
The work under review is the first major study of the Mexican cattle industry to appear since W. H. Dusenberry’s study of the mesta in 1963. Mining and agriculture have capitalized the attention of most of the recent publications on economic history. Serrera has framed his study in the New Galicia of the last half of the eighteenth century, when the region was undergoing a sustained economic growth, based largely on cattle development. After assessing the role and impact of Guadalajara’s cattle industry on the general economy of New Spain, the author proceeds to study in considerable detail all the relevant aspects of the subject. He covers not only cattle, but horse, mule, and sheep raising, stressing production and internal trade patterns. Using the records of payment of alcabala, he has reconstructed reliable figures for those variables. Numerous tables and graphs convey a great deal of information, while well selected plates provide visual relief.

In Serrera’s balanced approach there is room for the powerful cattle families of the region as well as for the relatively modest cattle-holding indigenous confraternities. The chapter on the latter topic is one of the few available in Mexican colonial historiography. Serrera also makes clear that despite the enduring cultural and economic imprint left by cattle and horses on New Galicia, the mule was just as important, being the basis for all pack transportation. Such interesting vignettes are based on extensive use of archival sources. The baroque “luxury of detail” applies here to factual information as well as a riches of words—a characteristic of many Spanish-writing authors. Nonetheless, the economic historian of colonial Mexico will find in this solid work a useful tool for filling an obvious gap in the general picture of the economy of New Spain during its peak years.

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