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James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz

Excerpt

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Part I

The context

The Western Hemisphere after European contact has often been called the “New World,” but the intrusive and indigenous people who created the American societies hardly seem to have seen it in that light. Rather, both groups operated within worlds already highly structured, whole bodies of social, cultural, and technological practice, which shaped and colored all they did. Their innovations were largely forced upon them, usually taking the form of extending an already-known principle into a new sphere. The Iberians in America sought and found analogies between the new experience and what was familiar to them, whether in their own society, in their relations with the Moors on their own ground, or in their contacts with the Africans outside it. And the Indians too dealt with the outsiders in terms of analogies from out of their past. The meshing of the respective backgrounds was a vital factor in quickly bringing some areas of America to the center of attention while others long remained on the margin, and it helped determine not only the rate but also the forms of development.

Since so much of what happened after the conquest can be understood and even predicted from a thorough grasp of how the societies involved were constituted immediately prior to contact, we want to discuss that topic at considerable length; what follows here in Part I, however, is meant not merely to depict something prior in time but also to describe the functioning of the two societies in any place and time period where they can be identified. Despite the remarkable growth and differentiation of Iberian society in an American setting, the overall strategy of marriages within the Iberian framework, for example, is not discernibly different in eighteenth-century Mexico, Peru, or Brazil than it was in fifteenth-century Spain and Portugal. Similarly, despite vast transformations and losses in the indigenous world, some types of indigenous socio-political organization persisted from ancient times through the entire colonial period and beyond, as long as the peoples who originated them could be said to exist. In dealing with Iberian and

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indigenous society around 1500, then, we are aiming not so much at a rounded picture of the status quo as at the description of certain organizing principles, standard procedures, and types extant both before and after contact.

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Iberian ways

At the border of the Christian and Muslim spheres, the home of many kingdoms and several languages, turned partly to the Mediterranean, partly to the Atlantic, and partly in upon itself, early modern Iberia had more than its share of diversity. But recognizing the idiosyncrasies of each of the various Iberian kingdoms, all nevertheless shared a common cultural and historical experience. Especially they shared the general organizational patterns we will be emphasizing here, so that in the following discussion we will treat them as a unit for the most part, subsequently devoting a few pages to distinctive features of Portugal or Spain.

The city

Not very far beneath the surface of Iberian reality lay the city-state, the basic entity of Mediterranean civilization from time immemorial. Nationality was still fluid, distant, and easily undermined by dynastic change and conflict. Everywhere they went, the early modern Iberians gave more importance to provinciality and less to nationality than one might expect. Anyone from the home province was a friend, anyone from elsewhere was an outsider. Again and again political alliances and antagonisms in the New World were based on provincial origins. The province, the city, and the neighborhood were crucial reference points in helping individuals to define themselves in relation to others. Nothing but family had as strong a hold on the emotions of Iberians or was as essential to their sense of identity as regionalism, the love of what was later called the *patria chica* (home province or town).

Even more important than loyalties were the nature and structure of the provincial entity. The city proper was indissolubly integrated with a larger or smaller area around it, its territory, where many of its citizens had their holdings; people domiciled in surrounding hamlets were as much citizens of the city-province as the true urban dwellers. The percentage of the populace living within the city walls was not necessarily high, but nearly everyone with any position was

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located there. All organizations, whether ecclesiastical, commercial, social, or even agricultural, had their directorship and headquarters in the city. To advance in anything was to approach the city. As centers of craft production and the markets, the cities were naturally the home ground of the artisan and merchant groups, but the nobility too, both the high nobles and those only locally prominent, were urban based. Their chief residences and social ties were in the city, though their economic sinews might be flocks of sheep and estates in the country and whole rural areas might be under their dominance. This nucleation was symbolized in the municipal council, where representatives of the area's socially most prominent and economically most powerful families (these two attributes almost always went together) sat in great dignity. The Iberian city, with its traditional rights and privileges, its political-symbolic functions, and its broad command of the social and economic resources of its region's inhabitants, was a theater of action for the entire society, not merely half of an urban-rural dichotomy as may have been more nearly the case in northern Europe.

Functional groupings of society

The society inhabiting these city-provinces can be described in many ways, some more useful than others. Iberians themselves spoke much of the distinction between noble and commoner, and so much was made of nobility that a fairly large proportion of the population, people who in some countries would have been considered prosperous townsmen, asserted noble status for themselves. Much of the activity concerned with establishing nobility was superficial, a sort of subterfuge and camouflage that deceived no one, but the ideal, the well-defined role and life-style of the nobleman, was a force in life. Nobility was as much a set of attitudes as it was a matter of lineage. Whatever the medieval military origins of noble status, by the sixteenth century its avenues of approach were broader. Full economic success in almost any branch of life created nobility, and the nobles new and old all adhered to the same patterns. Mastery of the martial arts, horsemanship, and literacy were expected. There were also things a noble did not do, as important to his status as his positive attributes. The noble married a woman of high lineage (underneath which ideal much jockeying for wealth and position went on); he maintained a large establishment of relatives, retainers, and servants who filled a city house of much magnificence and spread out to care for lands and stock in the country. Though seigneurial,

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noblemen were not anticommercial. Through their employees they invested in every aspect of their region's economy. The goal was permanent wealth, enabling a family to "live nobly" from rents and herds without daily activity in trade. Despite the modern stereotype of the threadbare *hidalgo* (the most widespread Spanish term for a nobleman), in Iberian society there was a reasonable correspondence between wealth and nobility, both factually and ideally.

If we subsume the noble under the category "person of independent means" or estate owner (not the same as landowner, since Iberian noblemen often had numerous dependents and employees and innumerable sheep but very little land), then Iberian society's most meaningful subdivisions were those according to occupation or function. Professional people, with training for the church, the law, or medicine, were a group important beyond their numbers—all the more so in the Indies, as we will see. They were not a social class in themselves but were recruited from a broad social spectrum, starting with the nobles at the top. Though the professions were practiced most seriously, they were hardly bourgeois; they were perfectly compatible with nobility, even an added distinction, and the titles stemming from university degrees and bureaucratic office were so prized for the status they conferred that they displaced other titles and sometimes even an individual's first name. Professionals shared the attitudes and life-style of the nobility, and success in the professions or the royal employ could lead to a formal grant of noble status for those who did not have it already.

Lower ranking but still toward the upper end of the social scale were the merchants, especially those involved in long-distance wholesale trade. They were propertied and literate by definition, not nobles per se, though the most successful of them were forever merging into the nobility. They were closer to being a self-sustaining social group than the professionals and had a life-style of their own involving much geographical mobility, for lucrative trade was still almost always long-distance trade.

A large number of Iberians were the direct dependents and employees of others, their retainers, stewards, "servants." These ranged from literate, influential majordomos who had practical management of the affairs of important noblemen to hangers-on, pages, henchmen, and stableboys. Spaniards had a special word, *paniaguados* (from *pan y agua*, "bread and water"), for those who received their sustenance from a patron. Varying from noble to the lowest commoner, these retainers were in no sense a social class, but the function, the client relation to a patron or family, was quite constant.

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In a prefactory economy, most manufactures were produced by artisans in shops where wares were both made and sold. Definitely plebeians, often low on the literacy scale, artisans nevertheless were trained in special skills, and their tools and materials represented capital; successful masters headed good-sized establishments of journeymen, apprentices, and slaves. Trades ran in families, and artisans as a group had much social solidarity. Shopkeepers and other people who engaged in local petty trade, as opposed to long-distance merchants, were on the same level as the artisans and had much in common with them.

Most Iberians were farmers or herdsman. If large holders were at the top of Iberian society, agricultural small holders and workers were at the bottom. The variety of their tenure and living conditions was wide, ranging from prosperous farmers who owned their own land to migrant laborers. Many paid various rents and duties to their lords, whether noblemen, the church, or the crown. Most lived in small agricultural towns and villages, the typical Mediterranean pattern, going out to their fields in the morning and returning home at nightfall. The relatively unskilled Iberian peasant, as such, had little impact on America. It was rather those at the middle levels of agricultural life, the agricultural entrepreneurs, the skilled animal breeders and vegetable gardeners, who would help to change the face of the Western Hemisphere. The low prestige of working directly with the soil, however, would be a factor in the behavior of Iberians in the New World. Spanish and Portuguese farmers worked as hard as any in the world, but when given the opportunity to raise their social status by giving up labor in the fields, they invariably did so.

At all of these social-functional levels there were women, not as outwardly oriented as the men, but sharing the general social characteristics of their group. Although traditions of patriarchy, the Moorish heritage, and strong concern with family honor all combined to subordinate women in some ways, Iberian women did hold and inherit property and had other rights in custom and law. Widows and spinsters sometimes asserted themselves quite actively in economic life, and although the ideal of the secluded and retiring woman was commonly held, it was often far from reality. A fact of life, however, was that fathers made marriages and arranged dowries for their daughters, or placed them in convents, purely as a matter of social-economic family strategy, aiming for husbands who would bring the family the most possible wealth and prestige.

Though Iberia is surrounded by water, central Castile is landlocked, and mariners had no place in its society. All around the

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edges of the peninsula, on the other hand, were semiforeign peoples who lived from the sea, the Catalonians, the Basques, the Galicians, the Portuguese. Thus there arose the double-barreled Castilian disdain for sailors and foreigners, the two being considered largely the same thing. For the Portuguese, with a long seafaring tradition, attitudes were somewhat different, but not as much as one might expect. Captaining a maritime expedition or investing in overseas trade were occupations worthy of some regard, but common sailors, fishermen, and even ship captains were without high status. People with pretensions to nobility shied away from maritime associations or cloaked them under a surface of servants, land, and other symbols of rank.

Other principles of social organization

Aside from the rather miscellaneous functional groupings, there were certain organizing principles that ran through Iberian society and affected it at every level. One of these was patriarchy, the principle that any group, familial or otherwise, will form a hierarchy from the lowest or youngest up to one senior figure under whose protection and dominance it stands and through whom advancement is obtained. Society in a very real sense was made up of large units built around a family and an estate, with the proprietor ruling paternalistically over the direct family, many relatives, employees, and slaves, a unit that encompassed many social levels and stretched from city to countryside. If patriarchy was most fully expressed in great family estates, other partial embodiments of it were to be seen in merchants' companies, artisans' shops, and ecclesiastical and governmental organizations.

In accordance with the nature of patriarchy, the Iberian family was an inclusive entity, existing at several social levels at once. Ties to other families were emphasized through naming patterns, and "cousin" was as good as "brother." A rich and powerful family had poorer and less noble relatives who were taken into the fold to some extent, not to speak of orphans and slaves who adopted the family name. The practice of prominent men maintaining second relationships with women of lower class provided the basis for the acceptance of these liaisons in the New World. The illegitimate children of such unions (Spanish law recognized several levels of bastardy) usually received some recognition from the father, often taking his name and getting some support, being treated simultaneously as a servant and a relative. Thus Iberians had models for marriageless

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relationships with Black and Indian women and the recognition of their mulatto and mestizo children without implications of full equality.

Let us add that true to its inclusive multilineage and multilevel nature, the Iberian family practiced division of the inheritance rather than strict primogeniture. Only those who built the greatest fortunes established entails with obligatory inheritance of the eldest son; others gave the eldest preference but by custom and law left significant amounts to all legitimate children including daughters. Iberian family strategy, to be fully reduplicated in America, involved the attempt to consolidate and preserve the family's position while giving each heir a good basis in life, through several devices: arranging lucrative marriages, putting some sons into the clergy or other careers, sending daughters to nunneries, marrying close relatives, sacrificing illegitimate to legitimate heirs.

The paternalism of this system, with its mutual ties and obligations between patron and client, family head and dependents, master and retainer, cut across the strata of functional grouping or economic class. Each person or family group was tied to a patron by bonds of kinship, obligation, or interest. The system encompassed both affection and hatred and had places for people of very different characteristics. Transferred to the New World, it proved particularly adapted to the situation of a society in formation, with its typical decentralization and its need to incorporate people of divergent culture and ethnic origin.

Patriarchal organization was not the only social principle competing with that of occupational-economic groupings. In theory, society was divided into various corporations, self-contained entities which in cooperation with each other maintained the health of society and the general welfare. Different kinds of groups or social divisions had corporate status. The traditional three estates, nobility, clergy, and commoners, were in a sense corporations, each with its specific duties and privileges; together they made up the organic whole which comprised the body politic of the monarchy. There were also more specialized corporations, on the order of the artisan guilds. Each branch of society was to be a world unto itself, with the right to regulate its own practices and customs, to adjudicate disputes among its members, and to establish the standards of behavior expected of them. Theologians and political thinkers often made a great deal of the corporative ideal as the basis of Iberian society, but it was seriously undercut by the other, often more vital and pervasive principles we have mentioned. Many corporations had reality

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mainly as a kind of semi-institution or special-interest pressure group. The *consulado*, or merchant guild, for instance, represented some merchants but not all, and there was cutthroat competition among its own members; in general, such corporate organizations never embodied whole sectors of society. Yet the archaic, theoretical nature of corporatism as a general explanation of society should not disguise its remaining importance. Organized groups of any kind, including ecclesiastical and governmental, tended to become autonomous, self-contained bodies. Even more importantly, corporatism conditioned social expectations. The hierarchy of status rested squarely on affiliation with established categories such as "artisan" or "noble" even though they were not true "corporations," and people were correspondingly sensitive to the recognition of their rank as expressed in constantly used titles or epithets.

Ethnic groups

Christian Iberians did not live in cultural isolation. In the counterpoint of conquest and reconquest, retreat and advance through the Middle Ages, Muslims were often left under Christian rule and vice versa. In the lands of both there was also a significant Jewish minority. Relations between these ethnic groups were usually uneventful; in many ways each group formed another type of corporation. Jews living under a Christian prince, for example, had their own statutes, customs, and special obligations. Over the course of centuries, certain occupations came to be associated with specific ethnic groups, so that it was common to find Moors as artisans or gardeners, Jews as merchants and physicians, and Christians as workers of the soil or men at arms. But we must be careful not to overstate these associations, which fell far short of making early modern Iberia a caste society. Not every merchant was a Jew nor every artisan a Moor. The Moors especially were heavily concentrated in the southeastern part of the peninsula. There was considerable diversity in the types of occupation that any one group would perform, and Christian or Latin Iberian society contained the entire range within itself alone.

The Christian reconquest of Iberia was accompanied in its later stages by a growing conviction of the necessity of religious and political unity. Toleration of cultural and especially of religious diversity weakened. The fall of Granada in 1492 brought an end to Muslim political control anywhere on the peninsula, and almost immediately thereafter the Jews were forced either to convert or to leave Castile (they had been expelled from Aragon a hundred years

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earlier). A similar "conversion" took place in Portugal in 1498. In Spain even the Christianized Moors (*moriscos*) and intermittently the gypsies would eventually be the target of expulsion orders. Thus whereas Christian Iberians had a cosmopolitan tradition of dealing with other cultures, they were also embarked on a process of cultural and religious unification. The tensions created by the clash of these two tendencies within Iberian society were transferred along with everything else to the New World. It is well to remember, however, that diversity was the primary phenomenon and the search for orthodoxy the reaction to it.

Forced conversion created a large body of people who remained suspect in the eyes of their neighbors and of the church. Although the religion of their fathers was practiced in secret by some *conversos*, they were all nevertheless suspect, and the stigma passed from generation to generation. It became necessary to prove religious and ethnic orthodoxy (*limpieza de sangre*, "purity of blood"), that is, that one's ancestors were "Old Christians," to obtain advancement in royal service, entrance to certain schools, positions in the clergy, and many other honors and rewards. Though conversos and their descendants lived a strained double existence, they found ways within the fluidity of Iberian society of circumventing the restrictions, legitimating their status, and rising to the highest positions of government and society. Some who were caught practicing their old religion might suffer torture and death at the hands of the Inquisition, but the "New Christians" remained an integral part of Iberian society and could be found at every stage of the conquest and colonization of the New World along with their Old Christian fellows.

As a disguised minority, the New Christians had little separate impact in the New World. They concern us further in two main ways. First, their treatment, involving discrimination along genealogical lines together with much surreptitious acceptance, represented an important precedent for the treatment of non-Europeans in the New World. Second (and of secondary importance), within the Portuguese merchant corps there remained an influential, self-conscious, intermarrying community of New Christians who would later surface in America as a bone of contention between Portugal and Spain and would be prepared to ally themselves at times with northern Europeans.

Overall, the Iberians shared fully the general ethnocentricity of human groups in world history, assuming that their own language, religion, and ways were superior to those of others and looking for dominance in their relations with other peoples. But unlike some