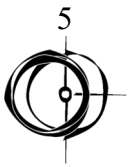


The Twists and Turns of Memory in the Discourse of Spanish American Independence

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ABSTRACT

Many Spanish American writers praised the wealth and virtues of the viceregal capitals, Mexico City and Lima, creating a vivid record of the relative autonomy and economic success of the urban elites who benefitted from early globalization. Some of these panegyrics employed the trope of the *translatio imperii*, suggesting the possibility that these cities might rival Madrid or Rome. Here, I consider the curious contrast to these representations presented by the memory of the viceregal period constructed in the discourse of independence. This discourse typically remembered the colonial period not as a time of autonomy and success, but as a period of enslavement to the Spanish. Many revolutionaries proposed a version of *translatio imperii* that was consistent with this discourse, claiming that they were to inherit one of the pre-Columbian indigenous empires. Simón Bolívar, however, sustained that Spanish America would inherit the spirit of empire directly from Rome. Both Bolívar and his compatriots creatively rewrote the traditional *translatio imperii* narrative into a redemption narrative capable of envisioning a glorious post-independence future.



KEYWORDS

Indies; *laudes civitatum*; *translatio imperii*; memory of colonial period; Simón Bolívar.

HOW TO CITE: Elise BARTOSIK-VÉLEZ, “The Twists and Turns of Memory in the Discourse of Spanish American Independence”, *Rubrica Contemporanea*, vol. XIII, n. 27 (2024), pp. 5-24.



Article received on 3-11-2022 and admitted for publication on 12-2-2022.

<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/rubrica.402>

Rubrica Contemporanea, vol. XIII, n. 27, 2024
ISSN. 2014-5748

A common literary genre produced by writers of the early modern period in the viceregal capitals of Lima and Mexico City was the *laudes civitatum* or *encomium urbis*, whose roots reach back to classical antiquity. David R. Marshall notes that “praises of cities were a typical rhetorical exercise”, and that the genre

entailed praise of the city’s founder (a famous man or even a divinity) and descriptions of its site and walls, the beauty of its buildings, the fertility of its surrounding fields, the abundance of its waters, the customs of its inhabitants, and everything that could instill glory and pride, from conquests obtained through military valor to the presence of famous personages [...]. Beginning in the 8th century *laudes civitatum* multiplied, especially in Italy, transcending the boundaries of Scholastic exercises to take on different tones, mostly political, but always maintaining their reference to classical, especially Roman, antiquity.¹

The *laudes civitatum* tradition, with its tentacles reaching back to Rome, was well-established in the Hispanic world, including the Indies, as I discuss in the first section of this essay.² Authors who penned works that praised Mexico City or Lima include Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, Fray Buenaventura de Salinas y Córdova, Antonio de la Calancha, and Hernán Cortés himself.³ Their prose and poetry emphasized the riches, loyalty, virtue, and importance of the viceregal capitals and their inhabitants. Many of these works also attested to a deepening sense of autonomy experienced by some American elites in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴ I refer

1. David R. MARSHALL, “Mirabilia Urbis”, trans. Patrick Baker, in Anthony Grafton et al. (eds.), *The Classical Tradition*, Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010, 592. For more on the *laudes civitatum* tradition, see Ernst Robert CURTIUS, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 155-157, and Sandra TOFFOLO, *Describing the City, Describing the State*, Leiden, Brill, 2020, pp. 12-15.

2. See Antonio RAMAJO CAÑO, “Notas sobre el tópico de *laudes* (alabanzas de lugares): algunas manifestaciones en la poesía áurea española”, *Bulletin Hispanique*, 105/1 (2003), pp. 99-117, <https://doi.org/10.3406/hispa.2003.5150>; Richard L. KAGAN, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1793*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 24-26; and Juan Luis BURKE, *Architecture and Urbanism in Viceregal Mexico: Puebla de los Angeles, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, London, Routledge, 2021, pp. 1-2. David BRADING notes that encomia written about Mexico City “*debió mucho a los humanistas españoles del siglo XVI, que habían cantado las glorias de Sevilla, por entonces la auténtica metrópoli de las Indias*” (*Orbe indiano. De la monarquía católica a la república criolla, 1492-1867*, Ciudad de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 346).

3. Barbara FUCHS and Yolanda MARTÍNEZ-SAN MIGUEL call Cortés’s second letter “[e]l texto fundacional en la alabanza de la ciudad de México” (“*La Grandeza mexicana* de Balbuena y el imaginario de una ‘metrópolis colonial’”), *Revista Iberoamericana*, LXXV/228 (2009), p. 681.

4. Here I use the term “elites” instead of “creoles” (or “creole elites”) to refer to the relatively small number of subjects in the Indies who possessed wealth, prestige, and power in colonial society. The three terms are taken from Max Weber’s formulation of social hierarchies published in his posthumously published *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922). This group was far from homogenous. It included, for example, merchants and descendants of the conquistadors, two groups whose interests increasingly diverged and who competed against each other for limited resources and favors “within an increasingly strict hierarchy of merit” (Nino VALLEN, *Being the Heart of the World: The Pacific and the Fashioning of the Self in New Spain, 1513-1641*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, p. 22). It also included *peninsulares*, mestizos, and even indigenous elites who were loyal to the monarchy and whose actions were principally motivated by their own self-interests and not by their birthplace, whether that was Spain or its territories abroad. Regarding native elites, see Peter B. VILLELLA, *Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1500-1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

to this as an American sense of “rising glory”, a term used in the eighteenth century to describe a similar self-consciousness in revolutionary British America.⁵

Some of the *laudes civitatum* produced in colonial Spanish America featured the notion of *translatio imperii et studii*, the centuries-old idea that empire and its culture move westward as history progresses. According to the most common version of *translatio imperii* circulating in the Americas, after empire began somewhere in Asia, it moved in succession to Greece, Rome, the Holy Roman Empire of Germany, Spain, and then it crossed the Atlantic to the New World. Spanish American writers used the trope in representing their cities as rivals to Madrid or Rome. Some even suggested they would someday inherit the mantle of empire –or they already had inherited it– from this chain of previous empires.

In later years, however, as I argue in the second section of the current piece, the dominant discourses of independence denied that colonial elites had experienced –and left an extensive record of having expressed– a sense of *rising glory*. Instead of remembering the viceregal period as a time of impending imperial greatness, abundance, and elite agency, independence discourses represented it a dismal era of total subjugation to the Spanish. The exiled Jesuit Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán (1748-1798), for example, averred in his *Carta a los españoles americanos* that the nearly three hundred years of Spanish rule in the Indies could be “*abreviada en las cuatro palabras siguientes: Ingratitud, Injusticia, Esclavitud y Desolación*”.⁶ Revolutionaries, in effect, disavowed the very agency and successes that many colonial writers crowed about in their urban panegyrics.

We still find examples of the *translatio imperii* trope in the discourses of Spanish American independence, but these examples take different forms than those found in earlier encomia from the viceregal period. Many patriots claimed to inherit empire not from the customary chain of empires enumerated in the traditional *translatio imperii* narrative, which, in the Spanish American variant, included Greece, Rome, and Spain. Instead, they maintained they would inherit empire from the pre-Columbian indigenous empire of the Mexica or the Inca. The excision of the empires of the classical world and Europe from the *translatio imperii* narrative employed in the independence era was a radical revision. As I discuss below, an equally creative version of the narrative was employed by Simón Bolívar, the military and political leader of independence in much of South America. For Bolívar, the so-called Liberator, the only usable past was that of classical antiquity, and instead of arguing that Spanish America would inherit empire from indigenous peoples, he asserted that it would transfer directly from Rome.⁷ Both the version of *translatio imperii* proposed by Bolívar and that proposed by his peers repressed the memory of the economic successes and the relative autonomy of colonial elites. These

5. “Rising glory” was a popular trope in revolutionary British America and then the United States that predicted the region was destined for imperial greatness. The eponymous exemplar of what became known as the “rising glory poem” is *A Poem, On the Rising Glory of America*, written by Philip Freneau and Hugh Henry Brackenridge in 1771 and delivered that year at the commencement ceremony of the College of New Jersey.

6. Juan Pablo VISCARDO y GUZMÁN completed the letter in London in 1791, but it was not published until 1799, after his death, when Francisco de Miranda had it translated into French to garner support for Independence (*Obra completa*, Lima, Banco de Crédito de Perú, 1988, p. 205).

7. Elise BARTOSIK-VÉLEZ, “Simón Bolívar’s Rome”, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 25 (2018) pp. 333-354, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12138-016-0428-0>.



novel variants of *translatio imperii* also excised Spain from the story of imperial inheritance.

The “rising glory” of the viceregal period

Elites’ heightened awareness about the glorious futures of Mexico City and Lima during the viceregal period developed in a unique socio-economic and ideological context that merit a brief review here. Fundamental was the simple geographical accident by which the American continent was auspiciously located between Europe and Asia. Together with a confluence of events in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this resulted in the Indies playing an essential role in early globalization.⁸ These events include the discovery in the Indies of immense silver deposits, the mine of Potosí (discovered by Spaniards in 1545) being the largest. Twenty years later, in 1565, the Spanish conquered the Philippines and Spanish Americans began trading with Asia via the Philippines. This was around the same time that China adopted silver as a currency, creating a voracious demand for the white metal. China and Europe propelled world trade flows as they became the two central nodes of a bipolar global economy. The Indies acted as a crucial protagonist in this system and developed a significant degree of autonomy relative to Spain.⁹

In this scenario of increasing globalization, it is important to note, as Nino Vallen has recently argued, that the transpacific trade was never unanimously supported by Spanish American elites. In 1602, for example, the Mexico City *cabildo* did not deem the trade profitable enough in the previous five years and proposed closing the port of Acapulco and ending the trade with the Philippines.¹⁰ But the merchants of Mexico City and Lima and their allies, many of whom were members of international, family-based commercial and financial networks with ties to crown officials, clearly benefitted from the Indies’ participation in the transpacific trade.¹¹

First Lima (c. 1580-1640) and then Mexico City (c. 1640-1750), each officially designated as the *cabezas* of their respective Kingdoms of Perú and New Spain, functioned as the dominant center of economic activity in the Indies.¹² Every year (with only a few exceptions), the Manila galleons brought millions of pesos of Indian silver

8. Dennis FLYNN and Arturo GIRÁLDEZ, “Born with a ‘Silver Spoon’: The Origin of World Trade in 1571”, *Journal of World History* 6/2 (1995) pp. 201-221, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003554325-2>.

9. Mariano BONALIAN, *La América española entre el Pacífico y el Atlántico. Globalización mercantil y economía política, 1580-1840*, México, El Colegio de México, 2019; and Carmen YUSTE LÓPEZ, *Emporios transpacíficos: Comerciantes mexicanos en Manila, 1710-1815*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007.

10. VALLEN, *Being the Heart of the World*, pp. 169-170.

11. On family networks of merchants that spanned the globe, see Guillermo LOHMANN VILLENA and Enriqueta VILA VILAR, *Familia, linajes y negocios entre Sevilla y las Indias. Los Almonte*, Madrid, Fundación Mapfre-Tavera, 2003 and Enriqueta VILA VILAR, “Redes mercantiles y sociales entre Sevilla y Lima”, in Enriqueta Vila Vilar and Jaime J. Lacueva Muñoz (eds.), *Mirando las dos orillas: intercambios mercantiles, sociales y culturales entre Andalucía y América*, Sevilla, Fundación Buenas Letras, 2012, pp. 183-207.

12. BONALIAN, *La América española*, p. 159. According to Sergio Tonatiuh SERRANO HERNÁNDEZ, “fiscal revenue increased in [New Spain] since the 1650s and surpassed Peru’s by 1665”, “Building an Empire in the New World. Taxes and Fiscal Policy in Hispanic America during the Seventeenth Century”, PhD dissertation, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, 2020, p. 477.

from Acapulco to the Philippines; on their return voyage they carried tons of Asian goods, including silks and porcelains from China, lacquerware from Japan, and cotton textiles and spices from India. Some of these were then re-exported to Peru. Mexico City merchants and their allies controlled much of the Pacific trade, the Philippines having been incorporated into the Viceroyalty of New Spain in 1574 by royal decree.¹³ American merchants successfully pressured Madrid to establish *consulados*, merchant guilds, first in Mexico City (1594) and then in Lima (1613). The crown devolved a significant amount of authority to the *consulados*, including the *fuero mercantil* and the power to collect the *alcabala* sales tax and other duties. The *consulados* over time “steadily accumulated financial and political power”.¹⁴ While the crown had the ultimate authority, urban elites exercised in practice a significant degree of *de facto* autonomy.

The internal economies of New Spain and Peru grew more sophisticated, developing far beyond extractive mining and becoming less dependent on metropolitan imports.¹⁵ John Lynch has argued that “[b]y the 1640s certain sectors of the American economy –shipbuilding, agriculture, and investment in overseas trade– were far more buoyant than their counterparts in Spain [...]. Economically at least the dominant partner was now America”.¹⁶ This shift was reflected in diminished treasury returns sent from the Indies to Spain.¹⁷ American elites particularly benefited from their ability to control the local distribution of royal revenues.¹⁸ The “reorientation of the Hispanic world in the years around 1600” entailed a “new balance of power” and helped promote American notions about the centrality and importance of Lima and Mexico City within the monarchy.¹⁹ As Lynch concluded, “America was now the guardian of empire”²⁰ and many elite Spanish Americans appeared cognizant of this status, especially when Spain, like much of the rest of Europe, was experiencing economic decline.²¹



13. Ostwald SALES COLÍN, *El movimiento portuario de Acapulco: El protagonismo de Nueva España en la relación con Filipinas, 1587-1648*, México DF, Plaza y Valdés, 2000, p. 96. Also see Katharine BJORK, “The Link that Kept the Philippines Spanish: Mexican Merchant Interests and the Manila Trade, 1571-1815”, *Journal of World History*, 9/1 (1998), pp. 25-50, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2005.0111>. For a challenge to the view that the Philippines were fiscally dependent on New Spain, see Luis ALONSO, “Financing the Empire: The Nature of the Tax System in the Philippines, 1565-1804”, *Philippine Studies*, 51/1 (2003), pp. 63-95.

14. Gabriel PAQUETTE, “STATE-Civil Society Cooperation and Conflict in the Spanish Empire: The Intellectual and Political Activities of the Ultramarine *Consulados* and Economic Societies, c. 1780-1810”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 39 (2007), p. 270. Regarding the power of merchants of seventeenth-century Peru, see Margarita SUÁREZ, *Comercio y fraude en el Perú colonial: Las estrategias mercantiles de un banquero*, Lima, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos/Banco Central de Reserva del Perú, 1995.

15. Pedro PÉREZ HERRERO, *Plata y libranzas: la articulación comercial del México borbónico*, Ciudad de México, El Colegio de México, 1988, p. 137, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvhn08zq>.

16. LYNCH, *Spain Under the Habsburgs*, vol. 2, p. 13.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

18. Alejandra IRIGOIN y Regina GRAFE, “Bargaining for Absolutism: A Spanish Path to Nation-State and Empire Building”, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 88/2 (2008), pp. 173-209, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-2007-117>.

19. LYNCH, *Spain Under the Habsburgs*, vol. 2, pp. 13 and 212-218.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

21. Ruggiero ROMANO, *Coyunturas opuestas: La crisis del siglo XVII en Europa e Hispanoamérica*, Ciudad de México, El Colegio de México, 1993.

Some policy makers in Spain expressed alarm and anxiety about the increasing power and autonomy of Spain's overseas possessions. In 1568, the so-called Junta Magna was convened to devise a much-needed comprehensive strategy to govern the Indies. The "*resoluciones y advertimientos*" produced by the Junta hinted at the possibility that the Indies could become economically self-sufficient and eventually lost ("*facilmente podría venir a cessar del todo*").²² It was in this context that the Franciscan friar Martín Ignacio de Loyola (?–1606), then bishop of Paraguay and Río de la Plata, raised the alarm in his missives to the crown about the influx of Asian goods in Peru and what he viewed as Peru's *de facto* economic independence. On 6 May 1605 he warned: "*es grande la independencia que se va siguiendo al Perú y México, de España que es un inconveniente muy grande, y tal que el día que las Indias no estuvieren pendientes de España en todo sin duda se destruirá toda la política espiritual y temporal*".²³ Such fears were echoed in the seventeenth century by some of the *arbitristas*, one of the more extreme being the Marqués de Varinas, Gabriel Fernández de Villalobos (1642–1702), whose *Mano de relox que muestra y pronostica la ruyna de la América reducida a epítome* (1687) warned King Carlos II: "*De un cabello está pendiente la desunión de las Indias de la Corona de V. M.*"²⁴

Privileged urban Americans celebrated their status as protagonists in the global economy while proclaiming their loyalty to the crown, staging elaborate religious and civic festivals and engaging in ostentatious displays of wealth featuring a variety of textiles and other goods imported from Asia.²⁵ José Antonio Mazzotti notes that some Americans went as far as declaring "*el necesario traslado del axis mundi a tierras americanas*".²⁶ Mazzotti interprets said declarations as a response to European accusations of American inferiority, greed, and laziness by peninsular Spaniards and Europeans in general.

As Mazzotti's comment suggests, the ideological context in which elites boasted of their wealth and success was no less important than the economic context. The West in general had long been associated with a land of paradise and happiness, and Columbus and Italian humanists like Peter Martyr and Poggio Bracciolini interpreted the New World according to this trope.²⁷ Messianic narratives and eschatological prophecies associated

22. "Junta Magna, Resoluciones y advertimientos", en Vidal ABRIL CASTELLÓ and Miguel J. ABRIL STOFFELS (eds.), *Francisco de la Cruz, Inquisición, Actas II-1*, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas/Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1996, p. 173.

23. Quoted in BONIALIAN, *La América española*, p. 369.

24. Gabriel FERNÁNDEZ DE VILLALOBOS, MARQUÉS DE VARINAS, *Vaticinios de la pérdida de las Indias y Mano de relox*, Caracas, Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1949, p. 147.

25. Frédérique LANGUE, "De la munificencia a la ostentación: La nobleza de la ciudad de México y la cultura de la apariencia (siglos XVII-XVIII)", *Nuevo Mundo/Mundos Nuevos* (2005) <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.642>. Regarding how Spanish American elites integrated Asian goods into their culture, see José Luis GASCH-TOMÁS, "Asian Silk, Porcelain and Material Culture in the Definition of Mexican and Andalusian Elites, c. 1565-1630", in Bethany Aram and Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla (eds.), *Global Goods and the Spanish Empire, 1492-1824*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 153-173.

26. José Antonio MAZZOTTI, *Lima fundada: épica y nación criolla en el Perú*, Madrid, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2016, pp. 23-24, <https://doi.org/10.31819/9783954875443>.

27. Regarding the West, see Loren BARITZ, "The Idea of the West", *The American Historical Review*, 66/3 (1961), pp. 618-640, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1846967>. For interpretations of the New World, see Stelio CRO, "Italian Humanism and the Myth of the Noble Savage", *Annali d'Italianistica* 10 (1992), pp. 48-68.

the American continent with the heavenly fifth empire of the book of Daniel and supported the notion espoused by many Spanish American elites during the colonial period that the Indies would someday enjoy a glorious future.²⁸ Also important in nourishing the heady American self-consciousness were popular beliefs about the temporary nature of political power, including the belief in the *translatio imperii*. As alluded to above, different versions of the *translatio imperii* story identified different empires in the chain of imperial inheritance. Empires commonly included in the sequence were the Medean, Assyrian, Chaldean, or Macedonian. Rome, the paradigmatic empire of the West, was always included, as was usually the Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne and, of course in the Hispanic world, Spain itself.²⁹ Eventually Americans also saw themselves as protagonists in the story of *translatio imperii*, as they too claimed to inherit the spirit of empire that had once inhabited Rome.

All these notions were circulating in colonial Lima and Mexico City when writers employed the *laudes civitatum*. In both prose and poetry, authors extolled the natural and material wealth of their capitals and the civic and religious virtues of their inhabitants. While not all encomia employed the *translatio imperii* trope or directly addressed empire and its provenance, some suggested a moveable seat of power, a notion that lay at the heart of the *translatio imperii*. Others represented their New World capitals as new Romes, insinuating that they effectively rivaled Madrid or that they sustained the worldwide monarchy.³⁰ As I discuss below, these works should be considered part of a political strategy of elites to emphasize their city's significance and its loyalty to the crown. This was important in the economy of favor in which locals lobbied for royal



28. The literature on this topic is vast. For a cogent overview, see Alain MILHOU, “De Jerusalén a la tierra prometida del Nuevo Mundo. El tema mesiánico del centro del mundo”, in Ádám Anderle (ed.), *Iglesia, religión y sociedad en la historia latinoamericana, 1492-1945*, Szeged, Hungary, 1989, pp. 31-56; and idem, “Apocalypticism in Central and South American Colonialism”, in Bernard J. MCGINN et al. (eds.), *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, New York, Continuum, 2003, pp. 417-466.

29. Guillermo SERÉS, “Ariosto, los Reyes Católicos y la *Monarchia Cristianorum* carolina”, *Revista de Indias*, LXXI/252 (2011) pp. 331-364, <https://doi.org/10.3989/revindias.2011.011>. Hernán Cortés famously interpreted the supposedly peaceful submission of Moctezuma as a *translatio imperii*. See David BRADING, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State 1492-1867*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 17; and Anthony PAGDEN, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500-1800*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1995, p. 32.

30. The viceregal capitals of the Indies were commonly portrayed as new Romes. See, for example, Rodrigo de VALDÉS, *Fundación y grandezas de la muy noble y muy leal Ciudad de los Reyes de Lima*, Martina VINATEA (ed.), New York, Instituto de Estudios Auriseculares, 2018 [1687], p. 227. In his *Comentarios reales*, El Inca Garcilaso dubbed Peru, and specifically Cuzco, “*otra Roma*”. For a recent análisis, see Germán CAMPOS-MUÑOZ, “Cuzco. *Urbs et Orbis*: Rome and Garcilaso de la Vega’s Self-Classicalization”, *Hispanic Review* 81/2 (2013), pp. 132-134. For a discussion of how the “hyperbolic” praise of early modern urban discourse relied on formulaic comparisons with Rome, see Saúl MARTÍNEZ BERMEJO, “Lisbon, New Rome and Emporium: Comparing an Early Modern Imperial Capital, 1550-1750”, *Urban History*, 44/4 (2017), pp. 604-621. On the use of the Roman model in the Spanish world, see the superb study by David A. LUPHER, *Romans in a New World: Classical Models in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2003. For Mexico City as a “New Rome” see Richard KAGAN, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1793*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 151. Regarding depictions of Quito as a new Rome see Ernesto CAPELLO, *City at the Center of the World: Space, History, and Modernity in Quito*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011, pp. 25-28.

privileges and competed against other cities in the empire.³¹ To proclaim the greatness of one's city was in effect to affirm its loyalty to the monarchy, even as these authors sometimes hinted at unique visions of its political geography.

One such work is the epic poem *Grandeza mexicana* (1604) by the Spaniard Bernardo Balbuena (c. 1562–1627), who joined his father, a member of the audiencia of New Galicia, in New Spain at the age of twenty-two. Consisting of nine cantos written in tercets, the poem praises Mexico City's climate, landscape, architecture, government, and inhabitants (both human and equine). It represents the city as a great metropolis at the crossroads of global commerce, and it highlights the wealth created by the Pacific trade. The second stanza of the poem's "argumento" paints a vivid, geographically inaccurate image of Mexico City located on the shores of the Pacific, whose tides carry to the capital the natural riches of the East ("nácar lustroso y perlas orientales"). In the fifth chapter, entitled "Regalos, ocasiones de contento", the poet describes the wealth and splendor of the city, which is portrayed as the hinge between the markets of Asia and Europe:

*En ti se junta España con la China,
Italia con Japón, y finalmente
un mundo entero en trato y disciplina.
En ti de los tesoros del Poniente
se goza lo mejor; en ti la nata
de cuanto entre su luz cría el Oriente.*³²

Mexico City is the epicenter where not only Spain "se junta" with China, but also Italy "se junta" with Japan. Spain and Italy here represent the West, and China and Japan represent the East. All markets come together in the capital.

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The protagonism of Mexico City in the monarchy and in global trade is emphasized throughout the poem with its consistent lexicon of centrality (e.g., "centro", "quicio", and "corazón"). The capital is an emporium for the highest quality goods, and an enumeration of verbs stress the frenetic activity of trade: "del mundo lo mejor, la nata / de cuanto se conoce y se practica, / aquí se bulle, vende y se barata".³³

The city exerts agency as a powerful *urbs* at the center of this commercial system:

*México al mundo por igual divide,
Y como a un sol la tierra se le inclina
Y en toda ella parece que preside.*³⁴

The capital actively exerts itself—it "divides" the world into the two halves of East and West—, and like the sun that dominates the Earth, Mexico City "parece que preside" over the world.

31. For an informed discussion, see María Soledad BARBÓN, *Colonial Loyalties. Celebrating the Spanish Monarchy in Eighteenth-Century Lima*, Notre Dame IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2019, pp. 19-88. On the "complex hierarchy of present and past cities" in general, see MARTÍNEZ BERMEJO, "Lisbon, New Rome and Emporium", pp. 604-621. The term "economy of favor" is from Antonio M. HESPANHA, "La economía de la gracia", in ídem (ed.), *La gracia del derecho. Economía de la cultura en la Edad Moderna*, Madrid, Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1993, pp. 151-176. Also see Alejandro CAÑEQUE, *The King's Living Image: The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico*, New York, Routledge, 2004, esp. ch. 5.

32. Bernardo DE BALBUENA, *La grandeza mexicana y Compendio apologético en la alabanza de la poesía*, ed. from México, Editorial Porrúa, 1971, p. 91.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

According to Mazzotti, in representing Mexico City “como centro de la civilización occidental”, *Grandeza mexicana* “provincializa a Europa y a Asia, es decir al Viejo Mundo, con una visión progresiva de la historia, cuyos agentes criollos, sin llegar al separatismo político, engrandecen superlativamente la patria imperial”.³⁵ In a similar vein, Barbara Fuchs and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel argue that Balbuena’s poem “desplaza el centro del imperio español al virreinato de la Nueva España, al concebirlo desde una ciudad de México que funciona como bisagra y centro de operaciones entre los mercados europeos y asiáticos”.³⁶ I would argue that said *decentering* is best understood as an expression of loyalty to the monarchy that espouses an alternate view of its cartography. It is a novel revisioning of the empire inspired by the material reality lived by colonial elites and, at least in part, by the popular belief in the moveability of the center of power as expressed in the *translatio imperii* narrative.³⁷

The fortunes of the oligarchies of Mexico City and Lima began to decline in the second half of the eighteenth century. With China receding as a prominent power in world trade and England on the rise, the global economy was becoming unipolar and centered on trade flows of the Atlantic as opposed to those of the Pacific, which had previously dominated.³⁸ This scenario diminished the status of the once-powerful merchants of the viceregal capitals as protagonists in global trade. Economic growth in Spanish America overall remained relatively steady, but it varied by region, with some peripheral areas prospering at the expense of the once powerful urban centers. In the period just before independence, for example, per capita gross domestic product in both Argentina and Uruguay overtook the same figure in Mexico by 11 and 30 percent, respectively.³⁹

After the War of Succession, the Bourbons who gained the Spanish throne attempted to maximize revenues from their territories abroad. In what John Lynch famously called a “second conquest of America”, they began to treat their American possessions more like colonies instead of kingdoms, as had been the practice of the Habsburgs.⁴⁰ The crown tried to clamp down on contraband trade and the growing interference of foreigners in the economic activities of the Indies. Madrid also sought to ease the stranglehold on trade of long-entrenched local elites by enacting free trade decrees, in particular those of 1765, 1778 and 1782. The crown thereby opened commerce



35. MAZZOTTI, *Lima fundada*, p. 24.

36. Fuchs and MARTÍNEZ-SAN MIGUEL, “La grandeza mexicana de Balbuena”, p. 677. Georgina SABAT DE RIVERS argues the poem “se apunta solapadamente y quizá de modo inconsciente, a la declinación de ese imperio y a la sucesión de México, simbolizando a América, como cabeza del orbe, es decir, a un cambio en el eje de poder” (*Estudios de literatura hispanoamericana. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y otros poetas barrocos de la colonia*, Barcelona, Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992, p. 33).

37. For a critique of this argument, see Ignacio ARELLANO, “La ‘Grandeza mexicana’ de Balbuena: delirios críticos y claves de lectura”, *Hipogrifo: Revista de Literatura y Cultura del Siglo de Oro*, 5/2 (2017), pp. 307-346, <https://doi.org/10.13035/H.2017.05.02.19>. Arellano’s criticism of Fuchs and Martínez-San Miguel (and others) belies a traditional view of the Spanish monarchy as monocentric, with its hub in Madrid and the Indies relegated to the periphery.

38. BONIALIAN argues that global trade flows were “Atlanticized” in the second half of the eighteenth century (*La América española*).

39. Leticia ARROYO ABAD and Jan LUITEN VAN ZANDEN, “Growth Under Extractive Institutions? Latin American Per Capita GDP in Colonial Times”, *The Journal of Economic History*, 76/4 (2016), p. 1,203, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050716000954>.

40. John LYNCH, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973, p. 7.

to a number of different ports in Spain and Spanish America, and it also granted new trading companies privileged access to specific markets.⁴¹ The creation of multiple new *consulados* in the Indies helped to more equally disperse profits from trade and to strengthen metropolitan relationships with other regional elites.⁴² In sum, elites of Lima suffered losses while those in cities like San Blas, Buenos Aires, and Caracas benefitted.⁴³

In this context, some eighteenth-century Spanish American writers struck a new tone when praising their cities. One illuminating example is the epic poem, *Lima fundada o Conquista del Perú* (1732), written by the prolific creole polymath Pedro Peralta de Barnuevo (1664–1743). Peralta, who published on a great variety of topics, was professor and rector at the University of San Marcos, as well as eventually the chronicler of seven viceroys. Like Fray Buenaventura Salinas' *Memorial de las historias del Nuevo Mundo, Piru*, published nearly a century earlier in 1630, Peralta's long poem chronicles Pizarro's conquest of Peru. It also lauds the history of Spanish rule in the viceroyalty and extols the legacies of the creole descendants of the conquistadors.

In many respects *Lima fundada* follows the typical formula of the *laudes civitatum*. It compares Lima to Rome and panegyricizes Pizarro as a neo-Aeneas. Its first verse, “*Canto las armas, y el varón famoso*”, clearly echoes the first verse of the *Aeneid*. In Peralta's retelling, just as Virgil's Aeneas founds the Roman Empire, Pizarro founds the Spanish empire in Peru. The suggestion that Peru is the heir to empire is unmistakable in this analogy. Peralta also compares Pizarro to Homer's epic hero, Odysseus:

*Que, más que el hijo de Peleo, ardiente,
Fundaste el mismo Imperio que venciste;
Que, más que el dueño de Ítaca, prudente,
No erraste el mar que inmenso repetiste:
Que, más que Eneas, pío y reverente,
No ya un Lacio, una América erigiste,
Donde la Italia y Troya las grandezas
Cabén en un girón de sus riquezas.*⁴⁴

In Peralta's *superatio*, Pizarro outshines both epic protagonists of antiquity. He outdoes Odysseus not only because of the former's better sense of direction, but also because he “*fund[ó] el mismo Imperio que vencí[ó]*”, a rather muddled reference to the *translatio imperii* from the Incas to the Spanish. Pizarro is depicted as more heroic than

41. PAQUETTE, “State-Civil Society Cooperation and Conflict in the Spanish Empire”, p. 265.

42. Patricia MARKS writes: “In the last three decades of the [eighteenth] century, the Lima treasury was deprived [by the viceroyalty of Río de la Plata] of some 42 million pesos in revenues” (*Deconstructing Legitimacy: Viceroys, Merchants, and the Military in Late Colonial Peru*, University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007, p. 64). Also see Carmen PARRÓN SALAS, *De las Reformas borbónicas a la República: El consulado y el comercio marítimo de Lima, 1778-1821*, Murcia, Academia General del Aire, 1995; and Fidel J. TAVÁREZ, “Colonial Economic Improvement: How Spain Created New *Consulados* to Preserve and Develop its American Empire, 1778-1795”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 98/4 (2018), pp. 605-634, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-7160336>.

43. The merchant oligarchy of Mexico City did not experience a similar decline. See Carlos MARICHAL, *La bancarrota del virreinato: Nueva España y las finanzas del imperio español, 1780-1810*, Mexico City, El Colegio de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999; and Stanley J. STEIN and Barbara H. STEIN, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759-1789*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

44. Pedro de PERALTA BARNUEVO, *Lima fundada by Pedro de Peralta Barnuevo: A Critical Edition*, David F. SLADE and Jerry M. WILLIAMS (eds.), Chapel Hill, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 2016, p. 536.

Aeneas because America is richer and wealthier than Italy and Troy. What is most relevant here is the comparison of Peru to Rome –a comparison the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616) made over a century earlier–, which is extended in the remainder of the poem. At several moments, Peralta hints at the notion that Peru is (or will be?) a greater empire than Rome, such as when the “*ángel tutelar*” foretells to Pizarro the founding of Lima.⁴⁵

In all of this, *Lima fundada* conforms to the general contours of the *laudes civitatum* tradition. Yet the poem also employs a decidedly defensive tone absent from earlier encomia. Take, for example, the poem’s conclusion, where Peralta asks of Lima:

*¿Qué no has servido? ¿Qué no has celebrado?
¿Qué no has labrado? ¿Qué no has defendido?
La nobleza que fiel te hubo fundado,
¿No es la que hasta ahora te ha mantenido?
Del diadema [sic] español que has adornado:
¿No eres florón, que tanto allí has lucido?*⁴⁶

Lima’s consistently loyal service to the crown is highlighted in this passage with negatively phrased rhetorical questions and their string of past participles asking what Lima has *not* “*servido*”, “*celebrado*”, “*labrado*”, and “*defendido*”. The insinuation is that Lima has served, celebrated, worked, and defended *everything* for Spain, and the capital therefore deservedly serves as the “*florón*” adorning Spain’s crown.

Peralta’s revelatory prose footnote to the fourth line of the excerpt above expands on the loyalty of the city’s elites, illustrated in their financial contributions to the crown from trade (“*su celosísimo comercio*” has always provided to Spain “*muy crecidos donativos*”), their defense of the kingdom, and their lavish public ceremonies commemorating royal events. However, Peralta laments, members of Lima’s “*nobleza*” are currently incapable of continuing these kinds of activities because of their current financial difficulties.

*La fidelísima nobleza de Lima, que descende en gran parte de los conquistadores de este reino, y es un extracto de la mayor de España, y su celosísimo comercio han servido siempre a S.M. con muy crecidos donativos. Han contribuido a la fábrica de sus murallas y han concurrido a su defensa y a la del reino en mar y tierra en todas ocasiones; y sus caballeros han celebrado siempre las reales fiestas de canonizaciones de santos, proclamaciones, nacimientos y casamientos de reyes y príncipes, entradas de virreyes, victorias y otras funciones con el mayor esplendor que ha cabido en su celo: lo que hoy no pueden hacer por la gran decadencia en que se hallan, y que la va extinguiendo con lamentable acabamiento, si no se restituye, como debe esperar de la real benignidad.*⁴⁷

Peralta complains that because of “*la gran decadencia en que se hallan*”, elite limeños will no longer be able to engage in the costly activities of defending and celebrating the monarchy “*con el mayor esplendor que ha cabido en su celo*”. Only financial restitution by the crown, which is reasonable to expect (“*como debe esperar*”), can prevent their

45. In the Hebrew Bible, tutelar angels were assigned by God as guardians of different kingdoms or empires, and they feature in some *translatio imperii* narratives. Tomasso CAMPANELLA, for example, argued in the early seventeenth century that when an old empire falls to a new, rising empire, the angel of the former moves to the latter, rendering it more powerful (*Della monarchia di Spagna, en Opere di Tommaso Campanella*, Torino, C. Pompa, 1854, p. 89). Regarding tutelar angels, see S. R. DRIVER, *The Book of Daniel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922, p. 157.

46. PERALTA, *Lima fundada*, p. 540.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 540, fn. 68.



“*lamentable acabamiento*”. The incorporation of this plea for *mercedes*, or royal favor, is a striking addition to an exemplar of the *laudes civitatum* genre.⁴⁸

Peralta was certainly not alone in lamenting the declining fortunes of the city’s elites. Patricia Marks observes “a rising chorus of complaint bemoaned the increasing poverty of the viceroyalty in general and Lima in particular”.⁴⁹ The *Mercurio peruano*, the newspaper published by the Sociedad de Amantes del País from 1790 to 1795, is a rich repository of such complaints. Take, for example, José Hipólito Unanue’s nostalgic lament for better days in the transcription of his 1792 speech commemorating the inauguration of Lima’s surgical amphitheater:

*Tal es hoy la suerte, tal la condicion [sic] del Perú: de aquel Perú, hipóbole en otro tiempo de la feracidad y la opulencia. Consumidos sus moradores, solo presenta cúmulos de ruinas, heredades desiertas, minas derrumbadas. ¿Donde están aquellos pueblos de tan numeroso Vecindario, que sostenian su libertad. . . . ¿Donde los verdes sembradíos que hermozeaban los llanos, las faldas, y hasta las pendientes de los montes? ¿Adonde están los fecundos Minerales, cuya fama conmovia á los quatro ángulos del Globo, y reunia sobre nuestras eladas [sic] Cordilleras las naciones todas del Orbe, sedientas de sus riquezas[?].*⁵⁰

In this prolonged comparison between the wealth of yesteryear and its absence today, Unanue describes present-day Peru solely in terms of what it lacks. It is clear that for him, the economic success enjoyed by previous generations of “*aquel Perú*” was no longer possible.

The denial of *rising glory* in the discourses of independence

Spanish American advocates of political independence from Spain envisioned their futures in contradistinction to the colonial past, which they remembered as completely negative. They suppressed memories of the wealth and autonomy of the privileged residents of the viceregal capitals that had been vauntingly celebrated by earlier writers, employing what Ruth Hill has dubbed a “discourse of disenfranchisement”.⁵¹ Hill notes that this discourse generated one of the fundamental narratives that promoted nation-building in nineteenth-century Spanish America:

The discourse of disenfranchisement [...] was the father of the *Spanish Middle Ages* narrative that served as a cornerstone of nation building for nineteenth-century Spanish American intellectuals and politicians. This refashioning of viceregal history, aided by the refashioning of Spanish history undertaken by their European contemporaries,

48. María Soledad BARBÓN argues that Peralta’s *Jubileos de Lima* (1732), which chronicles Lima’s performances of loyalty in celebrating the marriage of Crown Prince Louis, also alternates between “first exalting Peru and then insinuating the needs of the viceroyalty”, capitalizing on the “mutual pact of obligations” binding the king and his vassals. Peralta here also references the potential royal remuneration that could restore Peru “*a aquel antiguo floreciente estado que gozaba*” (*Colonial Loyalties*, p. 58).

49. Patricia MARKS, “Confronting a Mercantile Elite: Bourbon Reformers and the Merchants of Lima, 1765-1796”, *The Americas*, 60/4 (2004), p. 519, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tam.2004.0061>.

50. Unanue’s speech, delivered 21 November 1792, was printed in five consecutive issues of the *Mercurio peruano* beginning on 3 February 1793. [José Hipólito UNANUE], “Decadencia y restauración del Perú”, *Mercurio peruano*, 3 Feb 1793, vol VII.

51. Ruth HILL, *Hierarchy, Commerce, and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America: a postal inspector’s exposé*, Nashville TE, Vanderbilt University Press, 2021, p. 6.

portrayed viceregal Spanish America as a feudal comedy of errors in which *criollos* were victimized by European Spaniards.⁵²

As Hill suggests, the negative “refashioning” of the colonial period was clearly aided by –indeed, it was reinforced by the same dynamic that produced– the eighteenth-century revival of the Black Legend, according to which Spain effectively disenfranchised not only native peoples in the Indies but Spanish subjects in general.⁵³ Spanish American patriots essentially embraced the Black Legend’s narrative of victimization, including themselves (as predominantly white elites) in the same category as indigenous, black, and mestizo victims of Spanish colonialism.

Michel de Certeau’s observations about the writing of history and its logic of periodization is useful in understanding this “discourse of disenfranchisement”:

La historiografía separa en primer lugar su propio presente de un pasado [...]. La cronología se compone de “periodos” (por ejemplo: edad media, historia moderna, historia contemporánea), entre los cuales se traza cada vez la decisión de ser otro o de no ser más lo que se ha sido hasta entonces (Renacimiento, Revolución). Por turno, cada tiempo “nuevo” ha dado lugar a un discurso que trata como “muerto” a todo lo que le precedía, pero que recibía un “pasado” ya marcado por rupturas anteriores. El corte es pues el postulado de la interpretación (que se construye a partir de un presente) y su objeto (las divisiones organizan las representaciones que deben ser re-interpretadas). El trabajo determinado por este corte es voluntarista. Opera en el pasado, del cual se distingue, una selección entre lo que puede ser “comprendido” y lo que debe ser olvidado para obtener la representación de una inteligibilidad presente.⁵⁴

In a similar dynamic, Spanish American independence discourse denoted the present time as a complete break with the colonial past now deemed *other*. Forgotten was the autonomy and success of previous generations, as well as their heady awareness of their own significance in global commerce and in the monarchy.

Despite efforts to repress memories of the viceregal period in this manner, its traces were readily apparent in the family fortunes of some advocates of independence. Simón Bolívar himself was a seventh-generation American whose ancestor Simón de Bolívar had immigrated to the Indies from the Basque Country in 1589 and had been granted an *encomienda* by the crown. Bolívar inherited a sizeable fortune from both his paternal and maternal families, which were among the wealthiest in the region. His estate was composed of a variety of properties, mines, cattle, slaves, and several plantations that produced indigo, cacao, and sugar, all of which were acquired by his ancestors during the colonial era. Noteworthy too is the influence wielded by Bolívar’s antecedents in the

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

53. María José VILLAVERDE RICO, “La historia de las dos Indias y el resurgir de la leyenda negra en el siglo XVIII”, en ídem y Francisco Castilla Urbano (eds.), *La sombra de la leyenda negra*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2016, pp. 203-239; Tomás PÉREZ VEJO, “La leyenda negra, las independencias y las nuevas naciones latinoamericanas,” en María José Villaverde Rico y Francisco Castilla Urbano (eds.), *La sombra de la leyenda negra*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2016, pp. 451-482, and Ronald HILTON, *La leyenda negra y la ilustración: hispanofobia e hispanofilia en el siglo XVIII* (trad. Silvia RIBELLES DE LA VEGA), Madrid, Editorial el Paseo, 2019.

54. Michel de CERTEAU, *La escritura de la historia*, trad. Jorge López Moctezuma, México, D.F., Universidad Iberoamericana, 2006 [1978], pp. 17-18. Karen STOLLEY refers to this same passage from Certeau in her analysis of José de Oviedo y Baños’s *Historia de la conquista y población de Venezuela* (1723) (*Domesticating Empire: Enlightenment in Spanish America*, Nashville TE, Vanderbilt University Press, 2013, p. 12).



political administration of Venezuela. Several of them served as members of the Caracas *cabildo*, while others occupied different official posts.⁵⁵

The family wealth of insurgents like Bolívar contradicted the dominant independence narrative about the viceregal period “as a time of darkness and three centuries of barbarism”.⁵⁶ In Certeau’s language, this present-day evidence of past agency “perturbed” the perfectly ordered story of independence:

Pero todo lo que esta nueva comprensión del pasado tiene por inadecuado –desperdicio abandonado al seleccionar el material, resto olvidado en una explicación –vuelve, a pesar de todo, a insinuarse en las orillas y en las fallas del discurso. “Resistencias”, “supervivencias” o retardos perturban discretamente la hermosa ordenación de un “progreso” o de un sistema de interpretación. Son lapsus en la sintaxis construida por la ley de un lugar; prefiguran el regreso de lo rechazado, de todo aquello que en un momento dado se ha convertido en impensable para que una nueva identidad pueda ser pensable [emphasis in original].⁵⁷

Bolívar’s estate is a “*supervivencia*” from the past that disproves, for example, his contention in the Carta de Jamaica –which he wrote to an unnamed businessman in 1815 after the first republic of Venezuela fell and he had fled to Jamaica for safety –that “[l]os americanos, en el sistema español que está en vigor, y quizá con mayor fuerza que nunca, no ocupan otro lugar en la sociedad que el de siervos propios para el trabajo, y cuando más, el de simples consumidores”.⁵⁸

One of the most popular metaphors employed in the discourses of independence to negatively portray the colonial experience was that of slavery, and it was often accompanied by a reference to “*trescientos años*” or “*tres siglos*”, as in Viscardo’s previously quoted *Carta a los españoles americanos*.⁵⁹ Bolívar himself used the slavery metaphor. In the Juramento de Roma, for instance, which he purportedly pronounced in 1805 while overlooking the ruins of Rome, he promised to break the “*las cadenas que nos oprimen por voluntad del poder español*”.⁶⁰ He also employed the metaphor in his speech to the *Sociedad Patriótica* on 4 July 1811, when he urged his fellow Venezuelans to declare independence:

¿Qué nos importa que España venda a Bonaparte sus esclavos o que los conserve, si estamos resueltos a ser libres? Esas dudas son tristes efectos de las antiguas cadenas.

55. John LYNCH, *Simón Bolívar: A Life*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, pp. 2-3; Arístides ROJAS, *Orígenes venezolanos*, Caracas, Editorial CEC, 2005, p. 113.

56. Rebecca EARLE, *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810-1930*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007, p. 26, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388784>.

57. CERTEAU, *La escritura de la historia*, p. 18.

58. Simón BOLÍVAR, *Doctrina del Libertador*, ed. from Caracas, Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1976, p. 63.

59. Hans-Joachim KÖNIG, “Símbolos nacionales y retórica política en la independencia: El caso de la Nueva Granada”, in Inge BUISSON et al. (eds.), *Problemas de la formación del estado y de la nación en Hispanoamérica*, Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 1984, pp. 396-97.

60. The *Juramento de Roma* is likely apocryphal, but I agree with the late Susana ROTKER that it is nevertheless worthy of serious scholarly consideration given its status as a foundational text in the narrative of Spanish American independence (“El evangelio apócrifo de Simón Bolívar”, *Estudios: Revista de Investigaciones Literarias y Culturales*, 6 (1998), pp. 29-44, and Elise BARTOSIK-VÉLEZ, “Simón Bolívar’s Rome”, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 25 (2018) pp. 335-336.

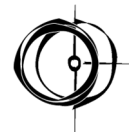
*¿Que los grandes proyectos deben prepararse en calma! Trescientos años de calma ¿no bastan?*⁶¹

The Liberator expounded his ideas about state slavery in the Carta de Jamaica. “*Los estados son esclavos por la naturaleza de su constitución o por el abuso de ella*”, he wrote. “*Luego un pueblo es esclavo cuando el gobierno, por su esencia o por sus vicios, huella y usurpa los derechos del ciudadano o súbdito*”.⁶² Bolívar contended that under Spanish rule, Americans had been assigned purely passive roles. Not only were they barred, he said, from participating in local governance, they were prohibited from participating in their own oppression, unlike subalterns of the despotic regimes of Turkey and Persia.⁶³ As a result, he argued, “*Se nos vejaba con una conducta que además de privarnos de los derechos que nos correspondían, nos dejaba en una especie de infancia permanente con respecto a las transacciones públicas*”.⁶⁴ He continued:

*Estábamos [...] abstraídos, y digámoslo así, ausentes del universo en cuanto es relativo a la ciencia del gobierno y administración del estado. Jamás éramos virreyes ni gobernadores, sino por causas muy extraordinarias; arzobispos y obispos pocas veces; diplomáticos nunca; militares, sólo en calidad de subalternos; nobles, sin privilegios reales; no éramos, en fin, ni magistrados, ni financistas y casi ni aun comerciantes.*⁶⁵

The difficulty of sustaining this argument given the facts, Bolívar’s own inheritance, and his family’s history of holding local positions of power is subtly belied here by his multiple qualifications (“*sino por causas muy extraordinarias*”, “*pocas veces*”, “*solo en calidad de subalternos*”, “*casi ni aun...*”).

The logic of this myth of enslavement required the repression of the memory of the agency, power, and economic success of colonial elites. It is worth noting that history provides many examples of these repressed elements. Take, for example, the Peruvian elites in the seventeenth century who independently organized and financed a defensive armada in response to the viceroy’s inaction in the face of increasing foreign threats and pirate raids.⁶⁶ Or the significant authority exerted by elites over intra-colonial treasury transfers, as illustrated by Regina Grafe and Alejandra Irigoin. They sustain that “Spanish American subjects were used to running their own show, not as participants in local representative assemblies and shareholders of the state, but as stakeholders in the empire’s administration, defence, and justice”.⁶⁷ Indeed, American-born elites throughout the Indies actively participated in many spheres of local government, including the church



61. BOLÍVAR, *Doctrina del Libertador*, p. 8. Venezuela’s Declaration of Independence, issued the next day on 5 July 1811 also equates the colonial period with slavery, its introductory paragraph referring to “*los derechos de que [España] nos tuvo privados la fuerza, por más de tres siglos*”. Acta de la Independencia, Biblioteca Virtual Universal, 2003, <https://biblioteca.org.ar/libros/70477.pdf> (consult 12-8-2023).

62. BOLÍVAR, *Doctrina del Libertador*, p. 62.

63. Ibid., p. 62-63.

64. Ibid., p. 63.

65. Ibid., p. 64.

66. Lawrence A. CLAYTON, “Local Initiative and Finance in Defense of the Viceroyalty of Peru: The Development of Self-Reliance”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 54/2 (1974), pp. 284-304, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-54.2.284>.

67. Regina GRAFE and Alejandra IRIGOIN, “A Stakeholder Empire: The Political Economy of Spanish Imperial Rule in America”, *The Economic History Review*, 65/2 (2012), p. 638, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0289.2010.00581.x>.

and the military, although the degree of this autonomy of course varied by region and time period.⁶⁸

Despite historical fact, the colonial period was ubiquitously portrayed after 1808 by Spanish American revolutionaries as a long period of enslavement to Spaniards. The New Granadino loyalist, José Antonio Torres y Peña, expressed exasperation with the frequency of these portrayals in his *Memorias sobre la revolución y sucesos de Santafé de Bogotá, en el trastorno de la Nueva Granada y Venezuela* (1814), where he writes that the rebels “*levantan el grito [...] contra las vejaciones del gobierno, en todo el tiempo que ha corrido desde la conquista hasta nuestros días. Aquí es donde se repiten y se reclaman trescientos años de esclavitud, aún por los mismos que tuvieron y conocieron a sus padres empleados en el gobierno [colonial]*”.⁶⁹ “*Creyeron*”, Torres dismissively concludes, “*que la repetición fastidiosa de esta cantinela era bastante para contestar a todo*”.⁷⁰

The standard story of Spanish American independence is a narrative of redemption whose rising plot about the improving fortunes of Americans requires a previous nadir from which to rise, a dark and miserable past that makes possible subsequent redemption in the form of political independence. Constructing this negative past was only possible if memories of the autonomy and economic success of previous generations were suppressed. The glories of the viceregal capitals that the colonial poets sang in panegyrics like *Grandeza mexicana* and *Lima fundada* were rendered simply inadmissible in the facile discourse of independence.

As advocates of independence repressed memories of the agency of their ancestors, many embraced the pre-Columbian past of the Inca or Mexica, claiming it as their own.⁷¹ There was well-established precedent for this move. Hernán Cortés himself had portrayed his conquest of Tenochitlan as a peaceful *translatio imperii*, and in his *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590) the Jesuit José de Acosta described the *translatio* from the Mexica and the Inca to the Spanish, referring to the book of Daniel, one of the fundamental texts of the *translatio imperii* tradition.⁷² Creoles had long claimed to be the modern heirs of these empires. Part of this claim entailed comparing those civilizations to Rome, a comparison made by a number of writers such as Fray Juan de Torquemada (1557–1624) and El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539–1616). Later, Spanish Americans such as Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645–1700) and Francisco Javier

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68. Mark A. BURKHOLDER, “From Creole to Peninsular: The Transformation of the Audiencia of Lima”, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 52/3 (1962), pp. 395-415, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-52.3.395>.

69. José Antonio TORRES Y PEÑA, *Memorias sobre la revolución y sucesos de Santafé de Bogotá, en el trastorno de la Nueva Granada y Venezuela*, Bogotá, Editorial Kelly, 1960, pp. 33-34. Also see Rebecca EARLE, “La iconografía de la independencia en la Nueva Granada” in Haroldo Calvo-Stevenson and Adolfo Meisel-Roca (eds.), *Cartagena de Indias en la independencia*, Cartagena, Banco de la República, 2011, p. 586. This reference also appears in EARLE, *The Return of the Native*, p. 26.

70. TORRES Y PEÑA, *Memorias sobre la revolución*, p. 121.

71. “Elites coopted the indigenous and the African elements of Spanish American culture when these could be used as a wedge to differentiate themselves from the ‘tyrannical’ Spaniards (their ancestors)” (HILL, *Hierarchy, Commerce, and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America*, pp. 311-312, fn. 8).

72. José de ACOSTA, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, Madrid, [Ramón Anglés], 1894 [1590], libro séptimo, Cap. XXVIII, pp. 351-352.

Clavijero (1731–1787) stressed the similarities between the indigenous past and Europe’s classical antiquity.

Given this history, it is no surprise that Spanish Americans agitating for independence portrayed their future societies as the continuation or revival of the great pre-Columbian civilizations that had been illegitimately usurped by the Spaniards.⁷³ As Rebecca Earle sustains:

Independence from Spain was thus said to avenge the injured ghosts of the indigenous leaders who died resisting the conquest. These heroic figures were the true fathers of Spanish America. Through the distinctive logic of independence-era rhetoric, the newly independent Spanish American nations traced their ancestry back to pre-conquest days. The pre-Columbian past thus formed an essential part of national history, much more glorious than the “three hundred years of tyranny” of which the colonial era was said to consist.⁷⁴

This is the message implicitly espoused by the title of fray Servando Teresa de Mier’s popular *Historia de la revolución de Nueva España, antiguamente Anáhuac* (London, 1813). Despite his book’s title, Mier does not discuss Anáhuac, as if its continuation or revival after independence were so obvious as to not require explanation. Indeed, Mexican independence was commonly portrayed as a restoration, as a long-delayed *translatio imperii* from the indigenous people after the three-century, illegitimate interregnum of the Spaniards.⁷⁵ Francisco de Miranda, the so-called *precursor* of independence, also leveraged the memory of pre-Columbian empire and its emotional charge in Spanish America. He proposed that the massive independent state that would stretch from the mouth of the Mississippi to Cape Horn be governed by a hereditary executive he called “*un Inca previsto del título de Emperador*” who would appoint “*senadores o Caciques*”.⁷⁶

For Simón Bolívar, however, the only usable past was that of the classical world. As a wealthy member of the Mantuano class, Bolívar left Venezuela at the age of sixteen to finish his education in Europe, where he lived, studied, and traveled (except for a brief period after his tragically short marriage) until he was twenty-six years old. He was inculcated in the ideals of the Enlightenment and classical republicanism, and his voluminous writings are peppered with quotations from eighteenth-century political



73. The bibliography on this topic is vast. For a comprehensive study of elites’ turn to pre-conquest indigenous history to legitimate their authority during the colonial period, the classic study is BRADING, *Orbe indiano*. Regarding the seventeenth century see Anna MORE, *Baroque Sovereignty: Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and the Creole Archive of Colonial Mexico*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Also see Enrique FLORESCANO, *Memory, Myth and Time in Mexico from the Aztecs to Independence*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1994; EARLE, *The Return of the Native*; Rebecca EARLE, “Creole Patriotism and the Myth of the ‘Loyal Indian’”, *Past and Present*, 172 (2001), pp. 125-145; and Andrew LAIRD, “The Cosmic Race and a Heap of Broken Images: Mexico’s Classical Past and the Modern Creole Imagination”, in Susan A. STEPHENS and Phiroze VASUNIA (eds.), *Classics and National Cultures*, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 163-181.

74. EARLE, *The Return of the Native*. pp. 3-4.

75. Rafael ROJAS argues that this interpretation helped underwrite independent Mexico’s early imperial aspirations to annex Cuba (*Cuba mexicana: historia de una anexión imposible*, México, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2001). Also see Arturo CHANG, “Restoring Anáhuac: Indigenous Genealogies and Hemispheric Republicanism in Postcolonial Mexico”, *American Journal of Political Science*, 67/3 (2003), pp. 718-731, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12660>.

76. Francisco de MIRANDA, “Proyecto de Constitución para las Colonias Hispano-Americanas”, in J. L. SALCEDO-BASTARDO (ed.), *América espera*, Caracas, Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1982, p. 208.

theorists and intellectuals like Montesquieu and Rousseau.⁷⁷ They also frequently allude to Greece, Sparta, and Rome. For Bolívar, the classical world provided an invaluable stockpile of models that he applied to the future independent states he helped construct.⁷⁸

Rome was central to Bolívar's version of the *translatio imperii* narrative, which he employed to predict the glorious future of an independent Spanish America. While he never explained his views about *translatio imperii*, he referred to the trope in both his Juramento de Roma and the Carta de Jamaica. In the former, he was inspired by the memory of both the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and he referred to the highs and lows of each:

*¿Conque éste es el pueblo de Rómulo y Numa, de los Gracos y los Horacios, de Augusto y de Nerón, de César y de Bruto, de Tiberio y de Trajano? Aquí todas las grandezas han tenido su tipo y todas las miserias su cuna. Octavio se disfraza con el manto de la piedad pública para ocultar la suspicacia de su carácter y sus arrebatos sanguinarios; Bruto clava el puñal en el corazón de su protector para reemplazar la tiranía de César con la suya propia; Antonio renuncia los derechos de su gloria para embarcarse en las galeras de una meretriz; sin proyectos de reforma, Sila degüella a sus compatriotas, y Tiberio, sombrío como la noche y depravado como el crimen, divide su tiempo entre la concupiscencia y la matanza. Por un Cincinato hubo cien Caracallas, por un Trajano cien Calígulas y por un Vespasiano cien Claudios.*⁷⁹

This passage emphasizes the negative traits of many Roman leaders. It goes on to allege that “*para la emancipación del espíritu, para la extirpación de las preocupaciones, para el enaltecimiento del hombre y para la perfectibilidad definitiva de su razón*” the Romans had realized “*bien poco, por no decir nada*”. For Bolívar, Rome's failure will be rectified by Spanish America, which will now inherit the *civilization* that had arrived in Rome centuries earlier from the east:

*La civilización que ha soplado del Oriente ha mostrado aquí todas sus fases, han hecho ver todos sus elementos; mas en cuanto a resolver el gran problema del hombre en libertad, parece que el asunto ha sido desconocido y que el despejo de esa misteriosa incógnita no ha de verificarse sino en el Nuevo Mundo.*⁸⁰

Bolívar also referred to *translatio imperii* at the end of the Carta de Jamaica, where he foretold a prosperous future for Spanish America after independence was won:

*Luego que seamos fuertes, bajo los auspicios de una nación liberal que nos preste su protección, se nos verá de acuerdo cultivar las virtudes y los talentos que conducen a la gloria; entonces seguiremos la marcha majestuosa hacia las grandes prosperidades a que está destinada la América meridional; entonces las ciencias y las artes que nacieron en el Oriente y han ilustrado la Europa volarán a Colombia libre, que las convidará con asilo.*⁸¹

77. For Bolívar's adherence to classical republicanism, see David BRADING, *Classical Republicanism and Creole Patriotism Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) and the Spanish American Revolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

78. Pierangelo CATALANO, “Derecho público romano y principios constitucionales bolivarianos”, in E. GARCÍA DE ENTERRÍA (ed.), *Constitución y constitucionalismo hoy*, Caracas, Fundación Manuel García Pelayo, 2000, pp. 689-715; and BARTOSIK-VÉLEZ, “Simón Bolívar's Rome”.

79. BOLÍVAR, *Doctrina del Libertador*, p. 3.

80. *Ibid.*, 4.

81. BOLÍVAR, *Doctrina del Libertador*, p. 74.

The reference here to “*las ciencias y las artes que nacieron en el Oriente*” is typical of the *translatio imperii et studii* trope that describes the westward movement of the arts and sciences as they accompany empire.

The memory of Rome and its political institutions served Bolívar as an indispensable tool in the protracted processes of nation-building in which he played a fundamental role. It also served as his inspiration in envisioning a continental confederation of independent republics that would rival the glory of the Roman Empire.⁸² Like his compatriots, Bolívar bypassed Spain in looking for a usable past. Yet while other revolutionaries declared they would inherit empire from indigenous empires, Bolívar contended that it would be inherited directly from Rome.

Conclusion: memory, the redemption narrative, and the changing story of empire

Spanish American writers during the colonial period compared their cities to Rome and employed the *translatio imperii* trope, subtly suggesting that their cities were or might someday become imperial centers. One can imagine the possibility that the protagonism touted with such verve by writers in the viceregal period –their boasting about the greatness of their cities and their importance within the monarchy –might serve revolutionaries in the eighteenth century as a valuable track record of what their own generation would be capable of after independence. This hypothetical narrative might have potentially served them in arguing that they would be even more successful than their predecessors because after independence they, unlike those ancestors, would be free of the chains of Spanish imperialism. Instead, the dominant discourse of independence completely disavowed the memory of elite autonomy and success during the colonial period. Insurgents, in the words of Annick Lempérière,

renegaron de su pasado de colonizadores y colonos para hacer suya la condición de ‘colonizados’. Renunciaron a su antigua identidad de vasallos de los ‘reinos indios’, orgullosamente asumida hasta 1810.1811, para hablar de su propia tierra como ‘colonias’, lo cual implicaba [...] el rechazo del pasado y de la herencia española.”⁸³

It may seem anachronistic that American patriots throughout the continent claimed to inherit empire given that the nation-state was commonly viewed as the replacement of empire in a natural progression of political formations.⁸⁴ But both British and Spanish Americans did so in their efforts to imbue their future states with the glory and legitimacy of past empires. Given Spanish Americans’ rejection of their Spanish past, however, they could not logically appeal to the traditional succession of empires in *translatio imperii* narratives common in the Hispanic world, which included Spain. Most Spanish American insurgents accordingly declared that they would inherit empire from a past indigenous empire, either the Mexica or the Inca. This was consistent with the long-standing practice forged by Spanish American elites of comparing these civilizations to Rome and claiming to be their modern heirs. In contrast, as we have seen, Bolívar held that empire would transfer to Spanish America directly from Rome.

82. BARTOSIK-VÉLEZ, “Simón Bolívar’s Rome”, pp. 350-351.

83. Annick LEMPÉRIÈRE, “El paradigma colonial en la historiografía latinoamericanista”, *Istor: Revista de Historia Internacional* 5/19 (2004), p. 110.

84. Krishan KUMAR, “Nation-states as Empires, Empires as Nation-States: Two Principles, One Practice” *Theory & Society* 39 (2010), p. 120, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-009-9102-8>.



The *translatio imperii*, together with the repression of the memory of the agency of viceregal elites, functions as a redemption narrative, which literary critic C. Stephen Jaeger defines as a story about “the rescue, in a critical moment, of life, freedom, and human dignity from a condition that ignores or suppresses or denies it”.⁸⁵ Jaeger further explains that a redemption narrative is:

any narrative that moves toward enlightenment, fulfillment, and the rescue of an endangered character. However dark at a given moment, the thrust of the redemption narrative is toward an opening revelation. This might range from St. Augustine[‘s] *Confessions* to the mythmaking self-narratives of political figures. In these cases insight, human understanding, and goals, human or divine, benefit from a widening revelation, at least after the breakthrough following on the first tragic fall, or series of falls, of the hero.⁸⁶

Redemption, in the case of the dominant discourse of Spanish American independence, is made possible by the *fall* that was the period of Spanish rule in the Indies, and this representation required the suppression of memories about the autonomy and wealth of colonial urban elites. It also required that Spain be expunged from the *translatio imperii* narrative.

85. C. Stephen JAEGER, *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 18, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812206524>.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.