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### Jordana Dym and Christophe Belaubre, eds., Politics, Economy, and Society in Bourbon Central America, 1759-1821

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last chapter, "Sor Juana, Serafina de Cristo, and the Nuns of the Casa del Placer," provides several poignant examples of nuns' alliances. One in particular highlights Sor Juana and her literary contribution to a secret society of Portuguese nuns. Contrary to popular belief, Kirk propounds that Sor Juana had a support system of female peers.

Stephanie L. Kirk's *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico* is a timely scholarly contribution to the field of gender and religion. Her text presents a fresh look at convent literature by specifically analyzing alliances, friendships, and communities; the majority of studies to date have focused primarily on spiritual *vidas* (autobiographies) and letters written by nuns. This book, as Kirk states in the conclusion, embraces an interdisciplinary approach to studying convent communities: it employs archival documents, literary theory, and the latest research on gender studies. References to numerous authors of secondary sources at times distracted this reader from a book that is otherwise very well crafted. Kirk provides a fine-grained analysis of a very complex picture of female alliances in colonial Mexico.

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*Politics, Economy, and Society in Bourbon Central America, 1759-1821.* Edited by Jordana Dym and Christophe Belaubre. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2007. ix + 310 pp. Illustrations, tables, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$60.00 cloth.)

This edited volume brings together an important collection of essays on politics, economy, and society in late colonial Central America, whose secondary importance within Spain's empire has contributed to neglect within Anglophone historiography. Nevertheless, as the editors emphasize in the introduction, "The Kingdom of Guatemala, Spain's smallest mainland captaincy general, experienced its share of Bourbon policy making" (p. 3). Moreover, as this anthology demonstrates, the Bourbon Reforms' most significant outcome in Central America was not success or failure in achieving centralization but success in providing opportunities for change in state-society relations and advancement for those who took advantage of openings created by the need for increased control.

Sajid Herrera's essay on primary education in San Salvador and Sonsonate demonstrates that while the Crown increased the number of schools from thirty-one in 1768 to eighty-nine in 1807, communities' inability to pay teachers and teachers' failure to do their job hindered the Crown's goal of creating good subjects. Christophe Belaubre utilizes notarial registers to show how financial managers helped the Church maintain solvency during natural

disaster and the *Consolidación de Vales Reales* (whereby, in 1804, Carlos IV seized interest on loans owed to the Church to finance Spain's wars), while establishing fiscal networks with Guatemala's elite that helped these men consolidate power. Jordana Dym's essay on the Bourbon Reforms and city government explores how municipal revival and fiscal and intendency reforms, which sought uniformity over centralization, unintentionally weakened ties of cities to villages and strengthened individual towns' autonomy. Gustavo Palma Murga analyzes reports by the *Consulado de Comercio* to demonstrate how the shift from the *Consulado's* defense of mercantilism after the 1778 Free Trade Regulation, to efforts to secure autonomy in choosing trading partners, stemmed from Guatemala City merchants' fear of losing control over regional commerce.

The rest of the essays explore the negotiation of power in Bourbon Central America. Drawing on official reports, Jorge González examines the rise and fall of Quetzaltenango's *aguardiente* monopoly, revealing how popular resistance to state reform caused the monopoly's downfall. Doug Tompson argues that Spanish colonization of the Mosquito Shore in the 1790s failed because of reliance on British personnel recruited to assist with Spanish occupation and Spanish misinterpretation of British methods of interaction with *costeños*. Eugenia Rodríguez-Sáenz analyzes official reports and civil suits to show how the Crown's regulation of marriage and sexuality in Costa Rica reinforced the Church-State alliance, thereby challenging traditional views of Bourbon anticlericalism. In his essay on José de Bustamante, captain general from 1811 to 1818, Timothy Hawkins shows how this bureaucrat exemplified a progressive monarchy. Michel Bertrand urges scholars to look at social networks as a model for understanding how elites functioned in Guatemala. In the conclusion, Stephen Webre situates the essays in a framework of change and continuity, prompting readers to view some of the change in Bourbon Central America as a product of forces, including natural catastrophe, "which in themselves have little or nothing to do with the political agenda of the Bourbon monarchy" (p. 266). In sum, this collection is significant because it asks scholars to rethink the Bourbon Reforms and other forces of change and their intended and unintended consequences for late colonial Central America.

Like all good studies, this anthology raises as many questions as it answers. For example, given that they gave rise to debates over the nature of power, the earthquakes that destroyed Guatemala City in 1773 and led to its relocation merit fuller examination. Analysis of the intersection between cultural production and state policies is also absent. Nevertheless, this collection is first-rate, with each essay being an invitation to explore Central America's rich but understudied colonial past.

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