

is not only able to revise Wolf's treatment of the Mayas and Aztecs, but also provides an interesting discussion of more peripheral civilized peoples and successfully integrates them with the two main-line civilizations. She also discusses the non-urbanized populations to the north and south of the Mesoamerican core. It is this treatment of the pre-Colombian period which is the most valuable section of the book as it brings within the reach of a non-specialized audience the recent scholarly literature in the field.

Her treatment of the colonial period is somewhat less successful. Her discussion of rural society is compelling enough, and she manages to avoid some of the more extreme conclusion which are often drawn from the works of Black Legendists. Even here, however, Helm's account of the fate of the Indian communities is overly brief. On the less positive side, her treatment of urban society is shallow. The mechanism whereby took place the transfer of Iberian society to the New World, and European techniques to the Indians, are inadequately broached. It all results from too traditional a view as to what the immediate post-conquest Spanish colonial society was like. It was certainly more entrepreneurial and less monolithic in its aristocratic character than she would have us believe.

Even more significantly there is an inadequate presentation of the economic history of the area. The seventeenth century is here simply an era of depression and the eighteenth one of growth. Such simplification precludes any meaningful evaluation of the impact of Middle America's changing relations with Europe on the fate of the Indians of the region. This despite the fact that in the work of such scholars as Bakewell, Hamnett, and Taylor we have a good deal of evidence on the subject. On the more positive side, her discussion of the southern periphery of the region is unique in a work of this kind, and quite welcomed.

Helm's treatment of the national period has weaknesses and strengths. Her discussion of the lowland areas of Central America brings light to bear on a region too often ignored, and her treatment of the fate of the rural Indian communities at the hands of nineteenth century liberals, although brief, is quite well done. The same can be said of her presentation of more recent phenomena such as the Mexican Revolution. Unfortunately, the relation between these changes and the participation of Middle America in the world economy is never explored.

It is clear from her discussion of the entire postconquest period that she is far better informed on Mexico than on the rest of the area. This, however, is less a feature of the book than the existing historiography. It is too Helms' credit that she tries to balance the geographical bias of her sources by giving a good deal of space to the different social situations to be found in the various Central American countries. Her own particular expertise on the lowland areas of the eastern coast serves her very well here.

On balance this is not the kind of work which is likely to be entirely satisfactory to historians. As in the case of most anthropological treatments in dealing with the post-Columbian period this book concentrates entirely too much on the rural as opposed to the urban, the oppressed as opposed to the oppressors. Given the limitations of this type of work, however, this is quite a good textbook.

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ALAIN CROIX. — *Nantes et le pays nantais au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle: Étude démographique.* «Démographie et Société», XV. Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1974.

During the last twenty-five or thirty years our knowledge of population movements in France over the last two centuries of the Ancien Régime has increased dramatically. By comparison the sixteenth century remains an enigma. Parish registers were not kept before the Council of Trent and the decision to require them was only slowly implemented.

Coupled with the loss of many early registers, this situation has meant that most assessments of population and demographic change before 1600 are extrapolations from less than certain figures, using multipliers of challengeable validity. To the few exceptions to this rule must be added the masterly study of M. Croix.

A full century and a half before Trent, in 1406, the bishop of Nantes prescribed the keeping of baptismal registers (in order to prevent marriages between godchildren and godparents who had forgotten their spiritual relationship). While no such documents from this early date have survived, a few registers date from the third quarter of the fifteenth century, and a substantial number are available in long runs from the first decade of the sixteenth. Coupling these with marriage and burial registers and the records of poor relief from the last part of the sixteenth century, Croix has extracted an impressive amount of information about population growth and movement, agricultural and economic crises, and even popular beliefs and attitudes. Although he has been unable to employ the standard practice of the demographic historian, family reconstitution, because of gaps in nearly every series, he has discovered much more than historians of other regions can dare to hope for.

The registers clearly indicate a substantial population growth in the *pays nantais* which lasted from the last third of the fifteenth century until the 1560s, when a slight climatic downturn, coupled with the political and military instability of the Wars of Religion, ended rural expansion. Nantes continued to grow for some further time, in part because of a rural exodus caused by crop failures and the actions of the soldiers. Croix does not compare his figures with those from the eighteenth century in any systematic way, but he implies that many rural parishes were only marginally more populous in 1790 than they had been in 1560. If this is true, it reinforces the arguments of Michel Morineau that the eighteenth century saw no "agricultural revolution" and no demographic take-off — growth during the reign of Louis XV may have been no more than a return to previous levels.

While the crises of 1500-01, 1531-32 and 1544-46 were relatively brief (and part of the thirty-year cycle which Goubert found in the seventeenth century) and had limited consequences, in 1562-63 the number of live births was halved by famine and during the ongoing crisis of the 1580s and 1590s deaths regularly exceeded births in many parishes. The basic pattern of the later sixteenth century was akin to that of the seventeenth as demographic crises regularly reduced the population to levels which could be sustained by an unchanging agricultural technology. Although his caution in avoiding wide-ranging conclusions is commendable, Croix tends to overstress the ways in which his region was atypical of France as a whole.

In his discussion of population movement, based primarily on the marriage registers from the last few decades of the century, M. Croix notes that men were more mobile than women and indicates that in most villages outsiders had moved short distances. He does not, surprisingly, consider the role which kinship connections may have played in the selection of outsiders as marriage partners. Many of the "foreigners" he identifies may not have been considered as such by the communities and family groups which they joined. It is fairly clear that in much of the countryside population groupings were more stable than they had been in the last few centuries of the Middle Ages. Nantes and a few of the more important subordinate centers in the region were the only exceptions to this rule.

The illegitimacy rate in the diocese was considerably greater than Goubert found in the seventeenth-century Beauvaisis, largely because of clerical concubinage and a much greater number of unconsecrated "marriages" which appear to have been tolerated by the community. Although more than 97% of births were legitimate, clerical sanctions appear to have been less effective than they were to be after Trent. Ecclesiastical pressures

ensured that relatively few marriages were performed during both March and December, but it is clear that internal as well as external pressures maintained popular adherence to the Christian calendar. The number of conceptions dropped precipitately during Lent. There was less conjugal observance of Advent, and Croix notes a tendency away from Lenten abstinence over the century.

The work on which this study is based is staggering; Croix examined the records of more than one hundred sixty thousand births, eight thousand marriages, and fourteen thousand deaths. He has organised it clearly and concisely, integrating the tables and graphs into the text. A few similar sets of documents survive from other parts of Britain; one hopes they will be plumbed with the same flair and ingenuity.

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WOLFGANG BERGER. — *Das St.-George-Hospital zu Hamburg. Die Wirtschaftsführung eines mittelalterlichen Grossshaushalts*. Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1972.

Berger's book is a study in medieval accountancy. It is an exhaustive survey of the economic records of a charity foundation in North Germany. The *Spital* of St. George outside the town walls of medieval Hamburg functioned from the later thirteenth century as a home for lepers. It received cases from four urban parishes, keeping lepers off the Hamburg streets for several centuries. It provided old age insurance for a number of town officials, burghers and their dependents. It was also a retreat for those in the fifteenth century who wished to do penance in their last years of life, and thus seek a surer path to heaven.

From the 1440s onwards detailed accounts have survived, notably the kitchen records or *Kohenbücher*. Berger uses these and allied economic archives to reconstruct the household budget of this famous medieval urban hospital, from which price data were already tabulated in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> The reader has to contend with a mass of graphs, and tables as text. He is given the burial cost of a poor leper (one mark), the cost of candle-light at the altar (four shillings), and the cost of a church-warden when processing at Christmas (six pence), as well as total income, expenditure and the hospital's investments in rents, houses and lands.

It is not an easy book to read. Detail predominated but the patient reader will find it full of useful piecemeal evidence for an understanding of standards and expectations of common burgher life in fifteenth and early sixteenth century North Germany.

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### *Prices and Wages in Late Medieval Germany*

URSULA HAUSCHILD. — *Studien zu Löhnen und Preisen in Rostock im Spätmittelalter*. Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1973.

The town of Rostock on the South Baltic provides Dr. Hauschild with archive evidence to test the general thesis of Professor Abel that in fifteenth century Germany labourers' wages had reached a level of adequacy, compared to prices of basic food stuffs,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M.J. ELSAS, *Umriss einer Geschichte der Preise und Löhne in Deutschland*, Leiden 1936-49.