eyes of the Spanish administration the native peoples were "reduced to *quanta* called 'Indians,'" Lane reveals the rich variety within indigenous societies and their historical experience (p. 87). Sections on the strategies of native lords, merchant women, and working men demonstrate the needs of colonial *encomenderos* alongside native expressions of willpower and agency in the form of resistance, artful adaptation, and collaboration. Particularly interesting is the section on merchant women: since a loophole in Spanish tax exemptions meant that single native women had no tax or tribute burdens (resulting, ironically, in the desire of women of mixed heritage to portray themselves as fully indigenous for tax purposes), they actually had greater economic freedom than their male counterparts, who were subject to the labor drafts and tribute payments of the *mita* and *encomienda* systems.

Chapter 4 turns to the Quito gold mines, blending vivid descriptions of mountain gold camps with tables of yearly gold production from 1548-1639 and a careful reading of accounts of a possible indigenous revolt provoked by the mines' insatiable need for labor. Chapter 5 examines trade, illustrating the ways in which *encomienda* labor and credit powered a thriving local and international economy, again with captivating examples of the schemes and adventures of individual *encomenderos*, shopkeepers, and merchants. Chapter 6, starring pirates, soldiers, and cannibals, demonstrates the

difficulties of evolving out of a conquistador economy. Many decades after the Spanish conquest, those accustomed to the soldier's life continued to seek opportunities to prove their valor and win recognition and *encomiendas* from the crown, even to the extent of refusing to fortify coastal defenses so as not to lose any opportunity to fight off pirates.

Much more than a two-dimensional snapshot of a city during one year of its history, *Quito 1599* reveals the dynamism and complexity of this small colonial kingdom. This book is based on extensive archival research, and Lane's approach to his documents is unfailingly sensitive and nuanced. All of the vignettes combine to enhance the larger picture, but the details ensure that that picture is indelibly human and memorable. This is not a comprehensive study of politics, slavery, indigenous culture, gender, or colonial economy, but it will yield valuable nuggets for scholars in all of these fields, and it is supplemented by a carefully selected and current bibliography. While the focus is on one small province, Lane is careful to highlight both the elements that were unique to this region and those that echoed the experiences of the empire as a whole.

While the writing of history is most frequently an endeavor to impose order on the past, Lane is wary of facile categorizations and welcomes the past in all its chaos and ambiguity. As a consequence, *Quito 1599* provides a valuable counterpart to histories of colonial structures and institutions. It shows us the visions, ambitions, and frustrations of an extraordinary variety of colonial inhabitants, and in doing so it demonstrates above all the permeability of the boundaries between Europeans and Africans and Indians, rulers and ruled, enslaved and free.

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