

5. CITY GOVERNMENT IN THE SPANISH INDIES

The colonial city was born just as the freedom and authority of the communes or towns of Spain was passing away. As a result, from the outset the right of the king to appoint municipal officials was accepted without question. Philip II began the practice—which later became general—of selling posts in the town councils to the highest bidders, with the right of resale or bequest of the offices, on condition that a certain part of their value be paid to the crown at each transfer. Gonzalo Gómez de Cervantes, a leading citizen of Mexico, criticized the practice and suggested reforming it in a 1599 memorial addressed to a member of the Council of the Indies.

It is well known and understood that Mexico is the head of all this kingdom and that all the other cities, towns, and places of this New Spain acknowledge it as such. All the more reason, then, that its *regidores* (councilmen) should be outstanding men, of quality, experience, and mature judgment. And the lack of such men has been a cause of many different things that show a serious weakness. The proof of this is that the majority of the *regidores* are youths who even twenty years from now will not have enough experience to govern a city; and it is a sorry thing to see those who have not yet left off being children, already made city fathers.

This evil arises from the permission granted by His Majesty for the sale of these offices—whereby they go to those who can pay the most for them, and not to those who would render the best honor and service to the commonweal. It is shameful that such youths should be preferred for the posts of *regidores* and other important positions over mature and eminent men who should occupy those offices. Truly, it would redound much more to the service of His Majesty and to the increase of his kingdom, if he gave these council seats to qualified persons, descendants of conquistadores, and others who have served him; they would regard their king and country with greater love, if His Majesty rewarded them for their merits and services, and would be inspired to serve him still more.

It is not seemly that those who yesterday were shopkeepers or tavern keepers, or engaged in other base pursuits, should today hold the best offices in the country while gentlemen and descendants of those who conquered and won the land go about poor, dejected, degraded, and neglected. And it is the city that suffers most from this injustice, because the fixing of market prices, the supervision of weights and measures in the markets, and other very important matters are in a state of great disorder. It would be a very efficacious remedy, if his Majesty were to add a dozen council seats and give them to

Gonzalo Gómez de Cervantes, *La vida económica y social de Nueva España al finalizar el siglo XVI*, ed. Alberto María Carreño (México, 1944), pp. 93–94. Excerpt translated by Benjamin Keen.

men of quality, maturity, wisdom, and merit—not by way of sale, but as gifts—and if he were to do the same with the seats that fall vacant. If such a policy were adopted, everything pertaining to his royal estate and the preservation of this realm would be greatly served and advanced.

6. THE SOURCES OF CATHOLIC POWER

By the last decades of the colonial era clerical discipline had relaxed, and the Church was rent by unseemly squabbles between monastic and secular clergy and between Creole and peninsular priests. Yet the Church's influence in colonial society, except among a tiny handful of converts to the new materialistic doctrines of the Enlightenment, remained undiminished. In the following excerpt the Mexican historian Alamán explains the sources of Catholic power.

The immense influence of the Church rested on three foundation stones: respect for religion, remembrance of its great benefactions, and its immense wealth. The people, poorly instructed in the essentials of religion, tended to identify it in large part with ceremonial pomp; they found relief from the tedium of their lives in the religious functions, which, especially during Holy Week, represented in numerous processions the most venerated mysteries of the redemption. The festivals of the Church, which should have been entirely spiritual, were thus transformed into so many profane performances, marked by displays of fireworks, dances, plays, bullfights and cockfights, and even such forbidden diversions as cards and the like, in order to celebrate at great cost the festivals of the patron saints of the towns, into which the Indians poured the greater part of the fruits of their labor. It was this vain pomp, attended by little true piety, that led the viceroy whom I have frequently cited [the Duke of Linares] to remark that “in this realm all is outward show, and though their lives are steeped in vices, the majority think that by wearing a rosary about their necks and kissing the hand of the priest they are made Catholics, and that the Ten Commandments can be replaced by ceremonies.”

The Indians continued to regard the regular clergy with the respect that the first missionaries had justly gained by protecting them against the oppression and violence of the conquistadores and by instructing them not only in religion but in the arts necessary for subsistence. This respect, which grew to be a fanatical veneration, presented no dangers as long as it was accorded to men of admirable virtue, and the government, to which they were very devoted and obedient, found in these exemplary ecclesiastics its firmest support;

Alamán, *Historia de Méjico*, 1:64–70. Excerpt translated by Benjamin Keen.

but it could become highly dangerous if a clergy of debased morals wished to abuse this influence for its own ends. This danger to the government was made still greater by the very precaution that Archbishop Haro had advised to avoid it, for since the high Church positions were entrusted to Europeans, the Americans, who generally enjoyed only the less important posts and benefices, exerted greater influence over the people with whom they were placed in more immediate contact.

The wealth of the clergy consisted not so much in the estates that it possessed, numerous though they were (especially the urban properties in the principal cities like Mexico City, Puebla, and others), as in capital invested in quitrent mortgages on the property of individuals; the traffic in mortgages and the collection of interest made of every chaplaincy and religious brotherhood a sort of bank. The total property of the clergy, both secular and regular, in estates and loans of this kind, certainly was not less than half of the total value of the real estate of the country.

The town council of Mexico City, seeing the multitude of monasteries and nunneries that were being founded, and the large number of persons destined for the ecclesiastical profession, together with the great sums devised to pious foundations, petitioned King Philip IV in 1644 "that no more convents of nuns or monks be established, since the number of the former was excessive, and the number of their woman servants even greater; that limits be placed upon the estates of the convents and that they be forbidden to acquire new holdings, complaining that the greater part of the landed property of the land had come into the hands of the religious by way of donations or purchases, and that if steps were not taken to remedy the situation they would soon be masters of all; that no more religious be sent from Spain, and that the bishops be charged not to ordain any more clerics, since there were already more than six thousand in all the bishoprics without any occupation, ordained on the basis of tenuous chaplaincies; and, finally, that there should be a reform in the excessive number of festivals, which increased idleness and gave rise to other evils." The *cortes* assembled in Madrid at that period petitioned the king to the same effect, and similar reforms were earlier proposed by the Council of Castile, but nothing was done, and things continued in the same state. . . .

In addition to the revenues derived from these estates and loans, the secular clergy had the tithes, which in all the bishoprics of New Spain amounted to some 1,800,000 pesos annually, although the government received a part of this sum. . . . In the bishopric of Michoacán the tithes were farmed out; this made their collection more rigorous and oppressive, since private interest devised a thousand expedients to burden even the least important products of agriculture with this assessment.

The clergy had a privileged jurisdiction, with special tribunals, and a personal *fuero* which in former times had been very extensive but had greatly di-

minished with the intervention of the royal judges in criminal cases and with the declaration that the secular courts had jurisdiction in cases involving both principal and interest of the funds of the chaplaincies and pious foundations. The viceroy decided conflicts between ecclesiastical and civil courts, and this prerogative was one of those that gave the greatest luster to his authority.

From the instructions of the Duke of Linares to his successor and from the secret report made by Don Jorge Juan and Don Antonio Ulloa to King Ferdinand VI, it appears that the customs of the clergy had declined at the beginning of the eighteenth century to a point of scandalous corruption, especially among the friars charged with the administration of the curacies or doctrines. In the epoch of which I speak this corruption was particularly notable in the capitals of some bishoprics and in smaller places, but in the capital of the realm the presence of the superior authorities enforced more decorum. Everywhere, it should also be said, there were truly exemplary ecclesiastics, and in this respect certain religious orders stood out. The Jesuits, above all others, were remarkable for the purity of their customs and for their religious zeal, a notable contrast, appearing in the above-cited work by Juan and Ulloa between their comments on the Jesuits and their references to other orders. Their expulsion left a great void, not only in the missions among the barbarians whom they had in charge but in the matter of the instruction and moral training of the people. . . . No less commendable were the friars of the order of Saint James, those of the order of Saint Philip, whose oratories had largely replaced those of the Jesuits, and among the hospitaller orders the Bethlehemites, who devoted themselves to primary education and the care of hospitals.

Into these religious orders the rivalry of birth had also penetrated, excepting always the Jesuits, who had no chapters or tumultuous elections and whose prelates were named in Rome by the general of the order, with regard only to the merit and virtue of individuals. Not only did there prevail in some of them the strife between "gachupines and creoles," but there were entire communities composed almost exclusively of one or the other element.

~~7. THE ADMINISTRATION OF COLONIAL BRAZIL~~

~~The government of Portuguese Brazil broadly resembled that of the Spanish Indies in its spirit, structure, and vices. Henry Koster, an astute observer of Brazilian life in the early nineteenth century, describes the political and financial administration of the important province of Pernambuco.~~

Henry Koster, *Travels in Brazil*, 2 vols. (London, 1816), 1:46-50.

ages of sixteen and sixty, must be enrolled either as soldiers of the line, as militiamen, or as belonging to the body of *Ordenanças*. Of the regular soldiers, I have already spoken in another place. Of the second class, each township has a regiment, of which the individuals, with the exception of the major and adjutant, and in some cases the colonel, do not receive any pay. But they are considered as embodied men; and as such are called out upon some few occasions, in the course of the year, to assemble in uniform, and otherwise accoutered. The expense which must be incurred in this respect, of necessity, precludes the possibility of many persons becoming members of this class, even if the government were desirous of increasing the number of militia regiments. The soldiers of these are subject to their captains, to the colonel, and to the governor of the province. The colonels are either rich planters, or the major or lieutenant-colonel of a regiment of the line is thus promoted to the command of one of these; in this case, and in this case only, he receives pay. I am inclined to think, that he ought to possess some property in the district, and that any deviation from this rule is an abuse; but I am not certain that the law so ordains. The majors and the adjutants are likewise occasionally promoted from the line; but whether they are regularly military men or planters, they receive pay; as their trouble, in distributing orders, and in other arrangements connected with the regiment, is considerable.

The third class, that of the *Ordenanças*, consisting of by far the largest portion of the white persons, and of free mulatto men of all shades, have for their immediate chiefs, the *Capitães-môres*, who serve without pay: and all the persons who are connected with the *Ordenanças*, are obliged likewise to afford their services gratuitously. Each district contains one *Capitão-môr*, who is invariably a person possessing property in the part of the country to which he is appointed. He is assisted by a major, captains, and *alferes*, who are lieutenants or ensigns, and by sergeants and corporals. The duties of the *Capitão-môr* are to see that every individual under his command has in his possession some species of arms; either a firelock, a sword, or a pike. He distributes the governor's orders through his district; and can oblige any of his men to take these orders to the nearest captain, who sends another peasant forward to the next captain, who sends another peasant forward to the next captain, and so forth; all which is done without any pay. A *Capitão-môr* can also imprison for twenty-four hours, and send under arrest for trial a person who is accused of having committed any crime, to the civil magistrate of the town to which his district is immediately attached. Now, the abuses of this office of *Capitão-môr* are very many; and the lower orders of free persons are much oppressed by these great men, and by their subalterns, down to the corporals. The peasants are often sent upon errands which have no relation to public business; for leagues and leagues these poor fellows are made to travel, for the purpose of carrying some private letter of the chief, of his captains, or of his lieutenants, without any remuneration. Indeed, many of these men in place, seldom think

of employing their slaves on these occasions, or of paying the free persons so employed. This I have witnessed times out of number; and have heard the peasants in all parts of the country complain: it is a most heavy grievance. Nothing so much vexes a peasant as the consciousness of losing his time and trouble in a service which is not required by his sovereign. Persons are sometimes confined in the stocks for days together, on some trifling plea; and are at last released without being sent to the civil magistrate, or even admitted to a hearing. However, I am happy to say, that I am acquainted with some men, whose conduct is widely different from what I have above stated; but the power given to an individual is too great, and the probability of being called to an account for its abuse too remote, to insure the exercise of it in a proper manner.

The free mulattos and free negros, whose names are upon the rolls, either of the militia regiments which are commanded by white officers, or by those of their own class and color, are not, properly speaking, subject to the *Capitães-môres*. These officers, and the colonels of militia, are appointed by the supreme government: and the subaltern officers are nominated by the governor of each province.

9. THE JESUIT INDIAN POLICY

The Jesuits early established their leadership in the work of Indian conversion and in the religious and educational life of Brazil in general. They aimed to settle their Indian converts in aldeas, or villages, where they would live under the tutelage of the priests, completely segregated from the white colonists. The Jesuit Indian program led to many clashes with the Portuguese planters, who wanted the natives to work as slaves on their estates. The planters charged that the Indians in the Jesuit villages "were true slaves, who labored as such not only in the colegios but on the so-called Indian lands, which in the end became the estates and sugar mills of the Jesuit Fathers." Replying to these and other accusations, Fr. Joseph de Anchieta explained the Jesuit Indian policy.

Every day, in the morning the Fathers teach the Indians doctrine and say mass for those who want to hear it before going to their fields; after that the children stay in school, where they learn reading and writing, counting, and other good customs pertaining to the Christian life; in the afternoon they

Joseph de Anchieta, *Cartas, informações, fragmentos históricos e sermões do Padre Joseph de Anchieta, S.J. (1554-1594)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1933), pp. 381-382. Excerpt translated by Benjamin Keen.

conduct another class especially for those who are receiving the sacred sacraments. Daily the Fathers visit the sick with certain Indians assigned for this purpose, and if they have some special needs they attend to them, and always administer to them the necessary sacraments. All this they do purely for love of God and for no other interest or profit, for the Fathers get their food from the *colegio*, and they live with the Indians solely because of love of their souls, which have such great need of them. The Fathers make no use of them on plantations, for if the *colegio* needs them for certain tasks, and they come to help, they work for wages, . . . and not through force but of their own free will, because they need clothing or implements. For although it is their natural tendency to go about naked, all those who have been raised in the Jesuit schools now wear clothes and are ashamed to go about naked. It is not true, as some say, that the Fathers are the lords of the villages.

When the Portuguese come to the villages in search of Indian labor, the Fathers help them all they can, summoning one of the Indian headmen to take the Portuguese to the houses of the natives to show them the goods they have brought, and those who wish to go they permit to leave without impediment. If the Fathers object at times, it is because the Indians have not finished their farm work, and they have to do this for the sake of their wives and children. In other cases, the Indians are not getting along with their wives, and once they leave for the homes of the Portuguese they never return; such Indians the Father also restrains from going, so that they may continue living with their wives. . . .

The Indians are punished for their offenses by their own magistrates, appointed by the Portuguese governors; the only chastisement consists in being put in the stocks for a day or two, as the magistrate considers best; they use no chains or other imprisonment. If some Indian who went to work for the Portuguese returns before completing his time, the Father compels him to return to work out his time, and if the Indian cannot go for some good reason the Father arranges matters to the satisfaction of his employer.

The Fathers always encourage the Indians to cultivate their fields and to raise more provisions than they need, so that in case of necessity they might aid the Portuguese by way of barter; in fact, many Portuguese obtain their food from the villages. Thus one could say that the Fathers are truly the fathers of the Indians, both of their souls and of their bodies.

PART FOUR



**COLONIAL
SOCIETY AND
CULTURE**

Colonial high culture could boast of only an occasional genius like Sor Juana. Popular culture, however, was thriving—at least to judge from the rare glimpses afforded by the documentary record. Elites may have felt isolated by their distance from European cultural centers and daunted by the prestige of European models, but further down the social ladder, the turbulent mixture of New World and Old World cultures was producing vibrant hybrid or *mestizo* cultures that were uniquely American. At the time, colonial authorities tended to view these *mestizo* cultures with suspicion because their supposedly transgressive nature threatened to undermine established social and cultural hierarchies. Nor were indigenous cultures eradicated despite concerted (if sporadic) efforts by colonial civil and religious authorities. Indigenous knowledge still surfaced from time to time in contemporary accounts to disturb the tranquility of the colonial social order.

1. THE COLONIAL UNIVERSITY

The colonial university was patterned on similar institutions in Spain and faithfully reproduced their medieval organization, curriculum, and method of instruction. Indifference to practical or scientific studies, slavish respect for the authority of the Bible, Aristotle, the Church Fathers, and certain medieval schoolmen, as well as a passion for hairsplitting debate of fine points of theological or metaphysical doctrine, were among the features of colonial academic life. In the following selection a Spanish friar describes the University of Lima in the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

The University with its royal schools is so renowned that it need envy no other in the world, thanks to its founders, the emperor Charles V and later Phillip II, both of glorious memory, who enlarged, ennobled, and enriched it with the same privileges as the University of Salamanca [the most prestigious and oldest university in Spain]. . . . There are chairs [professorships] in Scholastic theology, scripture, law, cannon law, . . . institutes, codes, decrees, three in philosophy, and one in the Indian language for the training of the priests who will serve as parish priests or doctrinal instructors for the Indians—before they are commissioned, they are tested and certified by the language professor.

The professors are for the most part native to the Indies and especially to this city. It would seem that [Lima's] skies, like those of the Indies in general, produce ingenious pilgrims, gifted with wit and facility, such that they are

Antonio Vásquez de Espinosa, *Compendio y descripción de las Indias Occidentales*, 2 vols. (1636), 2:606–608. Excerpt translated by the editors.

generally very able and lively intellects, as is evident from the chairs that they occupy and from the pulpits that they illuminate with great subjects, in particular, the sciences and religious sermons. They are unfortunate, however, in being far from the eyes of Your Majesty, because after having worked so hard—as the chairs are few, the subjects many, and not all can be lawyers—after having worked and excelled and spent 3,500 pesos getting their degrees, and having no way to make a living, they are dismayed to see themselves without prospects. Thus many clerics procure benefices and curacies among the Indians in order to make a living, with the result that many leave their books and studies behind and never finish their degrees.

The Cloister [Faculty] of this University is distinguished because it has more than eighty doctors and masters as well as members of the Royal Audiencia [Supreme Court] who join them because at the end of the year the gratuities [fees] are considerable. The lecture halls in the schools are very good and the chapel is elegant . . . but the most remarkable is the amphitheater where they hold public ceremonies and commencement exercises which are very large and majestic as are all the graduation ceremonies because the city's nobility are invited to take part. They gather together at the doctoral candidate's house. A banner bearing the coats of arms of the University and of the graduate hangs from a window over a canopy and a crimson velvet cushion and these are also placed in the theater set up in the Cathedral under the Royal Coat of Arms. The sound of trumpets, flutes, and bugles alert and call together the special guests and the doctors who had formed the previous evening's escort. The nobility follow the banner, followed by the Beadles with their silver maces, and then the masters and doctors with their insignia by order of seniority, and ending with the dean of the Faculty and the graduate. In that fashion they proceed to the Rector's house, where the members of the Royal Audiencia, with the Rector in their center and arranged by order of seniority, wait to join them. In this same order, the following day, they proceed to the Cathedral where the theater and stage have been made ready with decorations and chairs. They hear Mass and, when it is finished, the newest member of the Faculty makes some sarcastic remarks and the head master gives him his degree as is done at Salamanca.

2. THE TENTH MUSE

The conditions of colonial life did not favor the development of a rich literature. Isolation from foreign influences, the strict censorship of all reading matter, and the limited audience for writing of every kind made literary creation difficult. Amid "a flock of jangling magpies," as one literary historian describes the Gongorist versifiers of the seventeenth century, appeared an incomparable songbird, known to her admiring

*Your desperate pleas give wings
to the liberties women allow,
then once you've made them bad
you wish to find them pure and good.*

*¿Which one commits the greater fault
in a passion gone astray:
she who falls to constant pleading,
or he that pleads with her to fall?*

*¿Or who is most to blame
though both have done their share:
she that sins for pay,
or he that pays to sin?*

*¿Why then are you so frightened
of the error of your ways?
wish that women be the way you make them
or else make them as you wish.*

*Were you to quit entreating women so
then later on, with much more cause,
you could blame the woman
when she came to seek you out.*

*Thus with many weapons I expose
your arrogant and evil ways,
for in both word and deed
you bind devil, flesh, and world.*

4. GAUCHO ENTERTAINMENT

World-class intellectuals like Sor Juana, writing primarily for transatlantic cultural elites, were not the only ones to combine New World sensibilities and European cultural forms into a uniquely American hybrid or mestizo culture. In 1775–1776, Alonso Carrió de la Vandra, a disappointed colonial bureaucrat from Lima writing under the pseudonym Concolorcorvo, published his sardonic *El lazarrillo de ciegos caminantes* (Guide for Blind Travelers), a picaresque travelogue of an overland journey from Uruguay to Peru. This excerpt, a “laconic description of Tucumán province along the mail road,” provides a rare glimpse into the rural culture of Argentina—a culture that would later become renowned for its fierce gauchos (cow-

boys) and beated poetry contests. The translation of the poem in this excerpt approximates the original rhyme scheme in order to convey some sense of the mixing of cultural forms that the author found so noteworthy.

A small number of settlers are content to live rustic lives; maintaining themselves on a piece of beef and drinking *aloja*—a mildly alcoholic drink made from fermented carob and honey which they often make in backwoods regions—while sitting in the shade of the carob trees. There they have their bacchanals, telling each other stories, one gaucho to another or to their rustic entourage. Accompanied by the sound of badly strung and out-of-tune guitars, they sing and throw out verses that seem more like dirty jokes. If decency permitted, I would repeat some of the more extravagant ones on love—each clever in its own way—that they sing after warming themselves with *aloja* and then re-heating themselves with a post-*aloja* (although this custom is not common among the younger folks). The openings of their songs are well harmonized in a barbaric and crude sort of way because the verses are conceived and composed beforehand in the head of some witty scoundrel.

One afternoon, the district inspector, who wished to go horseback riding, guided us to a thick grove inhabited by a numerous band of gauchos of both sexes. He warned us that we should laugh with them but without taking sides, so as to avoid inciting them to violence. The inspector, as the most experienced among us, went up to the leader of the assembly, gave him the customary greeting, and asked permission for us to rest awhile in the shade of those leafy trees as we were tired out from riding in the sun. They received all of us graciously and handed us gourds of *aloja*. The inspector drank from the brew and we all did the same, reassured by his good faith and trustworthiness. Four of the rustic lads gallantly surrendered us their log seat. Two robust young women were swinging from two ropes lashed to two thick trees. Other women, perhaps a dozen, entertained themselves brewing *aloja*, preparing mate [tea], and slicing watermelons. Two or three men busied themselves heating pieces of partly dried meat and some marrow bones on the hot coals. Others tried to get their guitars in order by rubbing on the scuffed-up strings. An old man—who seemed about sixty years old but who had enjoyed life for one hundred and four years—rested at the foot of a shady beech tree, from where he gave his orders. Seeing that it was now time for the meal to begin, he sat down and asked the women when they expected to feed the guests. The young women replied that they were waiting for some cheeses and honey for the dessert to be brought from the house. The old man said that that seemed very good to him.

Concolorcorvo (Alonso Carrió de la Vandra), *El lazarrillo de ciegos caminantes* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1943), pp. 95–98. Excerpt translated by the editors.

The inspector, who was feeling a bit impatient, promptly told the old man that to him [the inspector] it seemed very bad “and so Mr. Gorgonio would you mind asking the young women and men to sing us a few of their favorite verses to the sound of their tuneful instruments.” “If it will make you happy,” said the venerable old man, “and the first to sing will be Cenobia and Saturnina with Espiridión and Horno de Babilonia.” They came briskly forward and asked the venerable old man if they should repeat the verses that they had sung earlier that day or if they should improvise others off the top of their heads. Here the inspector interjected: “the latter are the ones I’d prefer since they’re likely to be quite salty.” They had sung nearly twenty stanzas—which the venerable old man pronounced “awful”—when mother Nazaria with her daughters Capracia and Clotilde arrived [with food from the house] and the company welcomed with great pleasure Pantaleón and Torcuato who brought along the grilled meat. The inspector had already taken out his watch twice, by which we all understood that he wanted to leave. But the old man, who realized what was going on [with the inspector], ordered Rudesinda and Nemesio to sing three or four little stanzas from those that the friar had made when he had come by a week or so ago. The inspector alerted us to be attentive and that each one of us should commit to memory the verse that pleased us most. The first verses they sang, truth be told, were of little consequence. The last four seem to me worthy of setting down in print because of their extravagant nature, so I’m going to record them here for posterity:

Lady: *I know too well your vile acts,
and your low life as a felon.
You eat the finest melon,
and then give us rabbits for cats.*

Suitor: *That’s quite enough of settling scores;
there’s much worse that I’ve been called.
It seems I’ve scraped my belly bald,
from so much walking on all fours.*

Lady: *You really are a brazen lout;
only moonshine makes your heart pine.
Then at swallow number sixty nine,
you let your hidden demons out.*

Suitor: *Out to the square with all that herd;
out with that macho bag of gas.
And out with all who want to go,
so I can wipe my stinking a__!*

“Well the weather is starting to clear up,” said the inspector, “and before it starts raining *bolás* [lariats attached to rocks and used to trip up cattle]—

since there aren’t any cobblestones—we should get going.” And so we took our leave, although with some regret because the younger men wanted to stay to the end of the fiesta even if it lasted all night. The inspector, however, thought it was a bad idea to wait until swallow number sixty nine. The joke about rabbits for cats seemed to us to be the friar’s invention but the inspector told us that although it wasn’t used much in Tucumán, the saying was common in Paraguay and on the pampas of Buenos Aires. [Editor’s note: This common saying is backwards here: the usual substitution is cats for rabbits. Rabbits are often eaten while cats are not, but a cat’s dressed carcass resembles a rabbit’s closely enough to fool an unsuspecting consumer. It’s not clear from the excerpt if the author is confused himself or clueing his readers into the “backward” state of rural culture. Given the tongue-in-cheek tone of this anecdote, it’s probably a deliberate “mistake.”] The other ingenious verses were as good as those sung by the Arcadian shepherds of antiquity minus the cultured embellishments of Garcilaso and Lope de Vega [Spanish “golden age” writers who composed pastoral poems in the classical Roman style during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries]. We were also amazed by the extravagant names of the men and women. The old man told us that they were taken from the names of new saints introduced by Dr. Cosme Bueno in his almanac, and that, in general, new saints performed more miracles than old ones who had grown tired of asking God to intercede on behalf of men and women. This outrageous statement made us all laugh but we made no attempt to dissuade them because the inspector made the sign of the cross with his index finger in front of his mouth. Although the young men addressed each other and any passerby as “macho,” we didn’t think much about it; but it seemed improper to us that they called the women “macha.” The inspector, however, told us that in this manner of expressing themselves they followed in the footsteps of the renowned Quevedo [another Spanish golden age writer], who said with much propriety and grace: “pobres y pobras [poor men and poor women]”—just as they use “macho” and “macha,” although only when referring to young men and women.

These folks, who make up the greater part of Tucumán’s population, would be the happiest in the world if only their customs were better attuned to evangelical precepts; because the country has a delightful climate and the earth is made extremely fruitful with very little work. Wood is in such abundance that houses constructed from it could contain the populations of the two largest kingdoms of Europe along with arable lands for their sustenance. The only thing missing is stone for strong buildings, as well as navigable waterways and commercial ports spaced at regular intervals to facilitate the movement of commodities. The biggest lack, however, is that of settlers; such an extensive and fertile province has scarcely 100,000 inhabitants according to the best estimates.