

Review Article

Society and Culture in Early Modern Spain*

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The near-simultaneous publication of almost a dozen historical monographs on early modern Spain by American and British historians affords a singular opportunity to survey current tendencies within an emerging generation of Hispanists. The following article considers briefly each of these works individually. It closes with some general remarks on the strengths and weaknesses of an increasingly dynamic field of research.

I. THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

In May 1590 the Toledo Inquisition arrested Lucrecia de León, a young woman from Madrid who had recently garnered considerable fame as a prophetess. In a lengthy series of dreams, Lucrecia had echoed many of the traditional themes of Christian prophecy: the reconquest of Jerusalem, the appearance of a “new David,” and the successful propagation of the Christian faith among the pagans. Yet she had also openly criticized the corruption of state and church, the royal government’s oppressive tax policies, and the indifference of King Philip II and his advisers to increasing misery among the common people. Both the unusual

* The works discussed in this essay are Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. xiii + 229, \$24.95; Ida Altman, *Emigrants and Society: Extremadura and Spanish America in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. viii + 372; Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. xv + 218, \$24.95; David Sven Reher, *Town and Country in Pre-industrial Spain: Cuenca, 1550–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 337; Helen Nader, *Liberty in Absolutist Spain: The Habsburg Sale of Towns, 1516–1700* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. xvi + 305, \$39.50; Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. xiii + 206, \$37.50 (cloth), \$12.95 (paper); William Monter, *Frontiers of Heresy: The Spanish Inquisition from the Basque Lands to Sicily* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. xiv + 345, \$39.50; Stephen Haliczzer, *Inquisition and Society in the Kingdom of Valencia, 1478–1834* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. x + 444, \$45.00; Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory, 1513–1830* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. viii + 184, \$22.50; Melveena McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain, 1490–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. xii + 330.

attention to and the critical attitude toward contemporary politics in her dreams suggest the central questions of Richard Kagan's *Lucrecia's Dreams*: How, and above all why, did this young woman "embark on such an unprecedented and politically dangerous career?" (p. 8).

The answer lies within one of the more unique documentary sources of the early modern era: the transcriptions of over four hundred dreams that Lucrecia dictated to her confidants beginning in 1587.¹ These fascinating registers circulated in manuscript among a select group of clerics, courtiers, and others discontented with the policies of Philip II's government. Touching on an extraordinarily broad range of subjects, her dreams derived inspiration from oral culture, biblical texts and religious imagery (she had a particularly vivid memory for details of paintings and images in local churches), and the teachings of her clerical patrons and other popular prophets.² Their central theme was the loss and destruction of Spain at the hands of a corrupt and inept regime. Several dreams foretold the defeat of the Armada (pp. 75–76). Just as ominously, she also warned that if Philip and his advisers did not mend their ways and attend more diligently to the defense of the kingdom, they would confront a renewal of the *Comunero* revolts, which had shaken Castile in the early 1520s (pp. 69, 75, 119).

Kagan takes care to set Lucrecia and her circle in the diverse contexts of Madrid society, court politics (including the notorious Antonio Pérez affair), local traditions of political prophecy, and what he calls the "dream culture of Renaissance Spain." The result is a rich and imaginative study that weaves these variegated threads into an arresting portrayal of a resourceful woman caught between the threatening climate of a repressive regime and the strong and hardly disinterested pressures exerted by her patrons. Rejecting the passive role traditionally allotted to women within the spheres of religion and especially politics, Lucrecia shaped a coherent narrative framework for her dream experiences, within which she took on the leading roles of maiden warrior and adviser to the king (pp. 73–74). She was far from being the pliant victim of a cabal of malcontents, which is how she defended herself before the Inquisition.³ Instead, her actions suggest that she was a bold and ambitious person with a strong desire for public recognition, identity, and power within a society that denied her all these things.

A study of this sort—a biography of an unconventional figure based upon a detailed reading of Inquisitorial documents—inevitably evokes parallels with the flourishing school of European history known as "microhistory." The dreamer Lucrecia is clearly quite a character, and her portrait richly deserves to hang in the microhistorians' rogues' gallery of heretical millers, lesbian nuns, and peasant

¹ Although Lucrecia described herself to the Inquisition as a "simple woman . . . without letters," she clearly could read and perhaps even write (p. 23).

² Kagan is especially successful in linking Lucrecia's dreams to the experiences of other contemporary prophets. These include the well-known Portuguese nun María de la Visitación, who also foretold the defeat of the Armada and who actually appeared in several of Lucrecia's dreams (p. 7), and lesser-known figures like the "street prophet" Miguel de Piedrola (pp. 95–101).

³ This strategy did not work out badly, as she received the lenient sentence of public penance and a short period of seclusion in a convent in Toledo (pp. 154–56).

tricksters. Yet despite many superficial similarities, in other respects Kagan's book stands apart from the other microhistories. It contains little of the self-conscious discussion of sources and method characteristic of most microhistory. Above all, the focus of *Lucrecia's Dreams* differs from that of other work employing this approach, which tends to emphasize the diverse social groundings—especially in class and gender—of popular beliefs and behavior. The central concern of Kagan's book is with the relation between cultural activity—in this case, dreams and prophecy—and political power, both within the court and in the streets. Some will look upon this political interpretation of dreams as having too narrow a focus, missing the opportunity to study a unique documentary record for the history of psychology. However, Kagan's approach to the story of this remarkable young woman skillfully explores the limits and strategies of criticism within this most absolute of monarchies, and no student of early modern history should miss it.

II. A REGION WITHIN THE EMPIRE

In 1972, James Lockhart broke new ground in the social history of early modern Spain by publishing a prosopographic study of the *conquistadores* who accompanied Hernando Pizarro in the first phase of the conquest of Peru.⁴ Basing his work largely on official documentation in the *Archivo General de Indias* in Seville, Lockhart reconstructed in minute detail the origins and fates of this singular group of emigrants, many of whom hailed from Extremadura, the region where Pizarro himself was born. What he did not do was to follow the trail of documentation further into Extremadura itself. In *Emigrants and Society*, Ida Altman has picked up where he left off, turning to local records in order to undertake a "systematic examination of the question of the relationship of local Spanish society to emigration and the Indies enterprise" (p. 1).

The results are striking. *Emigrants and Society* analyzes social patterns in two cities in northern Extremadura, Cáceres and Trujillo, during the middle years of the sixteenth century. Both cities distinguished themselves as sources of migrants to the New World, especially during the early decades of the Spanish presence. Altman argues that the prominent role Extremadurans played in the Indies had its roots in long-standing patterns of geographic mobility (including seasonal out-migration) combined with limited opportunities for social advancement within a relatively poor and unspecialized regional economy. Emigrants hailed from many levels of society, including gentry, artisans, clergy, and professionals. Virtually all social ranks were represented, except the very rich and the very poor. Once in the Indies, they devoted themselves to a broad array of occupations, and most seem to have obtained their goal of at least a modest improvement in wealth and status. Strong ties of family, kin, and common place of origin bound the emigrants together and insured the ongoing influence of the New World on local

⁴ James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru* (Austin, Tex., 1972). An important precedent for his study was Mario Góngora, *Los grupos de conquistadores en Tierra Firme (1509–1530)* (Santiago, 1962).

society in Spain. Altman demonstrates how emigration to the Indies was rooted in, and in turn helped to shape, a regional society limited by scarce resources, yet flexible and adaptable in many of its broader patterns.

This innovative argument rests upon a solid base of documentation. Altman has complemented the widely scattered biographical and genealogical information on *conquistadores* and their families available in local histories with extensive new research in notarial records. The result is a study that firmly links general characterizations of social processes with the experience of specific individuals and their families. Altman is attentive to the question of the emigrants' beliefs and behavior, especially in relation to attitudes toward social change on both sides of the Atlantic. At this point her argument becomes more tentative. She strongly defends the notion that commoners and nobles alike contributed to shaping local society and the economy, arguing against those who "see the nobility as unilaterally shaping and defining society and economic and social relations" (p. 89).⁵ She then deduces from the "cultural and behavioral homogeneity" of Spaniards in the New World that a "common culture . . . united all groups" (pp. 297 and 90). However, to focus on colonizers among the colonized is to view them in a setting that exaggerates similarities in values and behavior while masking the differences likely to separate them in their place of origin. Until more is known about, say, modes of education, the extent of literacy, and religious beliefs and devotional practices in early modern Extremadura, such broad statements are best regarded as working hypotheses.

Much of what this book has to say will come as little surprise to readers familiar with other monographs on regions in early modern Spain.⁶ Altman's firm attachment to common sense takes the form of a cautious approach that prefers hard work in the archives to empty rhetoric. Her study is not, however, just a pile of facts. It makes a compelling case for emigration to the Indies as a force for both change and continuity within local society in Spain. As such, it elucidates patterns of historical experience on both sides of a newly transatlantic world, a common past whose parts too often have been isolated from each other.

III. URBAN VIEWS

Setting early modern Spain's most famous religious figure in the urban context where she spent most of her life is the theme of Jodi Bilinkoff's *The Avila of Saint*

⁵ Altman alludes here to the views of José Antonio Maravall, various of whose works—*El mundo social de "La Celestina"* (Madrid, 1968), and *La cultura del Barroco* (Barcelona, 1975)—characterize early modern Spain as a society firmly in the grasp of noble and clerical hegemony. For a criticism of this position, see John H. Elliott's review of the English translation of the latter in the *New York Review of Books* (April 9, 1987).

⁶ A partial list would include: Angel García Sanz, *Desarrollo y crisis del Antiguo Régimen en Castilla la Vieja: Economía y Sociedad en tierras de Segovia, 1500–1814* (Madrid, 1977); James Casey, *The Kingdom of Valencia in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1979); Juan Eloy Gelabert González, *Santiago y la Tierra de Santiago de 1500 a 1640* (Sada, 1982); Pegerto Saavedra, *Economía, Política y Sociedad en Galicia: La provincia de Mondoñedo, 1480–1830* (Santiago, 1985); and Bartolomé Yun Casalilla, *Sobre la Transición al Capitalismo en Castilla: Economía y Sociedad en Tierra de Campos, 1500–1830* ([Valladolid], 1987).

Teresa. Avila in the mid-sixteenth century was a thriving city of over ten thousand inhabitants, many of whom worked in its prosperous textile industry. Like other urban centers in Castile, it had grown dramatically beginning in the early decades of the century. However, one hundred years later Avila was in the throes of severe demographic and economic decline. Its population dwindled to around six thousand by the 1630s, dealing urban cloth production a blow from which it never recovered. The connections between this cycle of economic and social boom and bust and local religious experience are the subject of this pioneering study. Previous scholars have focused on St. Teresa as a mystic, as a member of a *converso* (converted Jewish) family, or as a feminist author.⁷ Bilinkoff's work is the first to examine rigorously the saint's biography within the twin contexts of urban history and the social history of religion.

The author identifies three stages in the religious experience of early modern Avila. She opens with an examination of religious practices in the city during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Spiritual life centered around monastic foundations, many of whose inhabitants hailed from the urban aristocracy. Members of this elite, firmly entrenched in the local organs of power, were the principal patrons of the traditional forms of piety (especially vocal prayer and endowed commemorations) practiced by the nuns and monks. However, by mid-century a new group of commoners, enriched by the expanding wool trade and local credit market, emerged to challenge the exclusive control of the civic oligarchy. Frustrated in their attempts at political change, the newcomers (many of whom were *conversos*) enjoyed greater success in promoting a new approach to religious life. Their brand of piety, similar to reforming currents elsewhere in Catholic Europe, preferred individual devotion to collective outward display and favored clerical and lay activism in dealing with the social problems created by urban growth:

By mid-century new religious reform movements articulated an alternative definition of piety, one that emphasized the importance of a personal experience of conversion and penitence and reflected the concern among many to relieve the condition of the poor and to mediate conflicts among social groups within the city. It featured a clergy committed to the active apostolate of a large community of believers, as well as the development of methods of internalized, mental, prayer which afforded the individual a more immediate and direct experience of the divine. [Pp. 78–79]

This new religious climate provided the immediate setting for St. Teresa's reform of the Carmelite order, as well as for other local movements directed toward improving education, the quality of the clergy, and services to the poor. However, population losses and economic depression beginning in the later sixteenth century led to a reassertion of the aristocracy and an increase in episcopal control. These forces combined to place renewed emphasis on hierarchy, deference, and other traditional values in detriment to the more flexible spirit of Teresa and her

⁷ In addition to the extensive literature on St. Teresa and mysticism, see Enrique Llamas Martínez, *Santa Teresa de Jesús y la Inquisición española* (Madrid, 1972); and Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, N.J., 1990). Elizabeth Rhodes, "Reconsidering St. Teresa and Golden Age Religious History," *Journal of Hispanic Philology* 14 (1990): 277–85, critically assesses the latter's handling of Teresa's context.

fellow reformers. By the mid-seventeenth century, the movement for change had suffered the same fate as the social class that promoted it, and Avila began its long career as a backwater of social and religious conservatism.

The Avila of Saint Teresa is a promising book. Well written and clearly argued, it successfully combines the concerns and techniques of social, religious, and women's history. One of the few criticisms that can be leveled against it, in fact, is that it does not go far enough in studying the connections between social and religious change that it sketches so suggestively. This omission is most apparent in its treatment of the supporters of local movements for religious reform. Avila has perhaps the richest fiscal and notarial documentation of any Castilian city for the sixteenth century.⁸ However, these sources barely make an appearance within Bilinkoff's work. Research in notarial records like testaments might have confirmed the differences in the types of spirituality that distinguished the "new men" who backed political and religious reform from the traditional aristocracy. Invocations, reference to membership in confraternities and other devotional associations, and above all bequests to different ecclesiastical institutions could provide stronger evidence of support (financial and otherwise) for Teresa's and other foundations.⁹ Similarly, the study of postmortem inventories could turn up supplementary information on the ownership of religious objects and images, the contents of personal libraries, and other indicators of differences in beliefs and devotional practices. To point out these lacunae is not to dispute the book's overall thesis linking religious change with social and economic transformation. Instead, I suggest that more extensive research in "traditional" urban social history would have lent greater specificity and nuance to Bilinkoff's approach to religious history, which focuses mainly on doctrine and ecclesiastical organization.

David S. Reher's *Town and Country in Pre-industrial Spain* tells a similar tale of the rise and fall of a Castilian city, albeit from a very different angle. Where Bilinkoff turns to urban history in order to analyze religious beliefs and behavior, Reher approaches the city from the point of view of demographic and family history. His principal interest is in the characteristics and determinants of "urban behavior," that is, the patterns of reproduction, mobility, and social organization specific to the city as opposed to the surrounding countryside (pp. 2-4).

To this end he focuses on Cuenca, a "typical medium-size pre-industrial town" in New Castile (p. 13). Like Avila, Cuenca was a major center of cloth production and thus housed a large artisan population. Also like Avila, much of its income

⁸ The leading local historian of this period, Serafin de Tapia, notes the existence of over one thousand volumes of notarial records from the sixteenth century alone. Even more unusual is the survival of 107 *padrones*, or nominal censuses of residents, from 1503 to 1622. For a discussion of this exceptionally rich documentation, see his "Las fuentes demográficas y el potencial humano de Avila en el siglo XVI," *Cuadernos abulenses* 2 (1984): 31-88, and "La documentación fiscal concejil en el siglo XVI: Un instrumento imprescindible para la historia social," in *Los archivos y la investigación: Ciclo de conferencias en homenaje a Carmen Pedrosa* (Avila, 1988), pp. 49-70.

⁹ Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., employs such an approach in studying wills as evidence of long-term changes in social and religious life in an Italian city; see his *Death and Property in Siena, 1205-1800: Strategies for the Afterlife* (Baltimore, 1988).

derived from the transfer of agricultural wealth to religious establishments located within the city walls. Thus its expansion and decline during the early modern era symbolized the demise not only of a thriving regional economy but also of the urban network of New Castile as a whole as the sources of local wealth shifted from industrial production to rents from agriculture and civil and ecclesiastical administrations. Yet despite the long-term contraction of Cuenca's economic opportunities, the city successfully resisted change: "Family structures, basic migratory patterns, economic structures and their spatial distribution in town, reaction to times of dearth and epidemic, demographic patterns, etc. were all basically unchanged, at least between the middle of the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. . . . Cuenca during the middle part of the nineteenth century was fundamentally the same as it had been two centuries earlier" (p. 299). This stability was nonetheless an illusion. The apparent lack of change within a stagnant economy overlay an ongoing "culture of mobility" rooted in the intense circulation of kin among a "vast and complex network of interdependent households" (p. 231). Geographical displacement was the regular experience of youth in particular; few children spent their entire adolescence at home. Predictably, service in other households, and even temporary migration to the countryside, proved most intense at the highest and lowest levels of the civic hierarchy.

Clear differences in behavior distinguished city dwellers from peasants. Both fertility and nuptiality levels were lower in the urban sphere, while mortality was higher. Geographic mobility was likewise more intense; during the nineteenth century some 10 percent of Cuenca's intramural population changed residence every year, fostering a markedly dynamic market in rental housing. Yet the city was not predominantly a receiving area for permanent migration from rural areas. Neither was it a force for change within a sluggish regional economy. To the contrary, its high level of integration with its hinterland suggests that the migration patterns of urban dwellers helped stabilize the precarious and technologically backward rural economy (p. 300).

That these patterns are at all visible owes much to Reher's adoption of a broad regional focus instead of concentrating exclusively on the city itself. This is merely one of several decisions that contribute to the book's success. His attempt to go beyond a strictly demographic approach in order to link population and family behavior with economic change is equally praiseworthy. Apart from its findings in demographic and family history, the book's most notable conceptual achievement is its refinement within the Spanish context of the notion of "urban system" introduced from historical geography via the works of David Ringrose and Jan de Vries.¹⁰ To be sure, the work as a whole is much stronger on the nineteenth century than on the early modern period. However, the richness and subtlety of Reher's analysis amply compensates for this imbalance, dictated

¹⁰ David R. Ringrose, *Madrid and the Spanish Economy, 1560–1850* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983); Jan de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984). Pages 58–65 of Reher's book contain an appreciative if critical discussion of Ringrose's thesis concerning Madrid's role in the decline of other urban centers in early modern Castile.

largely by the nature of local sources prior to the improved census data beginning in the 1840s. On the other hand, little is said about social and occupational mobility, which doubtless strongly influenced the decisions made by the migrants circulating between the town and country. Similarly, while Reher identifies a desire for income diversification as the key rationale underlying local economic behavior (p. 241), he leaves this promising observation largely unexplored. Given what he has achieved, however, these are minor omissions. They detract little from this highly sophisticated exercise in quantitative history, which represents the most impressive study to date within the twin fields of urban demography and the history of the family in early modern Spain.

The relations between town and country, and between local and central governments, are the central concern of the third work in urban history under consideration here, Helen Nader's *Liberty in Absolutist Spain*. Focusing primarily on New Castile, Nader studies the royal government's sale during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of charters of incorporation to hundreds of villages. The purchase of these privileges brought ample jurisdictions and powers of self-government to rural communities throughout the kingdom. At the same time, they dismembered the extensive holdings municipal councils administered—or, rather, exploited—within their hinterlands. The massive conversion of villages (*lugares* or *aldeas*) into towns (*villas*) thus had far-reaching consequences not only for the royal treasury but also for the social, economic, and political relations among cities, the crown, and the newly created town councils in the surrounding countryside.

As its title suggests, at the heart of this book lies a paradox: by converting the traditional practice of town “emancipation” into a money-making venture, an allegedly absolutist state wound up fomenting municipal independence. Drawing her evidence chiefly from the *Relaciones topográficas*—the detailed survey government officials undertook in New Castile beginning in 1575—and from the national cadastre of 1752, the author carefully traces the means by which the monarchy (often joined by local lords) connived in the extension of the rights of village self-government. This policy of mutual accommodation lasted until the arrival of the Bourbon dynasty in the eighteenth century, after which royal officials reversed past policy in a new attempt to centralize the administration and reduce the powers of local government. According to Nader, the consequences of supporting municipal freedom were many and varied. They included a dampening of social tensions in the aftermath of the failed *Comunero* revolt of 1520–21, as towns increasingly exercised the newly available powers of self-government: “Without a remote and centralized government meddling in their daily lives, and with local control of justice, land, and taxation, Castilians had a sense that they managed their own affairs. People do not need to resort to violence if they already control their daily lives or if they believe they can acquire that control through purchase. The Habsburg sale of church and royal towns made the acquisition of local self-administration a lively possibility” (p. 9). As a result the “real tension in society” existed not between social classes but, rather, among towns, which constantly embroiled themselves in grievances, lawsuits, and other forms of conflict with the rival jurisdictions of their neighbors (p. 6).

It hardly needs to be said that this is a refreshing way to look at the urban history of early modern Spain. Nader's meticulous reconstruction of the transformation of a kingdom of villages into a kingdom of towns is a compelling tale. Like most such stories, it has its winners and losers. Among the former were the newly emancipated villages, seigneurial lords looking to cut back on administrative costs, and the king's treasury; the latter included the cities, the church, and royal officials like *corregidores* who watched helplessly as the crown reneged on earlier promises and sold off their powers and privileges. The author skillfully weaves her way among a bewildering array of jurisdictions and levels of authority and documents her bold assertions with telling case studies in town emancipation.

All the same, one cannot help being struck by the presence of several questionable assumptions in Nader's argument. Foremost among these is her depiction of the internal dynamics of village life. Nader characterizes conditions in early modern villages as a direct continuation of the egalitarian traditions of frontier life in medieval Castile. That life in the countryside included "democratic town meetings and annually elected municipal judges and councils" (p. 3) is asserted rather than proved. The same could be said of her claim that "all citizens, male and female, married and single, adult and child, attended town meeting," where "every citizen could join in the discussion" (pp. 32–33). Closely related is her tendency to speak of villages as undifferentiated wholes, despite the instances that she herself cites of tensions and conflicts within rural communities (pp. 38, 134, 174). Evidence from different parts of the peninsula, including New Castile, suggests a fairly advanced degree of social differentiation within the countryside during the early modern era.¹¹ That attempts to gain municipal independence might have been more the work of a handful of wealthier villagers, who then might have used their newfound "liberty" to, say, redistribute the tax burden in their favor is a possibility suggested by studies of rural society elsewhere in Europe.¹²

These and other dubious presuppositions weaken the force of Nader's thesis. Still, one can hardly question the overall merits of her book. *Liberty in Absolutist Spain* shows an impressive familiarity with rural Castile, based on extensive archival research and the discriminating use of published local histories. More

¹¹ Noël Salomon's classic study *La vida rural castellana en tiempos de Felipe II*, rev. ed. (Barcelona, 1973), also uses the *Relaciones topográficas* to analyze stratification within rural communities. See in addition David E. Vassberg, *Land and Society in Golden Age Spain* (Cambridge, 1984), esp. pp. 120–50; and for New Castile in particular, Jerónimo López-Salazar Pérez, *Estructuras agrarias y sociedad rural en la Mancha, S. 16–18* (Ciudad Real, 1986).

¹² See, e.g., Domenico Sella, *Crisis and Continuity: The Economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979). In an appendix entitled "A Postscript on Feudalism" (pp. 148–73), Sella discusses peasant initiative in transfers of villages from royal to feudal domains. His observations, particularly regarding the redistribution of taxation within rural communities following such transfers, offer suggestive parallels to the shifts in jurisdiction that Nader studies. Another work on early modern Italy of relevance to her argument is Marino Berengo's short but stimulating essay, "Città e 'contado' in Italia dal XV al XVIII secolo," *Storia della Città* 36 (1986): 107–11. It is interesting that Berengo contrasts the firm control by Italian cities over their hinterlands with the situation prevailing in Castile, where the king sold off municipal lands and jurisdictions with abandon (p. 110).

important, Nader has an original, genuinely innovative argument to make. Right or wrong, this is the most stimulating work on Spanish cities to have been published in years. By questioning the fundamental lines of development of municipal and royal policies in the early modern era, it doubtless will call forth the reactions and, one may hope, deeper reflection that its author clearly sought to provoke.

IV. CITY WOMEN

Among the various aspects of early modern Spanish society and culture, women's history has perhaps received the least attention. In contrast to the vitality of this field elsewhere, studies of gender and female experience have only recently begun to appear. All the more reason, then, to welcome the publication of Mary Elizabeth Perry's *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*. This work's thesis is forthright: intensified social and economic change attending the dramatic growth of Seville during the sixteenth century "heightened anxiety about order and gender," thus placing traditional patterns of patriarchy "in crisis" (pp. 6, 13). Perry reconstructs the evolution of the collective identity of women by applying feminist analysis not only to standard documentary sources but also to literature and art. Nuns and *beatas* (devout laywomen), healers and witches, prostitutes and playwrights—these are but a few of the roles her book portrays women as playing within an exceptionally dynamic urban society.

Gender and Disorder is the first sustained monograph in English on early modern Spanish women. Rejecting the emphasis on victimization that marked an earlier phase in women's history, Perry's key terms of analysis are empowerment, creativity, resourcefulness, strategies—in short, a vocabulary designed to highlight the means women themselves devised to respond to conditions of repression and limitations upon their public activities. She handles the problem of the "silence" of traditional historical sources regarding women by searching for the "subtext" of female experience within official, male-dominated discourse (p. 21). While she brings to bear a wide range of texts, including some lesser-known writings of the period, this tactic ultimately frustrates her attempt to build a strong argument. Three problems in particular bedevil this study.

First, at times Perry shows little recognition of what was often a huge gap between official discourse and historical experience. As a result, local society comes across as dominated by male prescriptions, in ironic contrast to her emphasis on women's resourcefulness in dealing with men's attempts to dictate their beliefs and behavior. Thus, for example, she discusses at considerable length public condemnations of female sexuality, official insistence on the need for chastity and the defense of family honor, and the like. In the midst of this exposition, however, she slips in the fact that fully one-fourth of all the children born in one of the local parishes in the late sixteenth century were illegitimate (p. 58). This is one of many instances in which her own evidence suggests local women's incomplete reception, if not outright rejection, of prescriptive discourse. By not clearly distinguishing this discourse from the reality of its impact on

behavior, the book's characterization of local society is less convincing than it could be.

A second problem issuing from this tactic is one of lost opportunities. In her attempt to provide a broad reading of male discourse about women, Perry draws together texts from a wide variety of sources, including medical treatises, tracts about female education, and devotional literature of all sorts. Yet the constant interposition of works by writers so widely dispersed in time and place as Juan Luis Vives, Martín de Azpilcueta, and Luis de León, among others, dilutes her argument. Even more unfortunately, the specific historical experience of Sevillian women gets lost in the shuffle.¹³ It is significant that relatively few local documents are cited in the text. In particular, only one register from Seville's extraordinarily rich (if notoriously chaotic) notarial archive appears in the book. Yet surely this is just the sort of source that would have produced the most revealing glimpses into the real lives of real women, glimpses much less deformed by the lenses of external, male readings of—or marching orders for—women's lives. What is more, the male prescriptive literature about women, while of considerable interest, is not entirely unfamiliar, as it has received attention in previous works.¹⁴ What one knows virtually nothing about, however, is the real experience of women. "Local knowledge" of this sort is hard gained: Yet it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the true gap in the history of early modern Spanish women is the actual content of their daily lives—work, leisure, reproduction, sexuality, among many other subjects—and not the published discourse about or directed toward them.

A final weakness resides in the main thesis of the book itself. Perry argues that public discussion of issues involving gender in early modern Seville owed much of its force to a heightened awareness produced by a "crisis in patriarchy" (p. 179) brought on by changing social and economic conditions. Unfortunately, she adduces little evidence to support this notion. That Seville underwent extraordinary growth in this period cannot be questioned. However, that demographic and economic expansion produced a situation of "crisis" in patriarchy or anything else cannot be taken for granted. Once again, more careful study of the

¹³ For example, Perry discusses at length the ways in which the lives of female saints served as models for the behavior of local women (pp. 33–52). However, she does not investigate *how* this took place. This could have been approached by studying, among other things, bequests and invocations in wills, the iconography of religious images in inventories, and female membership and devotional activities in confraternities. That this line of research is feasible receives support from another local study cited in her book. Lola Luna, "Sor Valentina Pinelo, intérprete de las Sagradas Escrituras," *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 464 (February 1989): 91–103, argues (like Perry) that St. Anne served as a powerful symbol of female education. Yet, unlike Perry, Luna briefly identifies local chapels and churches where images of St. Anne were found (p. 99). This sort of intermediate link, between plausible general ideas and references and their specific presence in the lives of women in early modern Seville, is all too often missing in Perry's analysis.

¹⁴ To cite just two examples: Mariló Vigil, *La vida de las mujeres en los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid, 1986); and José L. Sánchez Lora, *Mujeres, conventos y formas de la religiosidad barroca* (Madrid, 1988).

specific local context might have converted a sweeping statement into a more precise, and thus more convincing, argument about the relations between social and economic change and contemporary perceptions of women's experience.

There is much to be learned from this book. Certain passages stand out, particularly those based upon Inquisitorial sources. There is also a lively and sympathetic account of the early years of Seville's Teresian foundation.¹⁵ Perry's style is energetic, and her enthusiasm for the subject is evident on every page. In sum, she is to be congratulated for a pioneering endeavor. However, clear as her argument is, her approach to the historical study of gender creates a little disorder of its own.

V. INQUISITION AND LOCAL SOCIETY

The Inquisition has no rival as an object of attention from historians of early modern Spain. The studies of the Holy Office published during the last decade alone would fill several groaning shelves.¹⁶ It hardly comes as a surprise, then, that the newer generation of social historians is also attracted to the study of what is still for many the symbol of Spain at the height of its imperial fortunes.

William Monter's *Frontiers of Heresy* is a broadly ranging study of the Inquisition's operations within the crown of Aragon and its Italian dependencies (Sicily and Sardinia). These kingdoms distinguished themselves during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through their often fierce defense of customary rights and constitutional liberties, known as *fueros*. To many of their inhabitants, the Inquisition appeared to be a hostile importation from Castile, and it was suspected (often correctly) of using its extensive powers and privileges to flout the local legislation that restricted its activities. On the whole, though, the crown's subjects vigorously supported the objectives of the Holy Office. In fact, they criticized its relative leniency in dealing with certain types of crimes, like sodomy, over which the Aragonese tribunals successfully defended their jurisdiction. Monter introduces this mixed record of conflict and cooperation by providing a general overview of the institutional development of the Aragonese courts. He then examines the districts one by one and goes on to analyze the major categories of offenses punished within them (adherence to Islam, Protestantism, witchcraft, and sodomy).

The argument of *Frontiers of Heresy* combines three theses. First, Monter distinguishes the types of persecution and victims characteristic of the Aragonese tribunals from those of their more notorious (and better-studied) partners in Castile. Beginning in the 1540s, prosecution for "judaizing" all but disappeared in the crown of Aragon, to be replaced by other offenses, "some of which bore

¹⁵ Perry, pp. 84–91. The chapter on convent life (pp. 75–96) is by far the best in the book, thanks above all to Perry's sensitive discussion of the nuns' own writings.

¹⁶ Recent critical assessments of this literature include Geoffrey Parker, "Some Recent Work on the Inquisition in Spain and Italy," *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982): 519–32; E. William Monter, "The New Social History and the Spanish Inquisition," *Journal of Social History* 17 (1984): 705–13; and Gustav Henningsen, "¿Por qué estudiar la Inquisición? Reflexiones sobre la historiografía reciente y el futuro de una disciplina," *Manuscrits* 7 (1988): 35–50.

little resemblance to conventional notions of heresy" (p. xii). Second, he notes that during the final decades of the sixteenth century and the early years of the seventeenth, the Aragonese courts became both the most activist and punitive tribunals within the Inquisitorial system. They focused their attentions in particular on migrants from France, whom they suspected of Huguenot sympathies, and on the *moriscos*, or converted Moslems, most of whom lived in the districts of Valencia and Aragon proper. Finally, Monter shows that because of the unique constitutional arrangements of the Aragonese kingdoms, the Inquisition played a more overtly political role there than in Castile. They provided the central government not only with an instrument for strengthening royal authority but also with the prestige associated with the successful prosecution of a wide variety of crimes.

While more restricted in geographic scope, Stephen Haliczer's *Inquisition and Society in the Kingdom of Valencia, 1478–1834* covers much of the same ground. In fact, the two books complement each other well. While Monter offers a panoramic overview of all the jurisdictions within the crown of Aragon, Haliczer focuses in depth upon a single district, that of Valencia, from its establishment in the late fifteenth century to its demise in the 1830s. His principal concern is with the institutional development of the tribunal, although he also devotes considerable attention to the groups it persecuted, especially *conversos* and *moriscos*. Among the book's more interesting findings is his meticulous reconstruction of the ways in which descendants of converted Jews and other victims successfully infiltrated the Inquisition, either by serving as familiars or in other posts or by purchasing fraudulent genealogies certifying Old Christian descent. Haliczer also carefully charts the tribunal's endless conflicts with Valencian institutions and argues for the relative waning of its power and influence beginning in the years Monter identifies as the "Aragonese century."

Comparison between the two books is inevitable, given the obvious overlap in subject matter, as well as their common emphasis on the institutional aspects of the Holy Office's past. Both draw largely on the same sources: the correspondence of individual tribunals with the Supreme Council of the Inquisition in Madrid and the fascinating case summaries known as the *relaciones de causas*. As a result, both authors view local activity from the point of view not of the periphery but of the center.

It is here, though, that the resemblance ends. From his base in the Madrid archives Monter ranges far and wide, at the same time keeping the Inquisition as a whole clearly in view. The pace is fast and his style is fresh and witty. Haliczer's approach is quite different. He devotes full attention to Valencian matters and, indeed, leaves few details unreported. As a result, his book plods along, although some of its chapters (particularly the two dealing with converted Jews and Moslems) are more taut and concise than the others. He clearly has succeeded in his goal to write the most thorough regional study possible of the Inquisition's activities.¹⁷ Yet, for a local history, there is curiously little reference to Valencian

¹⁷ Two other works share these laurels: Jaime Contreras's *El Santo Oficio de la Inquisición de Galicia: Poder, sociedad y cultura* (Madrid, 1982); and Ricardo García Cárcel's earlier study of the Valencian district. The two volumes of the latter, published as *Orígenes de la Inquisición*

society itself: Haliczzer maintains the same sort of distance from local perspectives found in Monter's more ambitious survey.

Together these two works go a long way toward revising the image of the Inquisition. Most generalizations about the Holy Office derive from observations of its functioning within the kingdom of Castile. Incorporating the Aragonese perspective leads to a different picture. Both studies drive yet another nail into the coffin of the worn depiction of the Inquisition as a monolithic instrument of oppression in the hands of a highly centralized monarchy. Oppressive it may have been, but monolithic it was not. Inquisitorial practice changed considerably over time, as it shifted from certain offenses and their perpetrators to others. There was also considerable scope for local variation, thanks largely to the success regional elites enjoyed in neutralizing the Inquisition's threat to their privileges and in using its power of patronage and communication to serve their own ends. Haliczzer in particular emphasizes the tribunal's complex and ambiguous impact upon Spanish society. Its overall influence, never as pronounced as many contemporary accounts (especially those by foreigners) suggest, doubtless counted for less among the vast majority of Old Christians than did other ecclesiastical institutions like parishes and confraternities. For as each author in his own way demonstrates, it was at the local level that the more crucial decisions were made.

VI. IDEAS, IDEOLOGY, AND THE THEATER

The six essays in Anthony Pagden's *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination* range literally from one end of the Spanish Empire to the other. Yet, appropriately enough, Castile—or, rather, what the empire's subjects thought of it—lies at the center of this ambitious attempt to discover a nexus linking political thought in arenas as diverse as Campanella's Naples and the Gran Colombia of Bolívar. For it was Castile that, beginning in the sixteenth century, faced the challenge—intellectual as well as political—of responding to the unprecedented problems of authority and understanding posed by the extension of empire in both the Old World and the New. Pagden has explored part of this story before.¹⁸ By incorporating new research on the development of political theory in early modern Italy, he now adds a welcome Mediterranean perspective to Spain's transatlantic transactions in ideas and interests.

The "image of the Spanish Empire"—how its diverse subjects in southern Europe and the Americas understood the nature and consequences of Spanish rule—is the central preoccupation of each of the essays in this volume. Those called in to testify on the changing character of empire are a diverse lot. They

española: El tribunal de Valencia, 1478–1530 (Barcelona, 1976), and *Herejía y sociedad en el siglo XVI: La Inquisición en Valencia, 1530–1609* (Barcelona, 1980), are something of a bête noire for Haliczzer, who frequently bashes them in his footnotes. While he identifies a number of errors of fact and interpretation, many of his criticisms of García Cárcel's work seem rather minor.

¹⁸ See in particular his impressive *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982).

include Scholastic theologians from Salamanca, the Calabrian rebel and philosopher Tommaso Campanella, Enlightened political economists from Bourbon Naples, and Latin American writers ranging from the Mexican historians Sigüenza and Clavigero to leaders of independence movements like Viscardo and Bolívar. Linking these disparate thinkers is not only a common concern with analyzing and responding to Spanish modes of government; they also were bound together by the painfully won realization that effective political authority was based upon awareness of and respect for local customs, however difficult they might be to discern. Such customs—complex amalgams of historical experience, the influence of the physical environment, and long-term patterns of social interaction—constituted nuclei around which those opposed to Spanish lordship based their alternative political programs. Attitudes toward these conditions of collective existence ranged from heady optimism—as in the case of the Neapolitan Paolo Mattia Doria, whose rosy view of local history prior to the arrival of the Spaniards rested upon a singular conception of the preconditions of *vita civile*—to bleak pessimism, as in the case of Bolívar, who saw little to celebrate and much to fear in the American past. Yet all these writers shared a common belief in the importance of the perception of the customs and mores of “civil society” in political thought and practice. A notion of public identity, the most visible product of the “impact of culture on political behavior” (p. 75), thus stood at the crux of empire and domain.

Pagden’s foray into the history of “political imagination” is itself imaginatively argued and elegantly written. It combines the best of traditional approaches to the history of ideas, grounded in a thorough familiarity with the classical heritage drawn on by early modern writers and closely attentive to shifts in the meaning of key terminology, with more recent innovations of the “new” intellectual history. The result is a combination of formal analysis of textual discourse with a keen sensitivity to the concerns of historical linguistics and anthropology.¹⁹ Here Pagden reveals himself as by far the most wide-ranging and subtle student of the political theory of early modern Spain and the numerous subject realms that contributed vitally to its world of ideas.

Melveena McKendrick’s *Theatre in Spain, 1490–1700* provides a general introduction to Spanish drama during its high point of creativity. Written in colloquial and economical prose, McKendrick packs a great deal in a short space. Following a useful historical introduction, the first two chapters offer lively sketches of the more important precursors of the *comedia nueva*, or “new comedy,” that emerged in the late sixteenth century and received definitive formulation at the hands of Lope de Vega. The following three chapters discuss the major playwrights from Lope to Calderón. The rest of the book examines the material conditions of theater life, both in the commercial playhouses and in its other two venues, the court and the street. The author’s sensitive yet sensible readings of a multitude of plays mount a passionate vindication of Golden Age

¹⁹ Pagden spells out some of his views on historical method in his “Rethinking the Linguistic Turn: Current Anxieties in Intellectual History,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988): 519–29.

theater. In fact, her habit of anticipating an answer to every detractor confers a curiously defensive tone on the work as a whole, which doubtless reflects the lesser esteem in which early modern Spanish playwrights are still held when compared with their English or French counterparts.

Theatre in Spain is largely a self-contained history of dramatic literature, punctuated intermittently by connections to the world outside. Especially interesting among the latter are the author's brief excursions into the questions of patronage and the role of the audience in the development of dramatic tastes. In a short section on theater and society (pp. 196–201), McKendrick acknowledges with pronounced skepticism recent speculation about the sociopolitical functions of the *comedia* by historians and literary scholars who have depicted the theater as an instrument for maintaining ruling-class hegemony.²⁰ She also cautions against the habit of using Golden Age drama as evidence for the historical experience of early modern Spaniards, and she effectively points out the contradictions in Calderón's depictions of the upper classes' social mores in his comedies as opposed to his tragedies (p. 167). Finally, McKendrick is especially sensitive to the question of the presentation of female characters in Spanish drama. Harkening back to her earlier studies of women in the Golden Age theater,²¹ she explores the sympathetic depiction of a number of memorably assertive female protagonists within the plays of Lope and Tirso de Molina in particular. Her persistent probing of the ambivalent and complex treatment of women within the most widely circulated literary texts of the period contrasts usefully with the approach of Elizabeth Perry, who favors a much narrower reading of contemporary attitudes toward women.

VII. CONCLUSION

Put these books together on a shelf, and what do you have? What vision do they offer of early modern Spain, and how do they change our knowledge of it?

Three points deserve emphasis. First, taken as a whole, these studies mark the coming-of-age of a new generation of historians, one that self-consciously distances itself from its predecessors' lines of interpretation. What they see is quite a different society and culture. Most of the historians surveyed in this essay take pains to discard the worn cliché of early modern Spain (and Castile in particular) as a rigid and immobile society, incapable of responding to challenges from within and without.²² Instead, an impressive consensus develops around what Helen Nader calls "the strengths and ingenuity of a society changing and reshaping itself at a dizzying pace" (p. x). This new emphasis on mobility—geographical, social, even political—rests upon the recognition of the importance

²⁰ For this approach, see José Antonio Maravall, *Teatro y literatura en la sociedad barroca* (Madrid, 1972); and José María Diez Borque, *Sociología de la comedia española del siglo XVII* (Madrid, 1976).

²¹ See in particular her *Women and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the Mujer Varonil* (Cambridge, 1974).

²² A locus classicus of this view is Pierre Chaunu, "La société espagnole au 17^e siècle: sur un refus collectif de mobilité," *Bulletin Hispanique* 68 (1966): 104–15.

of agency and decision making by individuals within all social ranks. It is not surprising that the new social history casts its nets widely, incorporating groups and forms of social organization previously neglected by historians. These range from Nader's preference for towns and villages—little studied despite their containing some 80 percent of Spain's population—to even more obvious victims of historiographic indifference, especially women.

Not only has the newer generation shifted the focus of inquiry to include previously marginal categories and groups, it has also subtly altered the terms of the analysis itself. A telling sign of the times is the relative lack of importance accorded to the theme of class (as opposed to gender) inequality and exploitation. Nader is perhaps the author who most explicitly shuns the categories and vocabulary of the parent generation of social history. Ironically, it is the least "social" and most "political" book—Kagan's *Lucrecia*—that most directly raises the issues of social inequalities and the conflict they generated. Marxism never played much of a role in English-language studies of early modern Spain, in contrast to the works of Spanish historians themselves.²³ Yet the clear-cut, Marxist-inspired terms of reference—class, mode of production, and the like—that served as stimulus or straitjacket in earlier works of social history have disappeared almost completely as categories of analysis. A less engaged lexicon has replaced them, along with a new emphasis upon the complexity and ambiguity of historical experience. When Haliczzer states that "the Inquisition's impact on Spanish society as a whole and on certain groups within it was ambiguous and far more complex than historians have yet imagined" (p. 360), he speaks for virtually all the authors under review in rejecting tidy explanations of the past that placed class conflict at history's center.

These and other trends are not, to be sure, limited to the case of Spain. In a recent essay, Natalie Z. Davis has drawn attention to the consolidation of a new approach to social history wherein "beliefs and categories" count for more than "birth rates, plows and inheritance practices."²⁴ The works surveyed above seem to lie somewhere between the "new" and the "classic" social history. Most of them try to supersede traditional social history through recourse to the history of culture or collective mentalities. And while most illustrate the advantages of this approach, they nevertheless also highlight the difficulties of integrating the study of society and culture. Ideally, the better products of the new social history eschew the abstract distinction between social and cultural experience by offering a simultaneous approach, one that effectively blends society and culture like the woof and warp of whole cloth. In practice, however, the strength of analysis usually resides on one side or the other. The odd man out, be it culture or society, winds up being acknowledged as important yet treated in a superficial, schematic way. I have already noted the "thin description" of social background in the

²³ With one notable exception, Michael Weisser's *The Peasants of the Montes: The Roots of Rural Rebellion in Spain* (Chicago, 1976), which comes in for strong criticism at Nader's hands (pp. 155 and 241).

²⁴ Natalie Z. Davis, "The Shapes of Social History," *Storia della Storiografia* 17 (1990): 28–34, quote on 29.

studies focusing on religion or gender. Conversely, the exercises in more classic social history seem reluctant to extend their analysis in more qualitative or cultural directions. Work on each side seems largely self-contained and makes scant reference to concepts and terminology from the other side of the fence.

A final point involves the relation between the new historiography of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain and the study of the rest of early modern Europe. The difficulties of integrating society and culture are not limited to the history of early modern Spain. What is more unique to Spanish historiography is that much of what is now called the “old” social history in the rest of Europe seems remarkably new in the Iberian context. Spain lacks basic studies of a wide range of subjects, and its historians have yet to employ a number of now-standard research techniques. Largely responsible for this relative backwardness is the pronounced insularity of Spanish history. The works reviewed in this essay continue by and large to partake of, in John Elliott’s words, an “excessively ‘internalist’ approach to the history of Spain”—one that at best frames its questions in a national or imperial perspective.²⁵ With a few exceptions—most notably Monter, Pagden, and Reher—their authors make little attempt to contrast their findings with developments outside the Iberian peninsula. Nader’s book exemplifies the missed opportunity for enrichment that comparative history has to offer. With the exception of her remarks on Spanish municipal policies in the New World, she makes little reference to similar matters outside Castile. Yet had she consulted, say, Thomas Brady’s recent study of municipal autonomy in the Holy Roman Empire, she could have drawn upon a more articulated and problematic definition of civic liberty than her own. Brady’s observation that for early modern cities “liberty meant both the independence of small units and the participation in political life of people whose normal social role was the performance of productive labor” speaks directly to Nader’s work, whose strictly institutional approach to urban autonomy precludes her tracing the social causes and consequences of the creation of new municipal jurisdictions.²⁶

These observations apart, I would not like to close on a pessimistic note. There is far more to celebrate than to criticize in all these studies. The newer generation of Hispanists has demonstrated its ability to combine thorough archival research with broadened historical conceptualization. The end product is a more refined and dynamic view of early modern Spain. The recovery of the historical experience of hitherto excluded groups, the recognition of the complexities attending the wide diversity of social choices, the avoidance of reductionist approaches to the study of the past—these are all signal accomplishments. Together they contribute to the slow but steady incorporation of Spanish history into the mainstream of European historiography, even if in the long run most of the work will have to be done by the Spaniards themselves.

²⁵ J. H. Elliott, *Spain and Its World, 1500–1700* (New Haven, Conn., 1989), p. 65.

²⁶ Thomas A. Brady, Jr., *Turning Swiss: Cities and Empire, 1450–1550* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 2. There are some welcome exceptions to the tendency toward insularity. James Casey’s *The History of the Family* (Oxford, 1989) is a European-wide survey that draws heavily upon Spanish examples, while Peter Sahlins’s *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989) compares Catalan village life on the French and Spanish sides of the border.