

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF  
LATIN AMERICA

VOLUME I

*Colonial Latin America*

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Edited by Leslie Bethell  
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# THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA

VOLUME I

*Colonial Latin America*

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*edited by*

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*Professor of Latin American History  
University of London*



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## CONTENTS

<i>List of maps</i>	page viii
<i>Note on currency and measurement</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>General preface</i>	xiii
<i>Preface to Volumes I and II</i>	xvii

## PART ONE. AMERICA ON THE EVE OF THE CONQUEST

1	Mesoamerica before 1519	3
	MIGUEL LEÓN-PORTILLA, <i>Research Professor, Universidad Nacional de México (UNAM)</i>	
	The early civilizations of Mesoamerica	5
	The Mexicas (Aztecs)	14
2	The Indians of the Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean at the end of the fifteenth century	37
	MARY W. HELMS, <i>Professor of Anthropology, University of North Carolina at Greensboro</i>	
3	Andean Societies before 1532	59
	JOHN MURRA, <i>Professor of Anthropology, Cornell University and Institute of Andean Research, New York</i>	
4	The Indians of southern South America in the middle of the sixteenth century	91
	JORGE HIDALGO, <i>Universidad de Tarapacá, Chile</i>	
	The southern Andes	92
	The Chaco and the littoral	108
	The Pampa, Patagonia and the southern archipelago	114

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
5	The Indians of Brazil in 1500 JOHN HEMMING, <i>Director and Secretary, Royal Geographical Society, London</i>	119
	A note on the native American population on the eve of the European invasions LESLIE BETHELL	145
PART TWO. EUROPE AND AMERICA		
6	The Spanish Conquest and settlement of America J. H. ELLIOTT, <i>Professor of History, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton</i>	149
	The antecedents of conquest	149
	The pattern of the islands	162
	The organization and advance of conquest	171
	The consolidation of conquest	188
7	The Indian and the Spanish Conquest NATHAN WACHTEL, <i>École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris</i>	207
	The trauma of conquest	207
	Destructuration	212
	Tradition and acculturation	230
	Resistance and revolt	237
8	The Portuguese settlement of Brazil, 1500–1580 H. B. JOHNSON, <i>Scholar in Residence, University of Virginia</i>	249
	Discovery and early exploration	253
	The factory period	255
	The period of proprietary settlements	261
	The establishment of royal government	267
	Society and economy, c. 1580	278
9	Spain and America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries J. H. ELLIOTT	287
	Metropolitan aspirations	287
	Colonial realities	310
	The changing relationship between Spain and the Indies	319
10	Spain and America: the Atlantic trade 1492–1720 MURDO J. MACLEOD, <i>Professor of History, University of Arizona</i>	341

<i>Contents</i>		vii
11	Bourbon Spain and its American empire	389
	D. A. BRADING, <i>Fellow of St Edmund's House and Lecturer in Latin American History, University of Cambridge</i>	
	The Bourbon state	389
	The revolution in government	397
	Expansion of colonial trade	409
	The export economies	418
	The domestic economy	426
	The last years of empire	434
12	Portugal and Brazil: political and economic structures of empire, 1580–1750	441
	FRÉDÉRIC MAURO, <i>Professor of Latin American History, Université de Paris X</i>	
	Portugal and Brazil, 1580–c. 1695	443
	Portugal and Brazil, c. 1695–1750	460
13	Portugal and Brazil: imperial re-organization, 1750–1808	469
	ANDRÉE MANSUY-DINIZ SILVA, <i>Maître-assistant in the History and Literature of Brazil, Université de Paris III</i>	
	Territorial changes in Brazil	472
	Administrative re-organization	479
	Re-organization of the economy	486
PART THREE. THE CHURCH IN AMERICA		
14	The Catholic church in colonial Spanish America	511
	JOSEP M. BARNADAS, <i>Cochabamba, Bolivia</i>	
	The transplantation of the Catholic church to the New World	511
	Consolidation of the church	527
	The effects of the new regalism on the church in the late eighteenth century	536
15	The Catholic church in colonial Brazil	541
	EDUARDO HOORNAERT, <i>Fortaleza, Brazil</i>	
	<i>Bibliographical essays</i>	557
	<i>Index</i>	625

## MAPS

Mesoamerica before 1519	<i>page</i> 34
Indians of the Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean at the end of the fifteenth century	38–9
The extent of the Inka empire	71
Indians of southern South America on the eve of the Conquest	93
The Indians of the Amazon basin and Brazil, <i>c.</i> 1500	121
The discovery and exploration of the New World	150–1
Captaincies of Brazil in the sixteenth century	263
Viceroyalties and audiencias in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries	288
Spain and America: maritime routes	343
Spanish America, <i>c.</i> 1790	398
Principal Portuguese trade routes, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries	451
Brazil before and after the Treaty of Madrid, 1750	473
The territories exchanged: the Seven Missions and Colônia do Sacramento	474
The northern and western defensive systems of Amazonia and the Mato Grosso	476

## NOTE ON CURRENCY AND MEASUREMENT

Various units of value and measurement are referred to in the text of the following chapters. It is not possible to give exact equivalents in modern terms, particularly as there were many local variations. The following explanations may prove helpful.

<i>Peso</i>	The silver peso of Mexico in the late eighteenth century was equal to the American dollar or 4s. 8d.
<i>Real</i>	The peso was divided into eight silver reales or twenty copper reales ( <i>reales de vellón</i> ).
<i>Maravedí</i>	The value of the maravedí varied widely and was often no more than an imaginary division of bigger coins, since for long periods there were no maravedí coins at all. The last ones to circulate, probably in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, were copper coins, often debased. One such coin was worth $1/34$ part of a real de vellón.
<i>Réis</i> (sing. <i>real</i> )	Smallest Portuguese monetary unit; existed only as money of account.
<i>Milréis</i>	1,000 réis, usually written 1\$000; worth 12s. in the middle of the seventeenth century.
<i>Cruzado</i>	The Portuguese cruzado was equal to 400 réis (480 réis in the first half of the eighteenth century); originally of gold, later silver
<i>Conto</i>	A conto equalled 1,000\$000 réis (1,000 milréis).
<i>Fanega</i>	A dry measure for cacao, wheat, maize, etc. Usually equal to 1.5 English bushels, but there were local variations, e.g. in Mexico, where the fanega of maize could be either 1.5 or 2.5 bushels (or 55 or 90.8 litres).



x

*Note on currency and measurement**Quintal*

Usually translated as ‘hundredweight’ and composed of 4 Spanish *arrobas* or 100 *libras*.

*Arroba*

The Spanish arroba weighed about 11.5 kg (25 lb). The Portuguese arroba weighed 14.5 kg (32 lb).

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AESC</i>	<i>Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilizations</i>
<i>CHLA</i>	<i>Cambridge History of Latin America</i>
<i>HAHR</i>	<i>Hispanic American Historical Review</i>
<i>JGSWGL</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas</i>

## GENERAL PREFACE

In the English-speaking and English-reading world the multi-volume Cambridge Histories planned and edited by historians of established reputation, with individual chapters written by leading specialists in their fields, have since the beginning of the century set the highest standards of collaborative international scholarship. *The Cambridge Modern History*, planned by Lord Acton, appeared in sixteen volumes between 1902 and 1912. It was followed by *The Cambridge Ancient History*, *The Cambridge Medieval History* and others. The *Modern History* has now been replaced by *The New Cambridge Modern History* in fourteen volumes, and *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* has recently been completed. Cambridge Histories of Islam, of Iran and of Africa are published or near completion; in progress are Histories of China and of Judaism, while Japan is soon to join the list.

In the early 1970s Cambridge University Press decided the time was ripe to embark on a Cambridge History of Latin America. Since the Second World War and particularly since 1960 research and writing on Latin American history had been developing, and have continued to develop, at an unprecedented rate – in the United States (by American historians in particular, but also by British, European and Latin American historians resident in the United States), in Europe (especially in Britain and France) and increasingly in Latin America itself (where a new generation of young professional historians, many of them trained in the United States, Britain or Europe, had begun to emerge). Perspectives had changed as political, economic and social realities in Latin America – and Latin America's role in the world – had changed. Methodological innovations and new conceptual models drawn from the social sciences (economics, political science, historical demography, sociology, anthropology) as well as from other fields of historical

research were increasingly being adopted by historians of Latin America. The Latin American Studies monograph series and the *Journal of Latin American Studies* had already been established by the Press and were beginning to publish the results of this new historical thinking and research.

In 1974 Dr Leslie Bethell, Reader in Hispanic American and Brazilian History at University College London, accepted an invitation to edit the Cambridge History of Latin America. For the first time a single editor was given responsibility for the planning, co-ordination and editing of an entire History. Contributors were drawn from the United States and Canada, Britain and Europe, and Latin America.

*The Cambridge History of Latin America* is the first large-scale, authoritative survey of Latin America's unique historical experience during almost five centuries from the first contacts between the native American Indians and Europeans (and the beginnings of the African slave trade) in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to the present day. (The Press has under consideration a separate Cambridge History of the native peoples of America – North, Middle and South – before the arrival of the Europeans.) Latin America is taken to comprise the predominantly Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking areas of continental America south of the United States – Mexico, Central America and South America – together with the Spanish-speaking Caribbean – Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic – and, by convention, Haiti. (The vast territories in North America lost to the United States by treaty and by war, first by Spain, then by Mexico, during the first half of the nineteenth century are for the most part excluded. Neither the British, French and Dutch Caribbean islands nor the Guianas are included even though Jamaica and Trinidad, for example, have early Hispanic antecedents and are now members of the Organisation of American States.) The aim is to produce a high-level synthesis of existing knowledge which will provide historians of Latin America with a solid base for future research, which students of Latin American history will find useful and which will be of interest to historians of other areas of the world. It is also hoped that the *History* will contribute more generally to a deeper understanding of Latin America through its history in the United States and in Europe and, not least, to a greater awareness of its own history in Latin America.

For the first time the volumes of a Cambridge History will be published in chronological order: Volumes I and II (Colonial Latin

*General preface*

xv

America – with an introductory section on the native American peoples and civilizations on the eve of the European invasion) in 1984; Volume III (Latin America, Independence and Post-Independence, c. 1790–1870/80) in 1985; Volumes IV and V (Latin America, 1870/80–1930) in 1986; and Volumes VI–VIII (Latin America, 1930 to the present) as soon as possible thereafter. Each volume or set of volumes examines a period in the economic, social, political, intellectual and cultural history of Latin America. While recognizing the decisive impact on Latin America of external forces, of developments within what is now called the capitalist world system, and the fundamental importance of its economic, political and cultural ties first with Spain and Portugal, then with Britain, France and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe as a whole, and finally with the United States, the emphasis of the *History* will be upon the evolution of internal structures. Furthermore, the emphasis is clearly on the period since the establishment of all the independent Latin American states except Cuba at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which, compared with the colonial and independence periods, has been relatively neglected by historians of Latin America. The period of Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries is the subject of two of the eight volumes. Six are devoted to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and will consist of a mixture of general, comparative chapters built around major themes in Latin American history and chapters on the individual histories of the twenty independent Latin American countries (plus Puerto Rico), and especially the three major countries – Brazil, Mexico and Argentina. In view of its size, population and distinctive history, Brazil, which has often been neglected in general histories of Latin America, written for the most part by Spanish Americans or Spanish American specialists, will here receive the attention it deserves. The editor of the *History* is himself, above all, a specialist on Brazil.

An important feature of the *History* will be the bibliographical essays which accompany each chapter. These will give special emphasis to books and articles published during the past 15–20 years, that is to say, since the publication of Howard F. Cline (ed.), *Latin American History: essays in its study and teaching, 1898–1965* (2 vols., published for the Conference on Latin American History by the University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1967), and Charles C. Griffin (ed.), *Latin America: a guide to the historical literature* (published for the Conference on Latin American History by the University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1971); the latter was prepared during 1966–9 and included few works published after 1966.

## PREFACE TO VOLUMES I AND II

The first two volumes of *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, which are closely integrated, are devoted to the three centuries of Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule from the first contacts between the native American Indians and Europeans at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries to the revolutions and wars of independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Man first entered the continent through the Bering Strait, perhaps as long ago as 35,000 B.C. There is some evidence of the possible presence of man in what is today Mexico as early as 20,000 B.C., but the oldest certain human finds – for example, at Tepexpan, north-east of Mexico City, and Lagôa Santa in Minas Gerais, Brazil – have been dated no earlier than 9,000–8,000 B.C. Agriculture in Mesoamerica dates from around 5,000 B.C., and the production of pottery from around 2,300 B.C. The earliest evidence of societies with political and religious structures can be found, in Mexico, at the Olmec sites, notably La Venta, and, in the Andes, at Chavin, both dating from before 1,000 B.C. By A.D. 1500 there were states with highly structured economies and societies and highly developed cultures and religions, like the Aztec empire in Mexico and the Inca empire in the Central Andes, as well as more or less stable chiefdoms of varying degrees of complexity throughout, for example, the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean and, still, hundreds of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes in North America, southern South America and Brazil. Research on pre-Columbian America has advanced rapidly during the past twenty or thirty years, especially in Mesoamerica, but also most recently in the Andes – and elsewhere. Important contributions to knowledge have been made by archaeologists, but also by linguists and palaeographers, geographers and botanists, even by mathematicians and astronomers and, above all,

by anthropologists, ethnologists and ethnohistorians. The invaluable *Handbook of Latin American Studies* (1936– ) has since 1960 included a section on publications in the important new field of ethnohistory. The *Handbook of South American Indians*, ed. Julian H. Steward (6 vols., Washington, D.C., 1946–50), and the *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, ed. Robert Wauchope (16 vols., Austin, Texas, 1964–76), remain indispensable, although the former in particular is now seriously out of date. No attempt has been made in *The Cambridge History of Latin America* to present a full-scale account of the evolution of the various indigenous American societies – in isolation from the rest of the world – during the two or three thousand years before the arrival of the Europeans. This belongs to another *Cambridge History*. However, the five chapters which form the first section of the first of these two volumes on colonial Latin America survey the native American peoples and civilizations on the eve of the European invasion.

The expansion of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and in particular Europe's 'discovery' of America, although not entirely neglected, have been largely excluded from this history of colonial Latin America. They are subjects which belong more properly to the history of Europe. There is in any case a vast literature on European expansion: for example, John H. Parry's classic *The age of reconnaissance: discovery, exploration and settlement 1450–1650* (London, 1963); V. Magalhães Godinho, notably *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial* (2 vols., Lisbon, 1965); Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European discovery of America*, vol. II, *The southern voyages 1492–1616* (New York, 1974); and, most recently, G. V. Scammell, *The world encompassed: the first European maritime empires c. 800–1650* (London, 1981), which examines Norse, Hanse, Venetian and Genoese maritime explorations before turning to the Portuguese and Spanish and finally the Dutch, English and French. The first three chapters of the second section of Volume I of this history of Latin America examine the European invasion, subjugation and settlement of parts of the New World during the period from 1492 to 1570/80. The viewpoint is not, however, exclusively European. Equally important is the 'vision of the vanquished'. And post-conquest relations between the Spanish and Portuguese and the native Americans are given particular attention. The remaining five chapters of this section, the central core of the volume, examine the political and economic structures of the Spanish and Portuguese empires in America from the middle of the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth centuries – to a large extent from a metropolitan perspective. There is some discussion of

*Preface to Volumes I and II*

xix

imperial rivalries, and the integration of Spanish America and Brazil into the new world economic system is also explored. The volume concludes with two chapters on the Catholic Church in colonial Latin America, but the reader is also referred to the *Historia General de la Iglesia en America Latina* which is being published in eleven volumes by CEHILA (Comisión de Estudios de Historia de la Iglesia en Latinoamérica) under the general direction of Enrique Dussel.

The second of these two volumes on colonial Latin America opens with two chapters on population trends and is then largely devoted to aspects of the internal economic and social history of colonial Spanish America (nine chapters) and colonial Brazil (four chapters) which have attracted most research interest during the past twenty years: for example, urban development; mining; land tenure and exploitation; labour systems, including African slavery; local economies and inter-colonial trade; social organisation and social change; Indians under colonial rule. Spanish America and Brazil have been for the most part treated separately. They have, on the whole, two different histories, two different historiographies. There are in any case few historians competent and willing to write comparatively about Spanish America and Brazil in the colonial period. The volume concludes with four chapters which survey the intellectual and cultural life – literature and ideas, architecture and art, music – of colonial Latin America.

A Cambridge *History*, as John F. Fairbank, one of the general editors of *The Cambridge History of China*, has written, is meant to be indebted to every single contributor to its field. More particularly in the case of these two volumes on colonial Latin America many of the historians who have themselves contributed chapters – nine American, eight continental European (two resident in the United States, one in Brazil), seven British (four resident in the United States) and seven Latin American (one resident in the United States, one in France) – also read and commented on the chapters of their colleagues. I am especially grateful in this respect to Dauril Alden, J. H. Elliott, Charles Gibson, Murdo J. Macleod, Richard M. Morse and Stuart B. Schwartz. In addition, Woodrow Borah, J. S. Cummins, Valerie Frazer, Olivia Harris and Enrique Tandeter provided critical assessments of several chapters. Most important was the advice and encouragement generously offered throughout the planning and editing of these volumes by my colleague John Lynch.

Patricia Williams at Cambridge University Press was largely re-



*Preface to Volumes I and II*

sponsible for initiating this project and continued to support it even after she left the Press. A number of editors at the Press have been involved in this *History*. I am particularly grateful to Elizabeth Wetton. The subeditors of the volumes were Cynthia Postan and Mandy Macdonald, after preliminary advice from Clare Davies-Jones. Nazneen Razwi at University College London offered invaluable secretarial assistance. The indexes were prepared by Alison Rowlatt.