

## “NOT A CITY BUT A WORLD”: SEVILLE AND THE INDIES\*

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*I*n the heart of Seville, squarely set between the ramparts of a Moorish citadel and the flying buttresses of a Gothic cathedral, lies the Archivo General de Indias—the Archive of the Indies (Figure 1). Many archives elsewhere in the world house important imperial collections, but none equals the Seville repository in terms of site and relevance. Forget London. Forget Paris. Forget Rome. Lisbon warrants a mention; Madrid, Genoa, and Antwerp too. It is Seville, however, that imparts a palpable sense of the connection between place and empire that no other locale can match, at least none that I’m aware of. For a historical geographer, archival research is fieldwork. I have been engaged in such fieldwork since graduate school a quarter-century ago. Although research trips have taken me across Europe and throughout Latin America, nothing captures my imagination more than fieldwork in the archive in Seville.

What was it that took me there? Even as a schoolboy, geography sparked my spirit of adventure, convincing me that beyond the confines of Glasgow lay truly a wider world. My first year at university, however, was a bit of a disappointment, and not merely because I failed my midterm examination in geography. Instruction at Glasgow University then focused on far-flung parts of the earth that were colored pink on the huge wall maps that adorned our lecture theaters. Discussion of the British Empire, past and present, took up large chunks of class time—Africa, North America, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand. Cartographically, that imperial pink rash manifested itself almost everywhere. There was much of interest to learn, granted, but what I wanted was to know more about those nonpink splashes visible for all to see, even on the most tattered of global representations. Not until halfway through my second year was a course offered that catered to my curiosity. Having been a stamp collector in my teens, I knew a bit about the pink flecks in the Caribbean, less about the two pink toeholds on the mainland, but as far as I could discern, Latin America for the most part was refreshingly nonpink, which meant dealing in our curriculum with the legacy of colonial powers other than Great Britain.

That was it. A course on Latin America exposed me to historical and cultural processes very different from the ones about which I’d been accustomed to reading and hearing. It also exposed me to the ideas of Carl Ortwin Sauer. My copy of *Land and Life*, by reason of well-thumbed consultation, opens of its own accord to “Fore-

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\* I wrote this piece while on a sabbatical fellowship in Seville awarded by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture. Over the years my archival work in Spain and Latin America has been supported by the University of Alberta, Queen’s University, the Killam Program of the Canada Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The idea of writing about fieldwork in archives arose during a conversation with Professor Daniel W. Gade of the University of Vermont, to whom I express my thanks. Other colleagues as instrumental as Dan go unnamed but not unappreciated. They, as well as members of my family and any friends who read the piece, now may have a better idea of what it is I get up to spending time in Seville.

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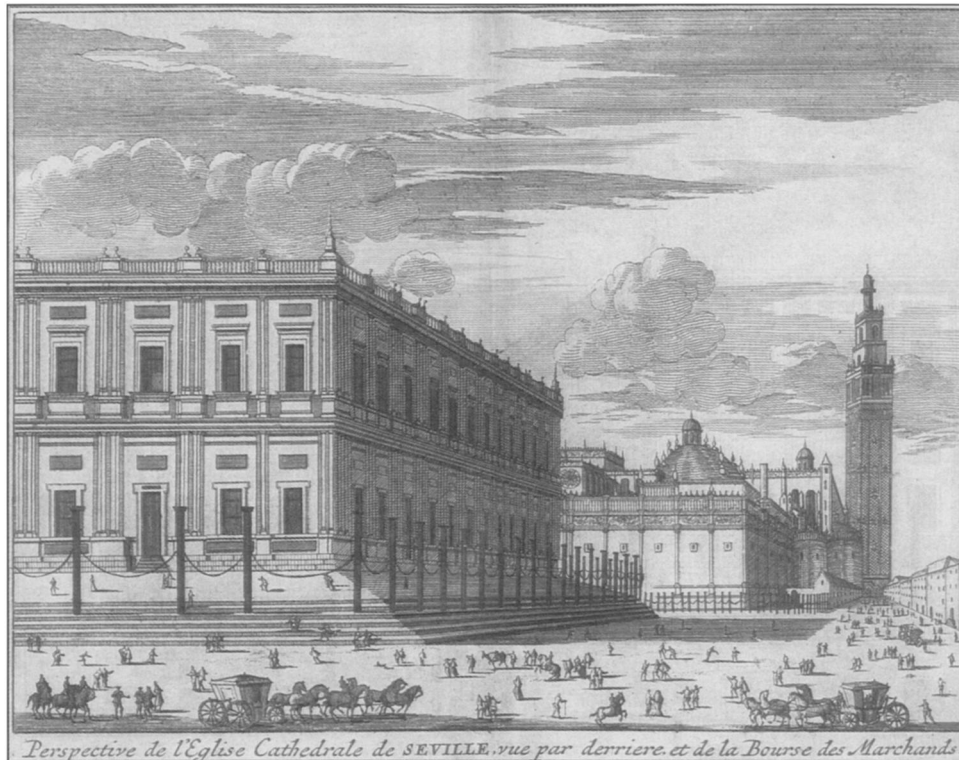


FIG. 1—The Casa Lonja, or Exchange House, today the Archivo General de Indias (left foreground) in Seville, looking toward the cathedral and the Giralda. Source: Alvarez de Colmenar 1707, vol. 3. (Collection of the author)

word to Historical Geography.” In a short, one-paragraph section called “The Archive in Historical Geography,” he has this to say (Sauer 1963, 366) :

There is an embarrassment of riches in the old Spanish records, from parish [registers] up to summary reports that were sent to the king. . . . There are diaries and accounts of early explorations, the *visitas* made by inspecting officials who reported in detail, letters of missionaries, the so-called geographic relations [*relaciones geográficas*] ordered for all Spanish America at several times in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, records of payments of taxes and tributes, data on mines, salines, and roads. Perhaps no other part of the New World has as elaborate a documentation.

The statement intrigued me, so I searched in the Adam Smith Library for further writings by Sauer as well as those of his Berkeley associates Woodrow Borah, Sherburne F. Cook, and Lesley B. Simpson. Those “old Spanish records,” it turned out, could be consulted fruitfully for all sorts of purposes. By the end of my second year at Glasgow, the urge to know more about Latin America had become firmly established. But what was I to do with such an interest?

At the suggestion of one Philip Ellis, whose lectures hooked me on the region, I applied during my fourth year to several graduate programs, eventually receiving

offers from both sides of the Atlantic. The one that appealed to me most came from the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where Philip himself had studied as a graduate student some years earlier. Off I went.

Alberta, looking back, may have seemed an unlikely choice, but it worked. Latin Americanists on the faculty there included my supervisor in geography, John F. Bergmann, along with David Johnson in history, and Ruth Gruhn in anthropology. Professors Bergmann and Johnson, furthermore, were strategic links to Berkeley, for the former had studied under Henry J. Bruman, one of Sauer's doctoral graduates, and the latter under James J. Parsons while being supervised by Borah. With Professors Bergmann, Johnson, and Gruhn in situ as the core of my graduate committee, and with members of the Berkeley School serving as off-campus mentors, I began formal examination of Latin America's colonial past, first in a master's thesis on the Mixteca Alta of Mexico (Lovell 1975) and then in a doctoral dissertation on the Cuchumatán Highlands of Guatemala (Lovell 1980).

My master's research introduced me to fieldwork in Latin America generally, but doctoral demands led me specifically to the archives, initially in Guatemala and later in Seville. Guatemala, given my intent to focus on the colonial experience of one of its most isolated and least studied regions, was the logical place to begin, more so because the Archivo General de Centroamérica (AGCA) in Guatemala City, by Latin American standards, was exceptionally well organized. This happy state of affairs came about largely because of the commitment of one man, José Joaquín Pardo (1905–1964), a legendary figure in the historiography of Guatemala—and, indeed, of all Central America (Luján Muñoz 1984).

Pardo's eccentric existence as a self-trained archivist—he actually arranged to have living quarters set up in the archive in order to remain close to his beloved documents—could easily be mistaken as having its roots in the magical realism of Guatemalan novelist Miguel Angel Asturias. For almost thirty years Pardo dedicated himself as director of the AGCA to organizing and classifying its contents, which he did by reading manuscript after manuscript and creating a *fichero* (card catalog) registering the essentials of time, place, and episode. Pardo's idiosyncratic referencing system, despite the advances of information technology even in a backward country like Guatemala, is still in use today. He was above all a methodical man, choosing to concentrate his energies on the colonial period, starting with the sixteenth century and working his way through to the early nineteenth. With the transfer to Guatemala City in 1937 of records formerly held in outlying municipal offices, Pardo had his work cut out. Those shipped to the capital from former imperial headquarters in Antigua were particularly challenging, for their subject matter dealt not only with affairs in present-day Guatemalan territory but also, given Antigua's role as the colonial hub of all Central America, with Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, as well as the Mexican state of Chiapas. By the time he died, Pardo had read and classified most of the 14,744 *legajos* (bundles of documents) relating to the colonial period. Of the estimated 50,000 or so *legajos* pertaining to postcolonial times, Pardo had worked through only a few more than

4,000 (Luján Muñoz 1982). Cataloging the Republican-era holdings of the AGCA is a task that still awaits its Pardo.

As with Sauer, I never had the pleasure of meeting Pardo personally, to thank him for all he did and to confide that without him I'd have been lost. In truth, not until I made it to Seville would I appreciate the Herculean dimension of Pardo's labors. I combed his fichero for references to the Cuchumatán Highlands and then, armed with stacks of call numbers, solicited my first documents.

Inspired by Pardo's example, my plan was to start with the conquest and early colonization of Guatemala and gather data chronologically, from the first Spanish intrusion in 1524 to final departure three hundred years later. Sixteenth-century Spanish script, however, eluded my powers of comprehension and triggered an unsettling crisis of confidence: How could I collect information if I couldn't decipher what had been written? I had picked up Spanish living with a family in Mexico, so I had no formal training to lean on. While I taught myself the paleographic basics and prayed for my skills in that area to improve, I heeded the advice of Miles Wortman (1982), a historian who sat at the desk next to mine in the archive.

"Don't make it any more difficult for yourself than it already is, George," he cautioned me. "Start at the end of the colonial period and work your way back."

I picked up the tab for more than just one round of drinks at the Costa Azul cantina that night, for Miles was right. High-end Zacapa rum was a small price to pay for that invaluable suggestion. The more legible handwriting of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries made data extraction far easier than wrestling with the stylized scribbles of the sixteenth. So I worked my way back to the conquest, not forward to independence as originally planned.

One Pardo habit I did manage to imitate was that of securing accommodation, if not on the premises of the archive itself, then only a few blocks away. Zone 1 in downtown Guatemala City, I was to realize later, has few of Seville's social charms and none of its architectural grace. The room I rented, however, was by 6:30 A.M. so noisy from the sound of passing buses that I always woke up early. I was therefore able to arrive at the archive most mornings punctually at 8:00 A.M., when its doors opened.

The months I spent accumulating notes and making transcriptions sometimes passed painstakingly slowly. Often I'd have to wait an age for a document simply to arrive at my desk, with the attendants blaming the delay on the leveling of Pardo's neat shelves caused by the earthquake of 4 February 1976. Romantic liaisons and on-the-job tippling were more likely reasons, for I had noticed that bottles of Quetzalteca, a popular local booze, as well as scented girls, could be smuggled into archival precincts that were out of bounds for me. Tardy delivery, however, allowed me the opportunity to observe who was lining up at the civil registry adjacent to the archive's reading room. There, invariably, barefoot Indians waited their turn, cut off from the documents I was perusing even though traces of their ancestors ran throughout their pages. I remember one occasion, tallying up for Huehuetenango how many native inhabitants had to furnish how much tribute to their Spanish masters, when I felt an insistent tug on the leg of my trousers. I looked down to see

a young Indian woman, with a horde of small children in tow and an infant tied to her back, point to the basket beside her on the floor.

"Señor, *cómprame un chuchito*. . . . Buy a chuchito from me, sir. I've only a few left. After I sell them, and my husband finishes his business at the civil registry, we can go home. . . . *Por favor, señor, cómprame un chuchito!*"

Tasty though the hot corn dumplings looked, I smiled but declined. I also declined repeated offers from archive staff to buy original colonial-period documents, the plunder of which is as recurrent as the violence that has stalked Guatemala all through its tragic history (Sullivan 1995).

Documentary theft, together with the ravages of floods, insects, earthquakes, and neglect, have had an erosive impact on the AGCA's holdings. This became more and more apparent as I read back through time, noticing that the archive's eighteenth-century sources were abundant, those of the seventeenth ample but less so, and those of the sixteenth not without value yet deficient in certain key regards—tribute awards known as *encomiendas*, for instance, and accounts indicating native population levels were chronically scarce. The Spanish pursuit of empire, however, rested on a massive bureaucracy that generated reams of paper flowing to and from the Council of the Indies, a governing body set up to advise the monarchy on how to administer its New World possessions. When reports were audited, testimony heard, or the conduct of officials subjected to review, the standard practice was to draft duplicate copies of all correspondence. In this way, ideally, one set of records would remain with the Crown's representatives in the colonies, with another sent to the Council of the Indies in Spain. The system, compared with how other colonial enterprises were run, was tedious and unwieldy, but from the standpoint of posterity it increased significantly the odds that documents would survive. It began to dawn on me that if material I was looking for was not to be found in Guatemala, then perhaps I might be able to locate it in Spain. I tidied matters up in Guatemala as efficiently as I could. Seville beckoned.



Andalucía, by virtue of Iberian geography Spain's historic gateway to the Indies, is divided into eight provinces, each with its seat in a city carrying the same name as the jurisdiction over which it presides. When evoking their essence in his *Canto a Andalucía*, there was one provincial capital for which the poet Manuel Machado found no words could suffice (Machado and Machado 1962, 227):

Cádiz, salt-laden brightness.  
Granada, hidden waters that weep.  
Roman and Moorish, silent Córdoba.  
Málaga, singer of flamenco.  
Almería the golden.  
Silvery Jaén.  
Huelva, shore of the three caravels [of Columbus].  
And Sevilla.

I first visited Seville during a cold spell in January, when the torrid heat of August was unimaginable. Snow, which I thought I'd left behind in Scotland and Canada, followed me to Madrid. As the train headed south toward my destination, the thick falls in Castile became lighter dustings that accentuated the features of landscape instead of burying them. We passed ruined castles, Quixote-like windmills, and town after town scattered across the vast upland plain. Enthralled, I stared out the window until night fell.

Once in Seville, I stuck to Pardo's proximity factor and took a room in an icy pension—the landlady chastised me daily for taking too many hot baths—in the old Jewish quarter of Barrio de Santa Cruz, five minutes' walk from the Archive of the Indies. There I focused my attention on early colonial documentation, which I found, indeed, to be bountiful. The problem was that no Spanish Pardo had bothered to sort through the records pertaining to Guatemala—or any other part of Spanish America, for that matter. Some idea of the volume of documentation housed in the archive can be garnered from a guide compiled by one of its directors, José María de la Peña y Cámara (1958). Don José reckons that, conservatively, 14 million folio-sized manuscripts, each measuring 31 by 22 centimeters, are contained in the archive's legajos. Were the contents of each legajo laid out in a row, the paper chain created would be a little in excess of 8,680 kilometers, roughly the distance from San Francisco in California to Valdivia in Chile. The contents of the archive thus stretch, in a literal geographical sense and not just metaphorically, from the northern frontier to the southern frontier of imperial Spain's far-flung New World possessions.

For the researcher, the archive has a certain inner logic that conforms to the old colonial order and allows some basic orientation. It is divided into sixteen primarily thematic units. Within many—but by no means all—of these thematic divisions, spatial subunits exist that relate to administrative and judicial entities known as *audiencias*, one of which is Guatemala. The Government section of the archive alone, however, possesses 973 legajos with documents concerning the Audiencia de Guatemala—which, during colonial times, I needed no reminding, encompassed territory from Chiapas to Costa Rica. With no Pardo fichero at hand to highlight the contents of each legajo, how was I to proceed?

Indispensable at this stage was the magnum opus of Murdo J. MacLeod (1973), which remains the scholarly benchmark against which studies of Spanish Central America are gauged. MacLeod's book is a provocative, sweeping interpretation of the colonial experience of the entire isthmus. I had mined its copious footnotes beforehand for all references to legajos on Guatemala containing information that interested me, especially if it dated to the sixteenth century. With MacLeod's references pointing me to a specific legajo, I would trawl its folios looking for bits and pieces expressly on the Cuchumatán Highlands: land and settlement, labor and tribute, native population, disease outbreaks, and economic activities. The strategy paid off. Within a month I had accumulated sufficient data to fill in the gaps from the Guatemalan end of the research axis.

Confident that I now had early details for the dissertation that I lacked before, I began to contemplate more deeply Seville’s role in the scheme of empire and grew to appreciate how the events and circumstances of life throughout Spanish America,



FIG. 2—The stone pillars in front of the Archivo General de Indias offer a vantage point from which to ponder what to do in Seville after the archive closes. (Photograph of the author by Robert Huish, February 2001)

not just in the remote corner of Guatemala I was researching, were linked to what took place in the port city on the banks of the Guadalquivir. Without the Guadalquivir, Seville’s golden age would never have come about. The city’s inland position on a river that connected it to the Atlantic but protected it from attack gave Seville a supreme advantage over coastal contenders when the monopoly to trade with Spanish colonies in the New World was up for grabs. Propelled by the

entrepreneurial savvy of its Genoese merchant contingent, whose resources helped finance the voyages of their compatriot Christopher Columbus and a host of other expeditions, Seville in 1503 secured the exclusive right to establish a Casa de Contratación de las Indias—a House of Trade for the Indies. This lucrative royal privilege it managed to hold on to until 1717, when the silting up of the Guadalquivir, along with an increase in ship size and an improvement in military defenses, saw the monopoly shift to Cádiz. For two centuries, though, Seville was Spain's imperial fulcrum, the place from which boats set sail, the place to which they returned. Out of Seville went European ideas and technology that changed the Americas; back to Seville came American bullion and commodities that transformed Europe.

"Not a city but a world" is how Fernando de Herrera (1536–1599) described Seville in its sixteenth-century heyday, when its booming population (it grew from 55,000 inhabitants in 1534 to more than 100,000 by 1590) made it the largest and most important urban center in Spain, drawing to its teeming midst people from all across Europe. No one writing in English more vividly captures the drama—but, for some, the delusion—of that glittering era than does Ruth Pike (1966, 1972), whose sketches of the Sevillian working class and its lowlife marginals, not just of the city's flashy merchants and aristocrats, are drawn from the colorful pages of Cervantes and Lope de Vega as well as from local archives.

The building that now serves as the Archive of the Indies is centrally connected, like the Guadalquivir itself, to the ebb and flow of empire. It was designed by Juan de Herrera, one of the architects responsible for Philip II's palace-cum-monastery at El Escorial, to serve as the Casa Lonja or Exchange House, which it did from the time its doors first opened in 1598 until its clients departed for Cádiz in the early eighteenth century. By 1785, after much dithering about what to do with a beautiful but redundant Renaissance gem, the government of Charles III decided to give the Casa Lonja another imperial function, one that would not only endure but also bestow on Seville recognition of the part it played in Spain's overseas expansion: Juan de Herrera's Exchange House would become the repository for records in the Crown's possession relating to all of its New World ventures; hence the designation *Archivo General de Indias* (Figure 2). It took two weeks, de la Peña y Cámara tells us, for one team of thirteen ox carts and another of eleven to reach Seville from the former storage facilities at Simancas, near Valladolid, the two convoys "traversing the dusty trails of Castile with the documents of the Indies sealed in 253 wooden chests, guarded by a sizeable troop of soldiers" (1958, 47). The documents have been stored in Seville ever since.



After my first archival stint in Seville it was back to Guatemala. There, instead of another spell in the AGCA, I wanted to check out municipal Cuchumatán archives, in the certain knowledge that orders from central authorities in Guatemala City to send old documents to the AGCA had not always been complied with. I also wanted



to test a proposition of Sauer's, which made a great deal of sense given what I'd been up to for the better part of two years (1963, 367):

Let no one consider that historical geography can be content with what is found in archive and library. It calls, in addition, for exacting field work. One of the first steps is the ability to read the documents in the field. Take into the field, for instance, an account of an area written long ago and compare the places and their activities with the present, seeing where the habitations were and the lines of communication ran, where the forests and the fields stood, gradually getting a picture of the former cultural landscape concealed behind the present one. . . . Questions begin to take shape as to what has happened. . . . There comes a time when the picture begins to fit together, when the past is clear.

Having spent a good deal of each summer between 1974 and 1977 visiting Maya townships in the Cuchumatán Highlands, I was already reasonably familiar with the lay of the land. Sauer's suggestion of combining field observation with archival reflection, however, worked wonders. As I hiked across hills and through forests, as I rested at a summit and looked down at a settlement in a valley below, a picture really did begin to emerge, much as Sauer had predicted. I also learned a great deal by conversing with the locals, most of whom had seen few gringos, and many none, show up in their communities, let alone inquire about possible archival holdings. Sadly, just as I was beginning to get a feel for the sort of documents I might stumble on to, the civil war that had been simmering in Guatemala for two decades flared up, making fieldwork not just risky but downright dangerous. It was time to hunker down and start writing.

Those initial archival forays, undertaken for dissertation purposes, were my point of departure. There have been scores of such sojourns since, most of which have entailed building on the regional foundation hewn out for the Cuchumatán Highlands and working from it toward the establishment of larger-scale scenarios for Guatemala as a whole, with Central America—indeed, all Spanish America—at times constituting the macrolevel objective. What published fruit, so to speak, came of my fieldwork in the archives? Here's a sample:

First I reworked chapters from the dissertation into self-contained discussions of population history (Lovell 1981, 1982), land and landholding (Lovell 1983a), forced native labor (1983c), and settlement patterns (1983b). With the violence of the civil war peaking between 1980 and 1984, I spent more time in Seville than in Guatemala, quarrying the legajos of the Archive of the Indies for further disclosures. With access to additional information, I then reassembled the parts back into a whole, creating two monographs in English (Lovell 1992a [1985]) and one in Spanish (Lovell 1990a), all three texts based on the dissertation but distinct from it and from each other. Moving beyond my Cuchumatán corner and the colonial period, I addressed the vicissitudes of Maya survival throughout Guatemala from conquest in the sixteenth century to counterinsurgency in the twentieth (Lovell 1985, 1988b). Perhaps the most fun I've had sleuthing in the archives is trying to figure out which side to believe—the Dominicans or the Franciscans—when examining the work of the

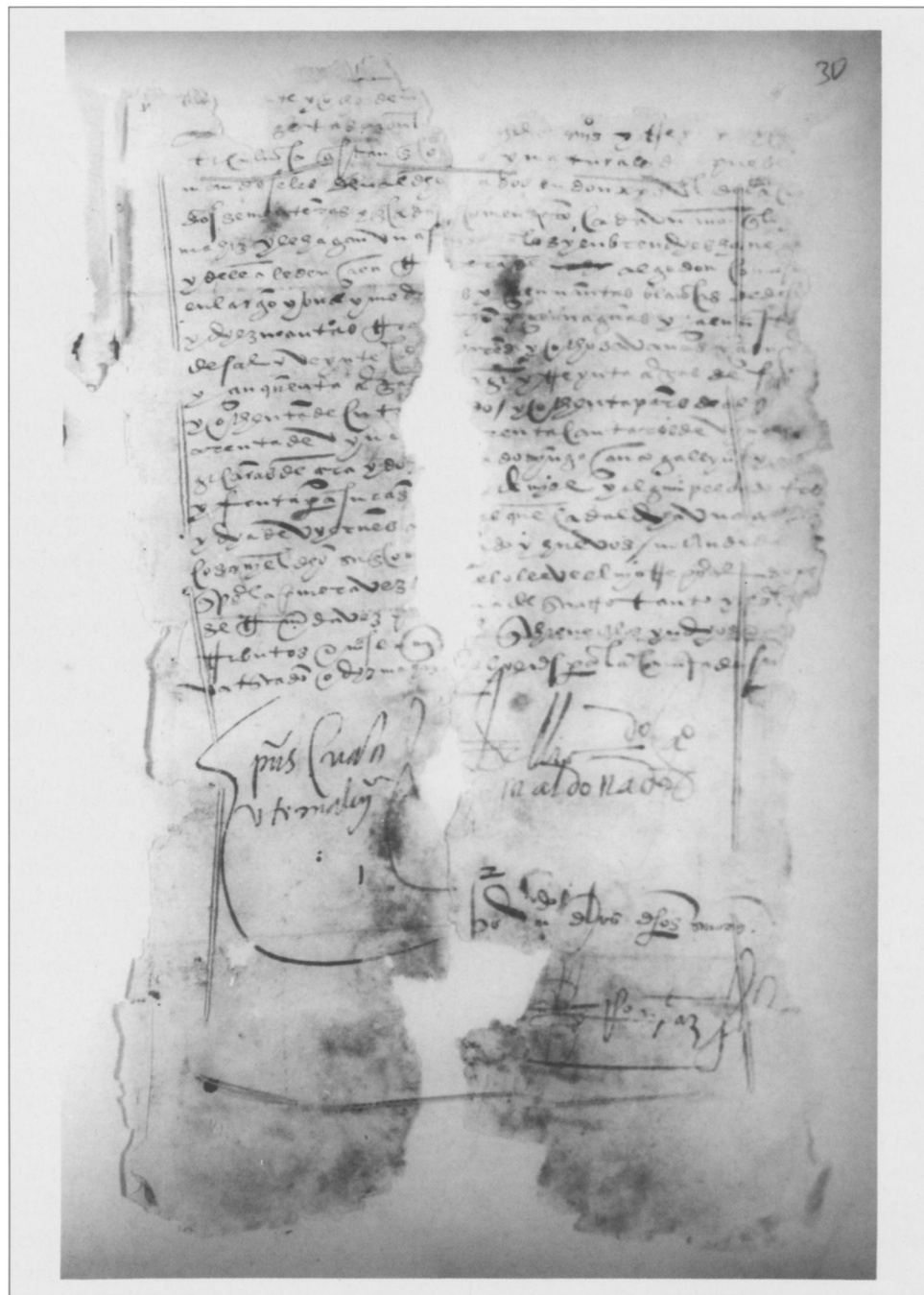


FIG. 3—Fragment of an original tribute levy for an Indian community in Guatemala, drafted between 1536 and 1541 by Bishop Francisco Marroquín (signature middle left) and President Alonso Maldonado (signature middle right). (Reproduced with the permission of the Archivo General de Indias; Patronato 70-1-8)

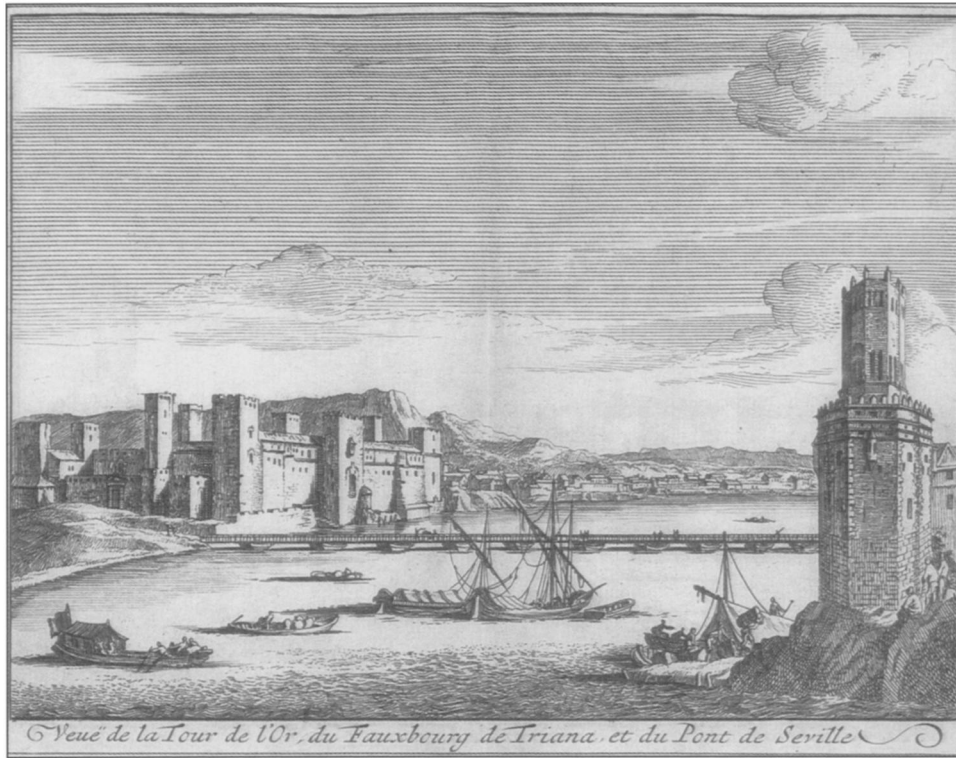


FIG. 4—A view of the Guadalquivir, with the Torre de Oro (right foreground) on the Seville side of the river, looking across to Triana. The Castle of the Inquisition (left) and the city's pontoon bridge are prominent features. *Source:* Alvarez de Colmenar 1707, vol. 3. (Collection of Alexandra Parma and Noble David Cook)

Church (Lovell 1990b). Certainly the greatest thrill was tracking down the earliest Indian tribute records known to exist for Guatemala (Figure 3), which researchers had long given up as lost but which two colleagues and I located in Seville in a section of the archive appropriately called “General Miscellaneous” (Kramer, Lovell, and Lutz 1986). Over the years I have sustained an interest in the role played by epidemic disease in Indian depopulation at various scales of analysis (Lovell 1988a, 1992b, 1993). With one colleague I have explored this and related demographic issues for all parts of Central America (Lovell and Lutz 1995, 2000); with another, most parts of Spanish America (Cook and Lovell 1992, 2000). As with the Cuchumatán monographs, Spanish-language versions of these English-language originals are revised and expanded editions, not mere translations, for there are always new archival data to integrate. Not until the civil war died down did I venture into the Guatemalan countryside and nose around in municipal archives, where, indeed, valuable sources are to be found (Lovell 1991). The terror of the war years, especially its impact on native communities, I have grappled with primarily in relation to Guatemala (Lovell 2000a), but recent events in Chiapas demanded that at-

tention also be paid to Maya groups there (Lovell 2000b). In both of these accounts I lean heavily on archival findings to help furnish the reader with necessary historical coordinates, for without recourse to them no understanding of present conflicts is possible.



Other archives and libraries—Simancas, the Vatican, the Hispanic Society of America in New York, the Newberry Library in Chicago, the Bancroft Library in Berkeley—have drawn me to their collections, but it is to the Archive of the Indies that I return again and again in search of a fix. The cause of my addiction, of course, is Seville itself. On a warm spring evening, with the fragrance of orange blossoms hanging in the air, I walk from the city's ancient core over to Triana, home in the past not only to artisans, potters, sailors, boat builders, and soap makers but also to gypsies, beggars, con men, streetwalkers, and the dreaded Inquisition (Figure 4). Three-quarters of the way across the river I imagine myself on the wooden pontoon bridge of the sixteenth century, not its later stone-and-steel equivalent. Din and commotion are everywhere. Enough light is left in the day for me to make out, looming in the distance, the Moorish tower called the Giralda, which Christians made the centerpiece of a Catholic place of worship. Down the Guadalquivir on the Seville side, ships laden with goods are docked next to the Torre de Oro—the Tower of Gold. Cargoes of that precious metal, as well as loads of silver, are but a block away from the Royal Mint, across the street from the building that is today the Archive of the Indies. The scene intoxicates me, it and dozens more I see and hear enacted around me.

“Not a city but a world.” Herrera was only half right, though. Two worlds, not one. Entangled now for more than five centuries. And discovering each other still.

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