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978-0-521-64630-7 - Spain, Europe, and the “Spanish Miracle,” 1700-1900

David R. Ringrose

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Spain, Europe, and the “Spanish miracle,” 1700–1900

David Ringrose here reexamines the history of Spain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He challenges the pessimism of prevailing assumptions about that history and its conventional separation into pre- and post-Napoleonic eras. *Spain, Europe and the “Spanish miracle,” 1700–1900* also questions the importance of the empire for Spain’s own economy, suggesting instead that Spain evolved as part of Europe; indeed, some of the recently documented modernization of the nineteenth century was already well under way in the eighteenth. In addition, the emergence of a governing elite closely tied to provincial society is placed in the context of traditional networks of patronage based upon close-knit family ties. Such a perspective makes the transitions of the 1930s and 1970s easier to explain.

This important and challenging book will change our understanding of the history of modern Spain.

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This book is dedicated to
Kathryn, Daniel, and Robert
who lived many years with the project
as another member of the family

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Preface

This book owes its existence to two very different inspirations. The first came from the disjuncture I experienced when, after reading the history of Spain that was available to graduate students in the early 1960s, my wife and I spent several years living in Spain in the decades after 1963. The economic, political, and cultural transformations we saw conveyed a dynamism and sophistication that simply did not match the expectations I had acquired reading about Spanish history. The second inspiration came from many years of interacting with Spaniards working on the economic history of their country. Increasingly they broke away from the recurrent question of “what went wrong in Spain?” and, reentering the archives, reexamined what actually happened. This reappraisal, prompted by new quantitative methods and techniques, produced new evidence of underlying continuities in the economic and political evolution of the country. These continuities suggested that the attitudes, political culture, and entrepreneurial drive that have been so striking in recent decades were not so new as they appear. Indeed, they are the product of a prolonged evolution, the key elements of which were in place by World War I.

The tension between expectations and experience while living in Spain and the revisions underway within the Spanish historical community interacted with my own work in the gestation of three earlier volumes about Spain. The result is this attempt to ask several questions about how we have perceived issues in Spanish history and to experiment with how we present some of the key elements of the story. There is little that is intended to be definitive in the answers proposed; there is much that is speculative and inferential.

The book itself has passed through a number of incarnations, starting as an extension of an earlier study of Madrid. For a while it was a massive (and increasingly tedious) study of local and regional central place systems. Briefly it became a synthesis of Spain’s nineteenth-century economy. Ultimately it has become a hybrid. Parts of it are monographic extensions of my own earlier work. Parts of it are synthetic in that they

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rely heavily on a careful if somewhat incomplete use of the flood of excellent monographs and essays produced by Spaniards in the last generation. Equally important, however, is its function as an extended historiographical essay. As such it probably raises more questions than it answers. That is one of my goals, and if the book provokes a new round of discussion and research it will have achieved its most important objective even if none of its propositions are left intact.

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Numerous Spanish and American colleagues contributed ideas and information, often without realizing it. I can only hope to name a few: Richard Herr, Joan Ullman, Helen Nader, Pamela Radcliff, John Marino, Donald Abbott, Suzanne Hiles-Burkholder, Jesús Cruz, Gabriel Tortella, Leandro Prados, José Varela Ortega, Santos Juliá, Antonio Gómez Mendoza, Pedro Fraile, Patrick O’Brien, Herman Van der Wee, Jan de Vries, Bartolomé Yun, Lewis Gann, Bill Hagen, and Albert van Helden. With one exception I have no way of ranking the contributions of so many friends and colleagues. The exception is Kathryn Ringrose, whose support, criticism, skepticism, and patience went well beyond the realm of ordinary scholarship.

Some of these people shaped my understanding of Spanish history; others helped to write the revisionist economic history that is one of the inspirations for the book. Some of them knew little about Spain, but knew a great deal about how to ask searching questions. They played a role in the evolution of this book, but they have no responsibility for the mistakes and misperceptions it may contain.