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Haciendas and Ranchos
in the Mexican Bajío

LEON 1700-1860

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Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío *León 1700–1860*

D. A. BRADING

Lecturer in Latin American History

University of Cambridge, and Fellow of St Edmund's House

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IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER

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Men who love wisdom should acquaint themselves
with a great many particulars.

Heraclitus (fragment 3)

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PREFACE

In the winter months of 1969, shortly after the completion of *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico*, I returned to the archives of Mexico. In that book I had argued that ‘the Mexican hacienda was a sink through which drained without stop the surplus capital accumulated in the export economy’. But for the historian, as much as for the scientist, hypothesis often runs ahead of available evidence. It was now time to verify this proposition. Anxious to avoid a wild goose chase for random data, a procedure bound to turn up material biased in favour of my case, I chose to concentrate on haciendas in the Bajío, the region most affected by eighteenth-century expansion of silver production. In the event, only León was found to possess a continuous series of records. The scholar may propound his questions, but it is the sources which prescribe the limits of the answers. In point of fact, the very reliance on public documents, be they municipal, notarial or parochial, precluded any sustained treatment of the central issue of the original hypothesis – the rate of agricultural profit and its relation to capital investment. Only the internal accounts of individual haciendas will yield a satisfactory resolution of this problem. Similarly, without access to such papers it was difficult to obtain any sure impression of the organisation of production or the disposition of the work-force within the great estate. To turn to the positive side, concentration on one district soon uncovered an unsuspected complexity in the pattern of land tenure. The existence of a numerous body of small-holders and tenant-farmers, *rancheros* as they came to be called, was a major discovery. Then again, the sheer pace of change in the eighteenth century, the dramatic growth in population and rapid clearance of scrub-land for agriculture, came as a surprise. Finally, I experienced the pleasure of meeting old friends in new clothes: miners and merchants from Guanajuato figured as landowners in León.

A few words concerning sources may be useful to others engaged in similar study. Contrary to expectation, the section *tierras* in the

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Preface

national archive in Mexico City, which includes all litigation about land tried by the *audiencia*, proved unrewarding. By contrast, the municipal archive of León ranks among the best in Mexico, with a set of records stretching from the late sixteenth century until the present day. By far the most valuable documents here were the inventories of estate, filed by executors after the death of landowners, from which the physical anatomy of haciendas can be reconstructed. Similarly, the notary register, which covers almost three centuries of history, contains virtually all transactions in landed property and the last wills and testaments of most landowners. From about 1890 onwards, however, it is advisable to consult the public property register in which all notarised transactions were also inserted. Then again, the parochial archive, still lamentably housed in the dispensary, possesses relatively complete records of baptisms, burials and marriages from the close of the seventeenth century until 1864 when new parishes were formed. At Guanajuato, the historical archive has important materials dealing with land titles for León and the local Department of Agrarian Affairs is the relevant source for information about modern *ejidos*. Finally, at Morelia the former episcopal archive now deposited in the Casa Morelos, preserves the parochial tithe reports sent to the diocesan authorities. It was my privilege to discover the existence of these remarkable documents.

In the course of seven years of research and writing I have incurred many debts, academic and otherwise, which it is a pleasure to acknowledge. In particular, I wish to thank Richard M. Morse and the History Department at Yale University for their succour and welcome at a difficult moment in my migration from Berkeley to Cambridge. My wife, Celia Wu, collaborated with me in both the compilation and computation of the demographic data and figured as co-author of the first version of the chapter on population which was published in the *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Eric Van Young, when still a graduate student at Berkeley, assisted in gathering statistical material, both at Morelia and León; I benefited from his comments. Robson Tyrer made a helpful preliminary survey of records in León. Claude Morin kindly permitted me to read his dissertation on the diocese of Michoacán and in addition sent me valuable population estimates to which reference is drawn in the text. At León my chief debt is to José Luis Leal, whose kind hospitality lightened my way: he opened the notary records still housed in his office without reservation or time-limit. Similarly, both Eduardo Salceda López and Jesús Rodríguez Frausto, respectively

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the directors of the historical archives at León and Guanajuato, made valuable suggestions as to the location of certain materials. Mariano González Leal presented me with a copy of the rare Catastral Map of León compiled by Edmundo Leal. Beatriz Braniff permitted me to read the title deeds of the hacienda called Jalpa de Cánovas. Enrique Florescano, from whose wide knowledge of agrarian history I have generally benefited, helped me find the tithe returns for León in the Casa Morelos. On different occasions conversation with Ward Barrett, Jan Bazant and William Taylor proved useful. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the arguments and conclusions put forward in this book. Finally, without the financial support provided by a years' grant from the Ford Foundation's Foreign Area Fellowship Programme and a further award for a second summer in Mexico from the Social Science Research Council of the United States, the research for this study could never have been undertaken. At Cambridge, I wish to thank Mrs Helen Clements, secretary at the Centre of Latin American Studies, for typing the manuscript.

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MEASURES AND MONEY

Peso: the silver peso of Mexico, sometimes referred to as the *peso fuerte* or *duro* was equal in value to the American dollar of that epoch

Real: there were eight silver *reales* in each Mexican peso

Fanega: although this unit of dry measure is usually taken to equal 1.5 English bushels, at León *fanegas* comprised 90.817 litros or about 2.5 bushels

Varas: all yards mentioned in the text are Mexican *varas* equal to 33 English inches or 0.838 metres

Hectare: equals 2.471 acres

Fanega de sembradura: the conventional area of land on which was sown a fanega of maize, equal to 8.813 acres or 3.5664 hectares. It formed a rectangle measuring 276 yards long and 184 yards wide. There were twelve *fanegas de sembradura* in a *caballería*

Fanega de sembradura ranchera: unit employed in the Bajío. There were seven in a *caballería*; it hence equalled 15.1085 acres or 6.1128 hectares

Caballería: equal to 105.765 acres and 42.7953 hectares. It measures 1,104 *varas* by 552 yards

Vecindad: in León this generally comprised 3.5 *caballerías*, i.e. 370 acres or 150 hectares

Sitio de ganado menor: grazing land for sheep and goats, 2,500 yards square, equal to 1,928.388 acres or 780.2711 hectares. There were 18.232 *caballerías* in a *sitio*

Sitio de ganado mayor: the large pasture grant, 5,000 Mexican yards square, equal to 4,388.867 acres or 1,755.61 hectares. There were 41.023 *caballerías* in each large *sitio*

Source: W. L. Orozco, *Legislación y jurisprudencia sobre terrenos baldíos*, II, 740-59.

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GLOSSARY

To avoid an unsightly text Spanish terms which occur frequently have not been italicised save where confusion might arise.

agostadero: seasonal or rough pasture land

agrarista: supporter of land distribution

alcabala: sales tax

alcalde mayor: district magistrate

alcaldía mayor: district, at times equal to an English county, governed by an alcalde mayor

alférez real: senior member of town council

alhóndiga: municipal grain market

alquilados: agricultural labourers, hired by the day

aparceros: sharecroppers

arrendatarios: tenant farmers

arrimados: squatters or sub-tenants

arroba: a unit of weight, equal to 25 pounds

audiencia: high court of justice

caballería: an area of land, equal to 105.8 acres. See *Measures and*

Money

cabildo: town council

cacique: Indian lord or chief

cajero: apprentice merchant

capellanía: a chaplaincy or chantry fund, yielding 5% interest

carga: a load

carnero: sheep ready for slaughter

casco: administrative centre of landed estate, the main buildings

catastro: register of property, census

castas: persons of mixed ethnic ancestry, half-breeds

caudillo: military leader

censo: mortgage or loan charged on property at 5% interest

composición: fee or tax paid to the Crown for lands occupied without due title

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Glossary

- congregación: a village, a civic unit
 consulado: the merchant guild and its court
 creole: Spaniard born in America
 ejido: lands held under communal tenure; since the Revolution the communities which are endowed with communal lands
 encomienda: a grant of Indian tributaries
 encomendero: possessor of an encomienda
 eriaza: uncleared or untilled land
 estancia: grazing land, a ranch
 fanega: a measure of dry weight, either 1.5 or 2.5 bushels
 fanega de sembradura: area of land on which was sown a fanega of maize. See *Measures and Money*
 fiel ejecutor: town councillor charged with the inspection of weights and measures
 fuero: exemption from royal jurisdiction, right to trial by members of the same profession
 gachupín: Spaniard, born in Europe, resident in Mexico
 ganado mayor: cattle and horses
 ganado menor: sheep and goats
 gañán: agricultural labourer, a peon
 hacienda: a large landed estate
 hacendado: owner of an hacienda
 hidalgo: a person of noble or gentle birth
 huerta: a garden or orchard
 inquilino: in Chile a service tenant
 jornalero: a labourer hired by the day
 juez de composición: an itinerant judge charged with the inspection of land titles
 labor: a large farm
 libranza: a promissory note, a bill of exchange
 matlazahuatl: epidemic disease of which Indians were the chief victims, probably a form of typhus or typhoid fever
 mayorazgo: an entail
 mediero: a sharecropper
 mercader: a merchant
 merced: original grant of land issued by Viceroy
 milpa: a maize plot
 obraje: a large textile workshop
 oidor: a judge of audiencia
 padrón: a census, a house-count
 partido: a district; also the share of ore taken by mine-workers

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- párvulo: an infant, usually children under seven years
- peninsular: A Spaniard born in the Peninsula
- peón acasillado: an agricultural labourer resident on an hacienda, usually close to *casco*
- peón acomodado: peon who received a maize ration as well as wage
- pósito: a municipal granary
- pueblo: Indian village
- pulque: alcoholic beverage made from juice of maguey plant
- ranchito: a small landed property, a subordinate section of an hacienda
- ranchero: a farmer, usually the owner of a small agricultural property
- ranchería: a hamlet, a group of ranchos
- real: silver coin, one eighth of a peso
- regidor: town councillor
- repartimiento: system of draft labour
- repartimientos de comercio: public distribution (often enforced) of merchandise and stock by district magistrate
- serviente acomodado: a peon who received a maize ration as well as wage
- sitio de ganado mayor: pasture land for cattle and horses: See *Money and Measures*
- sitio de ganado menor: pasture lands for sheep and goats
- solicitud: application for an ejido or land grant
- tierra adentro: the Northern Interior
- tierra labrada: arable land
- tierra templada: land falling within the temperate zone
- títulos de inafectabilidad: modern land titles granted to owners of small properties to prevent annexation for agrarian reform
- trapiche: small workshop, a mill
- vagos: vagabonds, Indians attached to neither haciendas nor pueblos
- vecino: a citizen, a house-holder
- vecindad: lands given to vecinos, in León about 370 acres or 3.5 caballerías
- villa: town or borough

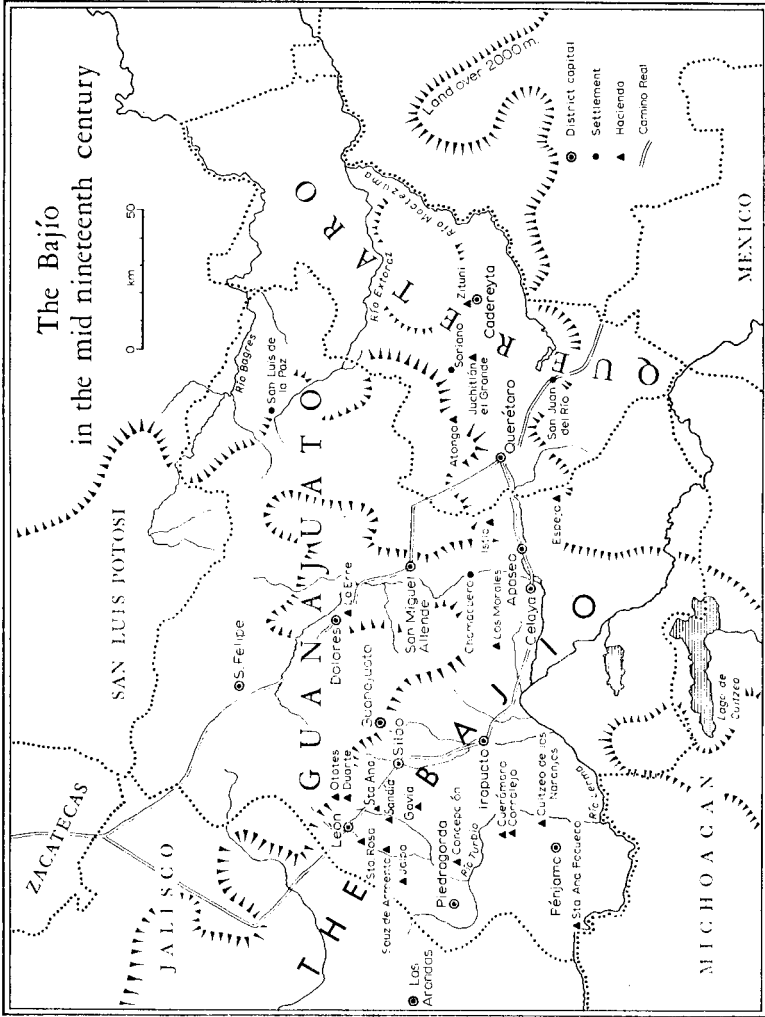
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Map 1.