

Die Mosquitoküste im Spannungsfeld: Britischer und spanischer Politik 1502–1821. By BARBARA POTTHAST. Cologne: Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Cie., 1988. Maps. Appendixes. Bibliography. Pp. 426. Cloth.

Barbara Potthast's *Die Mosquitoküste im Spannungsfeld* is a fine monograph which should attract attention for a long time to come. The research and analysis reveal a thorough, thoughtful, and analytical scholar. Potthast has examined a vast body of material, archival and printed primary and secondary, which applies directly to the Mosquito area and to British and Spanish conflict over that region. Still, although she repeatedly refers to the role of Spanish officials in Guatemala City with regard to the Mosquito area, she did not use the Archivo de Centro América in Guatemala City.

Potthast observes that, despite the often repeated allegation of a British protectorate over the Mosquito region and Indians, there was no formal agreement of protection until 1740 during the War of Jenkins' Ear. From this assertion, however, she draws the weak conclusion that because the British were so demonstrably reluctant to enter a formal agreement, it is not appropriate to speak of British imperialism. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson in their essay, "The Imperialism of Free Trade" (*Journal of Economic History*, 1953), and her own narrative indicate that the British were getting what they wanted from the region in the form of trade, labor, timber, foodstuffs, and turtle shells, and a kind of buffer against the Spanish authorities. There was no apparent need to formalize the relationship and thus obligate the British government.

The Spanish resisted British penetration with persevering determination, but little success. British-Spanish treaty proposals to transfer authority back to the Spanish inevitably entailed recognition of the previous British-Mosquito relationship which, in turn, entailed the fictional, but contractual, recognition of Mosquito sovereignty. The British were more than willing to maintain the fiction of domestic independence and equality of the Mosquitos. Every attempt of the British to arrange their withdrawal and to allow a Spanish return to the region encountered the Spanish unwillingness to consider some limited Mosquito sovereignty over the area which the Indians had traditionally controlled. This British-Spanish clash over Mosquito sovereignty undermined repeated Spanish projects to wean the Mosquitos from British allegiance.

Several minor flaws perhaps deserve notice. Potthast discounts the use of the Mosquito area and ports as a source of illegal trade in the eighteenth century, but the data and testimony from Costa Rica and other Central American sources (as well as British records in Jamaica) make this assertion unlikely. She also erroneously assumed that the designation "d" in British accounting and price quotation means "dime" (see Table on page 386). It means "pence." Such small flaws are not common, nor are they collectively a serious problem in Potthast's volume.

Her book could, perhaps, have profited from incorporating insights from several of the major syntheses and analyses which have appeared in the past ten years:

Ciro Cardoso and Héctor Pérez Brignoli, *Centro América y la economía occidental (1520–1930)*; Severo Martínez Paláez, *La patria del criollo*; Ralph Lee Woodward, *Central America: A Nation Divided*; and Héctor Pérez Brignoli, *Breve historia de Centro-América*. Despite Potthast's use of secondary sources, this book should furnish the standard account of the colonial-era Mosquito coast for a long time, except that it is only accessible to scholars who read German and thus will most likely not be as widely read as it deserves.

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Food, Conquest and Colonization in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America. By

JOHN C. SUPER. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. viii, 133. Paper. \$11.95.

The nature, availability, and distribution of food during the first century after the conquest offers an attractive bridge between social history and biology. Such is the subject of this ground-breaking volume.

The evidence marshalled by John Super makes clear that food was generally plentiful during the sixteenth century for both the conquered and the conquerors. Although distance was an obstacle to transport, land was readily available. The wide range of indigenous domesticates, combined with the introduced Old World crops, and especially animals, gave the diet of colonists and natives alike an unprecedented diversity. The idea that hunger and poor nutrition increased with European domination and the rise of the Atlantic trading system is refuted. Varied climates and the long growing season, often permitting multiple harvests, gave the New World a distinct advantage over the Peninsula. The land easily accommodated new arrivals. Land pressure rarely limited production. The explosion of livestock was facilitated by extensive tracts of abandoned Indian cropland and the demand for hides. Meat was abundant and extraordinarily cheap. Wage-price relationships are revealing. By comparison with beef, wheat bread, a cultural imperative for the Spaniards, was expensive, a reversal of the usual interpretation of the relation of diet and income, for meat was the food of the poor. Maize and manioc, along with Old World bananas or plantains, were usually Indian food. Substantial nutrient values, as well as ritual satisfaction, came from maize beer (chicha) and pulque.

The myriad institutions that developed around distribution and marketing gave rise to a food bureaucracy that by century's end seemed even more complex than the system of provision, which varied widely from region to region. Famine was apparently never a generalized condition. Only at the end of the sixteenth century was the commercialization of such crops as sugar and cacao, as well as Mexican wheat, encroaching on land for local food needs, significantly reduced due to sharply declining Indian populations.

The relation of people and environment has been of increasing attraction to