Encomienda y conquista: Los inicios de la colonización en Guatemala.

We have here another worthwhile contribution to the growing encomienda literature. Salvador Rodríguez presents a tightly written, scholarly study of the institution in Guatemala, from the conquest in 1524 through the administration of Alonso López de Cerrato (1548–1554). By limiting his subject geographically and chronologically, the author has been able to examine several aspects of the encomienda in this brief but compact work.

Rodríguez discusses the rationale for the encomienda and its place in Guatemala during the first three decades when encomenderos dominated society. Was the awarding of Indians a privilege granted to conquistadores by a generous sovereign, or was it a right owed without question to those who had won the land? Those responsible for apportioning the grants over the years had differing views on the subject. The author considers the policies of Pedro de Alvarado and his surrogates (the adelantado was absent about half the time during his seventeen-year governorship), during which years (1524–1541) the conquerors were favored. Alonso Maldonado then governed, continuing the policy of rewarding Spaniards to the detriment of the natives. But in 1548, Alonso López de Cerrato assumed the presidency of the audiencia, after which encomienda policy was significantly altered.

A valuable part of the book is the section devoted to the encomienda as an economic system. It includes important information taken from the well-known Legajo 128, which consists of the tribute assessment made from 1548 to 1551. Rodríguez has used the report well, compiling data in useful tables and appendixes. He touches on slavery, personal service, mining, cacao, and ranching, as well as tribute. The book is based primarily on selected manuscripts, which are listed individually in the bibliography.

This research is part of the ambitious Proyecto de investigación hispano-latinoamericano: Etnohistoria de Guatemala, which is a team effort devoted to investigations on sixteenth-century Guatemala.

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