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Alejandro Cañeque, *The King's Living Image: The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. xii + 403, £35.00, pb.

One of the dominating themes of the work on colonial Latin American history produced during the past two decades has been the reconstruction of the history of subaltern populations (especially indigenous communities). Although this corpus of historical research has transformed our understandings of the structures and practices of Spanish colonialism in significant and innovative ways, the casualties of this research, to some degree, have been administrative history in general and colonial bureaucrats in particular. Alejandro Cañeque's insightful book makes a compelling case for why these officials should not be ignored. It focuses on the period from the late sixteenth century to the end of Spanish Habsburg rule in 1700. Rejecting what he perceives to be ahistorical approaches to understanding Spanish political culture, the author interrogates the roles of language, ritual and ceremony in order to reconstruct contemporary understandings of viceregal power, its reach and its limitations. His broader objective is to re-examine the political history of Spanish colonialism by focusing on New Spain. Based on an impressive array of published and archival sources, this work is a fine example of historical research and writing.

Chapter one examines how the figure of the viceroy embodied the idea of the monarch, and reflects on contemporary understandings of the rule of viceroys. Cañeque assesses the political language and symbols which defined and described viceregal power. Key to his discussion of 'seeing the viceroy' through ritual is that the 'belief that authority is intimately connected with display was still very much alive' (p. 12). Chapters two and three analyse the most important bodies responsible for both the support and restraint of viceregal power, the Audiencia, the municipal council, and the Church and the Inquisition, and the discourses that legitimised their respective powers. Chapter four explores the central role that public display of viceregal power played in the deployment of imperial rule, and how conflicts among different institutions of colonial rule were 'tested on the public stage of the streets and churches of Mexico City' (p. 132). Cañeque emphasises the 'visibility' of the viceroy in such displays in contrast to the 'invisibility' of the king. Chapter five scrutinises viceregal patronage, networks of personal loyalties and distribution of offices, and the question of corruption in colonial government. Chapters six and seven map out shifts in colonial rhetoric about the indigenous populations of colonial Mexico and the relevance of viceroys to their lives.

Although Cañeque overstates the extent to which historians continue to view viceroys as absolutist despots and/or find their power base 'baffling' (p. 53), thus erecting a straw man, his questioning as to how much we really understand about one of the most important figures in the expansion of Spanish imperialism is well taken. The author makes several important arguments. First, that the concept of the 'state' when applied to Spanish rule and empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is not a useful category of analysis: 'It is pointless to study a state that never existed' (p. 13). What did exist, according to the author, is the concept of the 'mystical body' which is fundamental to understanding the nature of viceregal power. It was the conceptualisation of the 'viceroy as the king's living image [that] sets him apart, in a very radical way, from the conventional view of the viceroy as

the head of a colonial bureaucracy' (p. 239). Second, it was precisely because of an abiding belief that authority needed to be made visible and in a sustained manner that resulted in the ruling elite's sensitivities to symbols of authority manifested in ceremonies, rituals and public appearances. Given that the majority of the population of colonial Mexico was illiterate, 'symbolic representations of power reached a critical importance: It was the language of power that everybody understood' (p. 12). The viceroys' power depended on rituals 'because their power was constituted through them … it was not ritual in the service of colonial power but colonial power in the service of ritual' (p. 155). While some readers may not be fully persuaded by this argument, Cañeque's careful analysis of the politics of gesture, space, and accoutrements of position suggest that they were far from being ephemeral or irrelevant. Finally, he demonstrates how the ruling elite's discourse about the indigenous populations of Mexico shifted from a 'rhetoric of wretchedness' (p. 186) to one in which the indigenous population acquired two contradictory 'identities': whereas one of them idealised rural Indians, the other demonised their urban counterparts.

While I applaud the author's critique of the applicability of the concept of the 'state' to Hapsburg Spain and its American dominions, he seems to work with a highly idealised notion of 'state' as a benchmark for gauging its operations. Moreover, although he argues that it is not until around 1800 that it makes sense to argue for the existence of a colonial state, the reasons why he opts for the beginning of the nineteenth century are not made clear. Cañeque, nevertheless, resurrects an important debate about the nature of the state and contributes to broader discussions about Spanish imperialism in suggestive ways. A second quibble with this study relates to the author's argument about the ruling elite's construction of two contradictory identities for Mexico's indigenous peoples. 'The Indians of Mexico City', Cañeque asserts, 'occupied a place apart in colonial rhetoric, as they were not represented as poor and miserable but as cunning, drunkards, thieves, and with no respect whatsoever for authority' (p. 226). Fair enough, but quotidian practice (the fraught issue of whether or not urban Indians were subject to Spanish guild regulations, for example) suggests that an understanding of the 'miserable' nature of the urban Indians and their need for special protection did, in fact, continue to influence government policy in the seventeenth century as it did well into the eighteenth. A final observation concerns the author's emphasis on the 'invisibility' of the monarch. I was under the impression (perhaps misguided) that there was an array of visual and rhetorical strategies (including the very same ceremonies and rituals discussed by Cañeque) by which the king, despite his physical absence, could indeed, be made visible to his colonial subjects. Indeed, the author includes several illustrations in his book which clearly show representations of Spanish monarchs which were not refracted through the figure of the viceroy. Thus, the important question of ways in which the physical king entered into the imagination of his colonial subjects is elided. Such quibbles aside, *The King's Living Image* is an important and fresh study. It makes a major contribution to our understanding of viceregal political culture and power, and of Spanish colonialism more broadly.

University of Texas at Austin SUSAN DEANS-SMITH