

Trading Roles: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Urban Economy in Colonial Potosí. By *Jane E. Mangan*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. xiii + 277 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, appendix, illustrations, maps, tables. Cloth, \$79.95; paper, \$22.95. ISBN: cloth, 0-822-33458-5; paper, 0-822-33470-4.

Reviewed by Jeremy Baskes

When local Andean populations brought the first Spaniards to silver-rich Potosí in 1545, it was a desolate, uninhabited, wind-swept mountain. By the end of the century, it had become the largest city in the Western Hemisphere, with an estimated population of 160,000. Numerous historians have been drawn to study the fascinating mining economy that rapidly emerged at Potosí, whose silver output led to a veritable world economic revolution. Jane E. Mangan looks beyond the “silver mountain” to examine the emergence and evolution of a market economy within this burgeoning metropolis. The result is a superb work of social and economic history and a major contribution to the field of colonial Latin America.

Employing a wealth of primary resources, Mangan reconstructs local economic practices while weaving a vivid picture of urban life in the shadow of the Potosí mines. Mangan’s interests lie in the everyday transactions that allowed the city’s working classes to secure their daily survival. The booming economy presented myriad opportunities for entrepreneurial individuals, who rapidly became engaged in the provision of daily subsistence to the legions of workers who came, whether freely or unwillingly, to Potosí. Mangan discovers networks of petty traders marketing foodstuffs and beverages to Potosí’s mineworkers.

Each of the book’s six chapters examines the economy of Potosí from a different perspective. The opening chapter surveys the rise of Potosí’s economy from 1545 to 1600. While initially the city was provisioned by *trajines*, llama trains carrying foodstuffs to the inhabitants, enterprising individuals, especially native Andeans, began seizing opportunities to profit from the growing urban demand. Mangan finds that some of the goods displayed in the market had been produced by local communities through

traditional methods. Most indigenous traders, however, were *forasteros*, Indians who had fled their native communities, often to the chagrin of their *Kurakas*, or native chieftains.

In chapter two, Mangan uses notarial sources to reconstruct the town's economic use of space. Attempts by Potosí's town council to organize commercial space were designed to minimize the consumption of alcohol and to reinforce the social and ethnic hierarchy. In 1589 the town council established strict guidelines for the ownership and location of general stores (*pulperías*), stipulating that they were to be owned by Spaniards and located in Spanish neighborhoods. These largely ineffective regulations were issued in response to the citywide emergence of illegal drinking establishments, especially the notorious *chicherías* that the elites tried, but failed, to eliminate, fearing that Indians would pass their days drinking rather than working the silver mines.

Chapter three explores the production and marketing of two staple items: *chicha* (corn beer) and bread. As a traditional pre-Hispanic beverage, *chicha* was closely associated with native Andeans. Bread, on the other hand, was an essentially Spanish product. Yet, well before 1600, these items had transcended their traditional ethnicities: Spaniards, Indians, and Africans consumed, produced, and marketed all three. Mangan sees this blending of ethnic cuisines as reflecting the partial erosion of the politically constructed socioethnic barriers upon which colonialism was predicated.

In chapter four the author investigates the prominent role of credit in the marketplaces of Potosí. Despite the wide circulation of silver, much of it smuggled illegally from the mines, many urbanites relied on credit to finance their daily consumption. For their regular clients who found themselves short of cash, street vendors, bakers, and storeowners provided credit, sometimes taking an item in pawn, but at other times requiring only their customers' word of honor. In this economy dominated by largely illiterate peasants, Mangan asserts that few creditors kept formal records, relying instead on their memories.

Chapter five examines the important participation of women in the urban economy. While most of the city's *pulperías* and bakeries were owned by men, they were often operated by women, sometimes the owners' spouses. Women, especially indigenous women, were highly visible on Potosí's streets, hawking their wares to passersby. While Mangan finds that this booming colonial economy provided extensive

economic opportunities to all who could seize them, regardless of gender or ethnicity, she does not negate the relevance of patriarchy or Spanish control. Successful indigenous female traders often relied on Spanish men for credit or other connections.

The closing chapter highlights the decline of Potosí in the second half of the seventeenth century. Reduction of silver output led to the exodus of the population, which by 1700 had fallen by more than half, to 73,000. The age of economic opportunity had come to an end, leaving petty traders struggling to find customers.

The overriding argument of this wonderful book is that all social and ethnic groups in colonial Potosí participated actively in the city's phenomenal economic boom. Mangan's extensive and convincing exposition makes it clear that men and women, Spaniards, Indians, and Africans, rich and poor, were all deeply engaged in the local economy. Readers less familiar with Andean history might not be surprised by Mangan's conclusions, but to a significant extent, they fly in the face of conventional depictions, although she is careful not to dwell on this point. Historians of the colonial Andes operate on the assumption that trade and economic markets were nonexistent prior to the arrival of Spaniards. This conventional depiction seems hard to believe given Mangan's persuasive work, which leaves little doubt that a mere dozen years after Pizarro's conquest, Andean peasants had assumed a central role in the colonial marketplace. Jane E. Mangan's superb book might encourage anthropologists and early colonial historians to reconsider the conventional wisdom.

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