Reviews

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Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Edge of Crisis: War and Trade in the Spanish Atlantic, 1789–1808* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. xii + 623, £39.00, hb.

Edge of Crisis is the third volume of a great opus by Stanley J. Stein, professor emeritus of Princeton University, and his wife, historian Barbara H. Stein, being the product of a vast research project on the evolution of the Spanish Empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A first volume entitled *Silver, Trade and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (2000), analysed the Habsburg legacy of patrimonialism and its debilitating effect upon the imperial administration, later moving into a penetrating discussion of the reworking of old mercantilism under the early Bourbon in the first half of the eighteenth century. A second work, *Apogee of Empire* (2003), studied reforms that were put in place during the administration of Charles III (1759–88), including measures to liberalise trade, promote Spanish domestic industry, and modernise the fiscal and military administration in both the metropolis and the colonies. By careful analysis of the interaction of imperial bureaucrats and powerful mercantile firms and groups in Cadiz, Madrid and Mexico, this study made it possible to understand fundamental shifts in Bourbon policy, particularly regarding trade politics and policies in both Spain and Spanish America during the second half of the eighteenth century.

This third volume is a stupendous effort to broaden and deepen the contours of the 'Spanish Atlantic' – a felicitous phrase and concept – at the end of the eighteenth century. One of the great contributions of the Steins in this work is to transcend the traditional Britain/France dichotomy which has been prevalent in the discussion of power politics during the great crises of the European old regime in this period. Their detailed and massive study makes it evident how unwise it is to leave out of the historical discussion an analysis of the parallel trajectories of other rival, imperial states, most notably Spain, which continued to govern vast territories on a global scale during the eighteenth century. Indeed, it should be noted that the Spanish monarchy was able to compete actively with its principal and more powerful rivals, Britain and France, in many naval and land wars from 1761 until 1814.

Spain and its empire in the Americas were important if conservative actors in this grand theatre of war and trade that dominated the Atlantic during an era which was originally baptised as the 'age of revolutions', in the classic interpretations of Robert Palmer and Jacques Godechot. For the Spanish monarchy, this was a period of some modernisation (known as the Bourbon Reforms) but above all a time of defence of the old regime. That its efforts proved quite successful is demonstrated by the fact that, quite surprisingly, the Spanish empire in the Americas proved more resilient in many ways than the colonial regimes of Great Britain or France. The French lost effective control of Canada and the vast territory of Louisiana in 1763, and their richest Caribbean colony, Haiti, in 1803. The British were forced to let go of their most

important North American colonies (the United States) in 1783. In contrast, Spain did not lose the bulk of its American colonies until much later, between 1820 and 1825.

A close reading of the new volume reveals the considerable sophistication of the Bourbon Reforms, which were carried out in the last decades of the eighteenth century by three successive prime ministers: Aranda (a progressive), Flordablanca (a conservative) and Godoy (a skilled opportunist). Many of the new ideas intended to modernise but at the same time buttress the old monarchy and its empire flowed from the pens of a series of intellectual reformers, some of whom became high-level functionaries under Charles IV (1789–1808). Their reflections on the need to revitalise the Spanish economy, particularly in trade, industry and agriculture, were aimed at providing a response to (and a defence against) the aggressive dynamism of industrialising Britain and the Royal Navy, as well as the always economically and militarily powerful France.

As the Steins emphasise, however, much depended on New Spain, the empire's richest colony. Under the leadership of Viceroy Revillagigedo in the early 1790s, Bourbon Mexico played a major role in the Atlantic world. Although the wealthy merchants of Mexico City and Veracruz increased their rivalry, they simultaneously collaborated with the viceroy and the Spanish king to finance many public works and great fortifications in Veracruz, Campeche and throughout the greater Spanish Caribbean, as well as reinforcing the Spanish Navy by contributing to the great naval shipyards at Havana. At the same time, the great silver mines of Mexico made the viceroyalty the world leader in silver production. As Humboldt would remark at length in his famous *Political Essay on New Spain* (1811), Mexican silver coins provided most of the world with the greater part of the metallic currencies then circulating in Europe, the Baltic states, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, India and China.

But as *Edge of Empire* also demonstrates with force and clarity, the survival of the Spanish empire depended to a large degree on who controlled the Atlantic. For a long time, the Spanish Navy and Merchant Marine were able to hold their own, but after the catastrophic naval defeats at the Bay of San Vicente (1797) and later at Trafalgar (1805), at the hands of the British Navy, things began to unravel. These defeats led to the establishment of new ways of carrying on Atlantic trade, most notably through neutral commerce and shipping, particularly among trading ships of the United States, Portugal, Sweden and Hamburg. The Steins describe in detail how war led to the most complex trading and financial transactions of the age with regard to Mexican silver and commerce, organised in particular by the Ouvrard/Parish consortium. This consortium also engaged the merchant banks of Baring Brothers (London) and Hope and Company (Amsterdam), although much of the money finally ended up in the hands of Napoleon.

In sum, this work by Stanley and Barbara Stein offers a great tapestry, or 'metanarrative', of the imperial history of Spain and Spanish America from the time of the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 to the French invasion of Spain in 1808. The authors provide a detailed survey of a vast geopolitical and geoeconomic terrain, including most prominently detailed intellectual and political portraits of a large cast of characters who ran the Spanish government and its empire. These included high-ranking functionaries, churchmen, merchants, merchant bankers and mine owners of the Spanish American world. And it is from the careful biographical analysis of these figures that one can best understand the major

decisions and policies adopted to defend the empire in its hour of peril. Eventually, nothing could avoid the erosion caused by war, contraband, neutral trade, fiscal deficits and exorbitant war debts. The empire was slowly caving in, but as the Steins argue, it did not collapse at one blow. Indeed, while the invasion of Spain by the Napoleonic army in 1808 led to the breakdown of absolute monarchy in the metropole, the Spanish empire continued to survive in the colonies, and the viceroyalties and captaincies-general of Spanish America sent abundant funds to finance the war against the French. It was only as a result of the prolonged wars of independence – which began in 1810 but did not end until the 1820s – that the Spanish empire would finally fragment into a vast mosaic of new nations. In this sense 1808 was, effectively speaking, the year of the edge of crisis. I await the next volume from the Steins with eagerness, since it will undoubtedly round out this vast historical interpretation of the Spanish Atlantic with which they have already regaled us.

El Colegio de México CARLOS MARICHAL

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Hector Mendoza Vargas and Carla Lois (eds.), *Historia de la cartografía de Iberoamérica: nuevos caminos, viejos problemas* (Mexico City: Instituto de Geografía, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009), pp. 494.

This book of 19 chapters aims to show how the study of the history of cartography in Ibero-America has progressed in recent years, largely through the influence of Anglo-Saxon scholars such as Brian Harley and Denis Cosgrove. Harley, a geographer, was one of the first to theorise the history of cartography, arguing that maps are not neutral documents but reflect the exercise of power. From this perspective research into the history of cartography necessitates the deconstruction of the mapping process, revealing the purposes for which maps were compiled and the motivations of their authors. Hence it is argued that such research requires both detailed archival work and an interdisciplinary approach that draws on a range of fields such as cultural geography, semiotics, iconography and Foucauldian sociology. The papers presented in this volume have been selected by Mendoza Vargas and Lois to represent this new approach, which was marked by the first Simposio Iberoamericano de Historia de la Cartografía in Buenos Aires in 2006. While a few of the contributions to the volume have been written especially for this book, most are case studies taken from conferences held since then. The majority are studies of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maps, and the essays have a strong focus on Argentina and Mexico, possibly reflecting the interests of the editors and the location of the symposia. There is a total absence of papers on maps of the Andean region or Central America, and only one chapter touches on indigenous mapping.

The introduction is brief, being largely a résumé of the papers that the book contains, and it could usefully have provided a fuller overview of theoretical developments in the history of cartography in general. The book is divided into four thematic sections, though in many cases the essays address issues that straddle several sections. In the first and perhaps most diverse section, 'Cartographic Representations', two papers compare the approaches of different nationalities or social groups to representing space. Hence Francisco Roque de Oliveira compares Portuguese and