

INTRODUCTION

The disadvantages of an interior location in South America have remained apparent for nearly five hundred years. By the end of the fifteenth century, Spain's maritime exploration of the Americas had already become the skilful and free-ranging coastal reconnaissance whose discoveries were to provide the framework of the first great European empire in the New World. Subsequently, the style and pattern of Spain's imperial organisation were to emphasise the significance of sea routes and port cities, and confirm the hegemony of the coastal regions.

In the northern section of Spain's American empire, the imperial structure remained centred upon the Mexican plateau, set between spheres of interest in both the Atlantic and Pacific basins. The European endorsed the indigenous power focus, and Mexico City rose upon the ruins of Tenochtitlán. Whereas islands and isthmus had sketched an initial ground-plan of empire, however, the conquest of Peru represented the first major assault upon the continental land mass, and soon thrust the Spaniards into some of the highest and most rugged terrain in the Americas. Deeper penetration of the interior rapidly intensified the isolation of a mainland frontier whose supply-lines were extended from the west coast ports – ports already two thousand miles beyond the Caribbean and six thousand miles from Spain. Thus, although the central Andean cordilleras became primary sources of wealth, they never located the real centres of power. Lima, not Cuzco, was Pizarro's City of the Kings; the coast, not the plateau nor the high mountain basin, was to focus Spain's authority and prestige in South America, and reap the more lasting benefits from the resources of the interior. The Inca highways had constituted an elaborate system of overland circulation, one which tied both coastal valley and *montaña* fringe to the highland centres of empire. The pre-Columbian trackways would best survive, however, where they assisted Spain's new primary purpose – to link the mountain regions not internally, but to the sea lanes of the empire.

The mining centres in the Viceroyalty of Peru were serviced for the most part by the Pacific ports. Although to stray very far from the west coast increased both the sense and the burden of isolation, and demanded existence at altitudes to which neither the Spaniards nor their cavalry were ever comfortably adapted, yet the richness of such silver strikes as Potosí in Upper Peru impaled the administrative machinery of empire upon the

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highest and most inaccessible regions of the central Andes. Efforts to minimise the isolation from the ports were responsible for the close trading and commercial ties which were maintained between Lower and Upper Peru after the latter's transfer to the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. The export of unminted gold and silver from Upper Peru was officially diverted to Buenos Aires and the Atlantic route in 1777, but legitimate trade in such items as fish and guano, and in agricultural produce from the irrigated coastal valleys, for example, as well as the movement both of legally imported manufactured goods and of contraband, continued to underline the reliance on Pacific exchange.

Above all, there were overwhelming advantages to be gained, wherever possible, in shortening the overland lines of communication. Longer sea routes, even additional transshipments, were rarely critical factors in Spain's imperial organisation of South America. Within limits, routes were more frequently evaluated in terms of the additional time and inconvenience they involved in travelling overland, provided that military or strategic considerations were of lesser concern. Although the trails through the central Andes westward to the Pacific were forced to negotiate the continent's highest, roughest and most barren terrain, such trackways in general provided Upper Peru's shortest and cheapest overland routes to the coast. Moreover, despite the steep gradients and physical hardships they imposed, the Pacific trails were spared the savage attacks by plains Indians, untamed by Inca or Spaniard, which endangered the *pampas* and trans-Chaco routeways. Given the opportunity of free movement and exchange of goods, therefore, and disregarding the temporary late eighteenth-century realignment of trading patterns dictated by the Viceroy in Buenos Aires, Upper Peru's economic dependence upon the most accessible Pacific ports was unchallenged.

Nevertheless, in other respects, the links between the four provinces of Upper Peru and the major administrative centres of both Lower Peru and the Río de la Plata were tenuous, and weakened by distance; both viceregal capitals were more than one thousand miles from Potosí and Chuquisaca. When the opportunity was presented, the effects of physical separation were expressed in political terms, although Upper Peru – the Audiencia or Presidency of Charcas – was ill equipped and poorly sited to support political independence in economic terms. The post-Revolutionary period produced few fundamental changes in economic or social patterns, and the southern continent's reliance on the overseas export of primary products continued with little modification after the break-up of the Iberian empires. The prosperity of the newly independent States was to be closely

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tied to their continuing ability to participate in overseas trade. Colonial interdependence had rarely been fostered by Spain; there were few durable patterns of regional integration, communication and mutual dependence within Spanish America. Notable exceptions, such as the *pampas* mule trade with Peru, tended to strengthen the truth of the generalisation. Thus, the routine of a long-established overseas-exchange economy offered few antecedents and little scope for future flexibility or innovation.

In seeking political separation in 1825 from both Peru and Argentina, Bolivia was obliged by the application of the principle of *uti possidetis de jure 1810* to accept a singularly inappropriate distribution of territory – one whose frontiers, though ill-defined, reflected patterns of internal administrative convenience rather than those which would be required for successful participation in overseas trade. The centrifugal lines of movement to the ports and shipping lanes were recognised and safeguarded by the viceregal boundaries – soon, in this instance, to be abandoned. The future viability of any region plucked from the broader framework of the viceroyalty was uncertain, but it would inevitably depend to a great extent, and with few exceptions, upon how favourably the new State was placed in relation to sea routes, and to overseas contacts and influences. Around the early wealth of Potosí, Spain had shaped and reshaped many of its most important administrative frontiers – judicial, ecclesiastic and military. Internal sub-divisions, however, based with varying degrees of precision on the jurisdiction of intendants, *oidores* and provincial governors, would not necessarily combine to function as a political unit; nor, in external relations, would they provide a satisfactory setting for the unfamiliar and competitive role into which an independent Bolivia would be cast. The principal routeways from Upper Peru to the coast lay outside the jurisdiction of the Presidency or Audiencia of Charcas. In losing its rights to the most readily accessible Pacific ports, Bolivia had shed the advantages as well as the disadvantages of colonial dependence.

Paradoxically, therefore, Bolivia emerged in practice as a non-maritime Pacific State, a situation which was to be confirmed politically with the subsequent loss of the remote Atacama province. If the choice of independence was Bolivia's to make in 1825, such initiative was not long retained; the country was to survive as a unitary State on terms dictated elsewhere.

From the outset, internal and external communications formed one of the weakest aspects of Bolivia's political and economic geography, and the greatest single obstacle to further development. There was no marked determination in South America in the nineteenth century to link opposing

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coasts by transcontinental railways, lines from which the continental interior might well have derived some benefit. Occasional attempts or proposals to substitute shorter canal or rail linkages between stretches of navigable waterway in central South America ended, for the most part, in failure. In sharp contrast, the increasing number of transcontinental railroads linking the Atlantic and the Pacific seabords in the United States and Canada between 1869 and 1886 demonstrated the intention to promote coast-to-coast national unification and, at the same time, provided the stimulus and the means to achieve greater economic development of the western interior. In South America, however, political fragmentation, rival national interests, the lack of available capital, and the persistence of widely dispersed peripheral population clusters combined with the physical difficulties to make transcontinental railways impracticable. Circulation revolved around separate and selected coastal foci; the landlocked State of Bolivia reflected the stagnation of the continental interior, its disadvantages intensified by non-participation in the economic growth of the coastal zones. The inner Andean centres no longer offered sufficient inducement to the speculator; mines in Bolivia and Peru failed to attract the early replacement investment of British capital necessary to revive their declining output and to stabilise conditions. Political uncertainty and technical difficulties aside, the excessive delays and high cost of mineral transport to the coast remained severely limiting factors. The risks were great, the returns inadequate.

Under these circumstances, the landlocked State stood back from those areas which tempted both the foreign investor and the overseas immigrant to South America during the nineteenth century. It failed to share the advantages of direct contact with new ocean steamship routes and the effective world-wide lessening of distance they initiated. It failed to experience or benefit directly from the increased mobility afforded by the first phase of railway construction in South America. In both respects, therefore, a landlocked location represented serious isolation from two of the most important technological advances bearing on the growth of State organisation and State power during the nineteenth century.

Access to the coast, by direct or indirect means, thus became a priority in the conduct of Bolivia's external affairs, and was attempted in various ways: by the proposed exchange of territory, by improved access to the navigable portions of international waterways (suggested or confirmed), by demands for a corridor to the Pacific, and by free port and free transit agreements. Protracted effort and legal argument, however, met with little success. Indeed, Bolivia's long catalogue of nineteenth- and twentieth-

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century boundary disputes was closely linked to the country's attempts to secure internationally recognised, free and permanent access to the sea. Much was to depend, therefore, on the attitudes of the immediate neighbours, and in an era of vigorous continental economic exploitation and territorial expansion, enclosure by as many as five other newly created States was an added burden – a restraint plainly lacking the advantages of competition and cooperation that such a location can, in other circumstances, afford. Bolivia negotiated from a position of weakness, and was to discover to its cost that compromise was thereby denied. The guaranteeing of unimpeded access or transit to the high seas remained one of the most sensitive areas in foreign relations within South America, and one over which attitudes tended to harden most readily. Despite the various transit agreements which subsequently eased the communications problem in part, the legacy of persistent early failure survived in many forms.

For almost a century, Bolivia's physical and cultural isolation emphasised internal weakness, accentuated grievances, and stifled economic development. To the extent that in the attraction of investment, and in the siting of many growth and development projects the continental interior still competes unsuccessfully with the peripheral areas, the country's position has remained unfavourable. With few exceptions, major undertakings sponsored by the coastal States within their own national interiors have primarily been in response to the demands of the urbanised fringe. Indeed, whatever the future nature of the continent's interior development, the coastal and near-coastal city regions in South America will probably continue to focus population growth and migration, thus locating perhaps the last as well as the first major settlement frontier upon the continent's periphery. As always, the effectiveness of resource exploitation within the interior, and particularly within the landlocked State, is likely to remain closely linked to external forces and external communications. The gradual improvement of Bolivia's internal transport system will finally be measured in relation to external exchange: on the extent to which it may be possible to minimise the disadvantages of location by drawing the country into a wider continental circulation.

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CHAPTER I

THE INDEPENDENCE OF BOLIVIA

I. ACHIEVEMENT

Bolivia was created when the provinces of Upper Peru declared their independence in August 1825 – an independence not only from Spain but, in some respects even more significantly, independence from Argentina and Lower Peru at the same time. The new State adopted the name *República Bolívar* and amended it two months later to *Bolivia*. It was a prudent choice determined not, as might be thought, by the desire to acknowledge with gratitude Bolívar's support and sympathy for Upper Peru's independence movement. Indeed, the reverse was true for, ironically, an independent Bolivia was never part of the Liberator's grand design for the post-Revolutionary political map of Spanish South America. Bolívar's evident anxiety and displeasure at being forced to condone as a *fait accompli* the breakaway of a colonial *audiencia* from the Viceroyalties of both Peru and the Río de la Plata were not surprising, for he opposed Upper Peru's unilateral declaration of independence on two grounds – legal and geographical. Not only did the breakaway flaunt the principle of *uti possidetis de jure 1810*; in Bolívar's opinion, an independent Upper Peru, outside any proposed federation, was palpably not a viable unit. Its location, he observed, would never permit it to survive. Unduly pessimistic though this view was to prove, Upper Peru's situation in the South American land mass undoubtedly placed its successor State in a uniquely vulnerable position. The pattern of events both before and after Bolivia's independence continually reveals the interplay of political and economic factors against a background dominated by immutable problems of location – a remote mid-continental hinterland of extreme physical difficulty, its core secluded to the point of isolation within the lofty Andean cordilleras.

In one respect, the fact that an independent State emerged at all in this most massive and intractable section of the Andean system, two-and-a-half miles above sea level, was one of the long-term effects of the extraordinary silver strike made at Potosí. Spain's momentous discovery in 1545 of the great 'silver mountain' (15,600 feet) swiftly focused imperial attention upon one of the highest, bleakest and most inaccessible sites in all Latin America. Yet, by any standards and despite fluctuations in output,

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the enormous wealth derived for almost two centuries from this legendary Cerro Rico confirmed it as one of the greatest mineral strikes of all time, a prodigious source of revenue which thrust Potosí into sudden prominence, supplied the language with a new synonym for riches and established its location in the Spanish empire as 'the axis of an immense world' as Bolívar later described it.

Despite the harsh physical conditions, such exceptional prosperity resulted in the rapid influx and concentration of population which characterises the 'boom-town' of any age – miners, speculators, adventurers and merchants – the diverse, foot-loose elements of a silver *bonanza* whose magnitude eclipsed anything the Western Hemisphere had ever experienced. Accompanying them were those who set this 'boom-town' apart as a peculiarly Spanish enterprise: the Crown assayers, comptrollers and hierarchy of officials employed in the Royal Treasury and the Royal Mint. Around the city, inevitable adjunct of Spain's imperial administration, sprawled the camps of the many gangs of Indians transported under the system of forced labour in the mines known as the *mita*. Transport and supply networks, indeed all the complex logistics of organisation on the grand scale, were forced to penetrate this wild country – and not only to penetrate it, but to operate within it successfully despite the difficulties of sustained physical effort, of over-stretched lines of communication and of remoteness from the ports and sea routes to Spain. Imperial ambition, sustained in large measure by the extraction of precious minerals from its New World empire (in theory as much as one-fifth of total production was claimed by the Crown), had thus secured for Potosí a unique importance. Gratefully designated the Villa Imperial de Potosí by Charles V in 1553, it held at the close of the sixteenth and for much of the seventeenth century an unchallenged position as the largest city in the whole of the Americas.¹

The impact of Cerro Rico upon the population pattern of the region was not confined, however, to the cold, barren, windswept site of Potosí. In fact, the very dreariness and hardship of life at over 13,000 feet favoured a complementary growth of settlement in some of the warmer Andean intermontane basins, set apart from the Imperial City's more immediate orbit. These provided a welcome haven for officials and entrepreneurs inevitably committed to long spells of duty in Potosí and consequently within more congenial environments, there developed small, attractive

¹ The vigorous, turbulent character of cosmopolitan Potosí has been vividly described by Lewis Hanke, *The Imperial City of Potosí*, The Hague, 1956. See also Bartolomé Arzáns de Orsúa y Vela, *Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí*, edit. L. Hanke and G. Mendoza, 3 vols., Providence, R.I., 1965.

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'garden cities' such as Chuquisaca (modern Sucre, 9,500 feet), Cochabamba (8500 feet) and Tarija (6250 feet). These 'garden cities', with their surrounding estates, prospered as administrative, university or agricultural centres or, as in the case of Chuquisaca, in all three capacities. Potosí's role in stimulating the early growth of the principal intermontane urban centres of Upper Peru was therefore a fundamental one, for while they quickly exploited their agricultural advantages in response to the demands of the mining settlements, some of these centres gradually assumed a political awareness also, sustained, both directly and indirectly during the peak of its prosperity, by the economic stature of Potosí.

This developing sense of regionalism, intensified by location and topography, should be reviewed against the administrative patterns gradually evolved by Spain for the organisation of its South American empire. West of the Tordesillas line, a broad initial division of Spanish territory had been made among the first *conquistadores*. South of the equator, early land grants or *adelantazgos* between 1529 and 1548 divided much of the western part of the continent into broad bands, variously assigned to Francisco Pizarro (New Castile or Castilla del Oro), Diego de Almagro (New Toledo), Pedro de Mendoza and Pedro de Valdivia (New Estremadura, as far south as 41° S). In order to control the activities of the *conquistadores*, however, and identify the Crown as the centralised authority in all colonial administration, Spain divided its vast new empire into viceroalties, directed by the Royal and Supreme Council of the Indies, founded in 1524 and subject only to the king. Of the two original viceroalties – New Spain and Peru – the latter contained nearly the whole of Spanish South America until the eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms.

The immense size of the Viceroyalty of Peru soon dictated its progressive internal sub-division, and a series of *audiencias*, as well as the Captaincy-General of Chile, were gradually carved out of the whole. The original function of the *audiencias* was purely judicial. They were courts composed of judges (*oidores*) who, by tradition, were usually Spaniards born in Spain, not in America, i.e. *peninsulares*, not *creoles*. The post of *oidor* demanded keen professional ability and bestowed considerable prestige, for the *audiencias* long comprised one of the most important elements in the complex organisation of Spain's empire. Nominally, *oidores* were subordinate to the viceroy, although in practice the exercise of power by any individual was checked and balanced by the intricacies of administrative procedure. The location of the *audiencias*, too, had an important bearing on the measure of autonomy which they could achieve, for the increased

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isolation imposed on some by time and distance could render many of the prescribed channels of communication too slow and cumbersome to be operated effectively. Thus, the power of the *audiencia* tended to increase with distance from the viceregal seat and while still forming the highest chambers of appeal, subject only to the Crown veto, these courts in time added political, economic, ecclesiastic and military functions to their judicial ones. Moreover, they provided a continuity of administration during the interregna between viceregal appointments and in some measure acted as a controlling influence upon the viceroy himself. *Audiencias* (the term applied both to the tribunals and to the areas over which they had jurisdiction) were established at intervals throughout the colonial period;¹ of these, the Audiencia of Charcas became the eventual territorial basis of nineteenth-century Bolivia.²

So great had been the influx of population into Potosí after 1545 that only six years later, as the astonishing potential of the Cerro Rico began to be realised, the Council of the Indies was moved to recommend the establishment of a new *audiencia* in the general vicinity of the busy mining town. Chuquisaca, known also as Ciudad de la Plata and occasionally as Charcas, was selected, having been founded as early as 1538, only three years after Lima itself – Pizarro's City of the Kings. By 1551 Chuquisaca, Potosí's 'garden city', had become the seat of a bishopric, later an archbishopric, while in 1559 its importance was enhanced still further by Philip II's official creation of the Audiencia. It was given the regional name of Charcas, after the local groups of Charcas Indians; Chuquisaca was to be its centre. Towards this sheltered basin contained by a jumble of Andean sierras the *oidores* slowly made their way from Spain. Even with the long voyage to Lima/Callao safely accomplished, their final destination, and usually the worst part of the journey, still lay several weeks ahead – a tedious, uncomfortable progress following desert and mountain trails into the heart of the continent. As they penetrated ever more deeply into the interior, the *oidores* had ample time to reflect that Chuquisaca had provided them with one of the remotest assignments in the empire.

Initially, in the absence of any detailed information on settlement and topography, the jurisdiction of the *oidores* at Charcas was prescribed within

¹ Santo Domingo 1511, Mexico 1527, Panamá 1535, Lima 1542, Guatemala 1543, New Galicia 1548 (based at Guadalajara after 1560), Bogotá 1549, Charcas 1559, Quito 1563, Manila 1583, Santiago de Chile 1609, Buenos Aires 1785, Caracas 1786, Cuzco 1787.

² Specific studies of the Audiencia of Charcas may be found in: (i) G. René-Moreno, 'La Audiencia de Charcas, 1559–1809', *Revista Chilena*, Santiago, no. xxix, May 1877, pp. 93–142; (ii) A. Juaregui Rosquellas, 'La Audiencia de Charcas', *Bol. Soc. Geog. Sucre*, vol. xxx, 1933, pp. 1–53.

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a radius of one hundred leagues around Chuquisaca. The limits of *audiencias*, however, were frequently rearranged by a stream of royal *cédulas* from Spain, which augmented or reduced the administrative regions. The Audiencia of Charcas, no exception to this rule, expanded and contracted around its highland core; at one period it extended nearly two thousand miles from Arica to Buenos Aires, straddling the continent from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean and incorporating regions which had been explored and colonized from both these points of penetration. In 1776, however, the new Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata was created, and the Audiencia of Charcas was transferred from the Viceroyalty of Peru. Other internal administrative reforms followed, notably the establishment of the intendant system in 1782, which introduced the first important curb upon the power of the *oidores* in Chuquisaca, as indeed it did elsewhere. Eight new intendancies were set up in the extensive and territorially unwieldy Audiencia of Charcas, the head of each being responsible directly to the Viceroy. As a result, the *oidores* lost much of their gradually assumed political and administrative power, reverting rather more to their original function as a court of appeal. The President of the Audiencia was also the Intendant of the province of Chuquisaca (La Plata); the judicial power of the President now, however, became purely nominal. This late eighteenth-century reorganisation of Spain's bureaucratic structure is seen to have had significant political repercussions: 'the introduction of intendants into Upper Peru provoked a reaction on the part of the *audiencia* which completely shattered the united front of Spanish government in this part of the empire, and created a tension which contributed in no small part to the undermining of the colonial régime in Upper Peru'.¹

The creation of two new *audiencias* – Buenos Aires in 1785 and Cuzco in 1787 – pared away still further Chuquisaca's sphere of influence. But these, and other, adjustments did nothing to lessen the relative isolation of Charcas, situated at the north-western extremity of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, and even farther from Buenos Aires than from Lima. Although the limits of the Audiencia of Charcas had been modified many times during its history, enclosing a vast area just before the establishment of the intendant system, its effective centres had always remained firmly within the central Andes, where a distinctive regionalism gradually emerged in the four Upper Peruvian provinces of Chuquisaca, Potosí, La

¹ J. Lynch, *Spanish Colonial Administration, 1782–1810. The Intendant System in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata*, London, 1958, p. 241. Chapter x, 'The Intendant and the Audiencia', examines growing tensions and attitudes of independence at this period, with particular reference to the Audiencia of Charcas.