
This account of the city and archdiocese of La Plata, written in 1639 by the cura rector of the metropolitan church, contains a wealth of detail on life in and around Upper Peru's administrative capital. In the absence of any form of editorial introduction, other than a brief note indicating that the original manuscript is in the Lilly Library of Indiana University, the reader has to rely upon the text itself for details of Ramírez de Aguila's career. His claim to have spent twenty-four of his forty years in America as a cura de indios is substantiated by an impressive familiarity with rural society around Chuquisaca.

Although his observations on idolatry, life-style of caciques, drunkenness, mita organization, and similar themes are not original, they have a ring of authenticity and are eminently quotable. The author insists upon the incorruptibility of the curas—"ningun cura en todo el arzobispado se sabe que tenga mujer conocida . . . hay muy pocas curas en toda la provincia que tenga un peso sobrado" (p. 161)—but freely criticizes the Potosí authorities and corregidores elsewhere for maladministration. But the decline of Indian population in the region is attributed to an inevitable process of mestizaje—"el indio junto al español es como el madero junto a la polilla, como el agua junto a la esponja" (p. 123)—rather than deliberate abuse. The description of the city of La Plata contains much worthy detail on tribunals, churches, and convents, but the most useful information for the modern scholar concerns socioeconomic life. The provisioning of the city is discussed at length and is supplemented by fragmented observations on the merchant community—there were some thirty wholesale merchants with premises in the Calle de Mercaderes in 1639, for example—and on society in general. We learn that few of the 600 Spanish heads of families resident in La Plata had fortunes in excess of 200,000 pesos (p. 66), that Negro slavery had increased considerably in recent years (p. 58), and so on. In short, this is a work which all serious students of Upper Peru in the first half of the seventeenth century should consult.

University of Liverpool

John Fisher