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Rafael Varon Gabai. *Francisco Pizarro and his Brothers: The Illusion of Power in Sixteenth-century Peru.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. xvi + 352 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8061-2833-7.

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Conquest As a Rent-Seeking Family Business

"Gold brings cares and so does the lack of it; but the cares of poverty are alleviated when one attains a moderate fortune, and those of wealth increase the more one gets." - Cervantes, *The Jealous Extremaduran*

Though long obscured by the shadow of the Black Legend and its focus on wanton conquistador cruelty, the conquest of Tawantinsuyu, as Rafael Varon Gabai rightly argues in this ample new volume, was always a self-consciously entrepreneurial project. Whether descendants of swineherds or bluebloods, the men of Cajamarca were businessmen, shareholders in a very risky enterprise; they differed from contemporary merchants in that they bet not only their purses (and horses), but their very lives on the profitability of a given venture. Though at times this Wall Street terminology seems anachronistic, in painting the Pizarro brothers and their competitors as cunning investors struggling to survive in a Hobbesian business environment, Mr. Varon gives new meaning to the term "corporate raiders." Yet even when this less-studied aspect of the complex of events that transpired between the Capitulacion of Toledo and the seizure of Cusco is highlighted, Francisco Pizarro and his brothers seem just as unable to escape decadence as in any Black Legend yarn. Cut down by former allies, hemmed in by crown officials, dismissed as rebels, and stripped of their most profitable enterprises–it is perhaps superstitious to call it the curse of Inca gold, but the Pizarro trajectory, whether spun as a political or financial history, reads like a moral tale.

As presented by Mr. Varon, a researcher at the Institute for Peruvian Studies in Lima, the story of what he calls the "Pizarrista enterprise" is not a parable at all, but rather a detached analysis of family fortunes from Extremaduran petty nobility to untold wealth and fame in the conquest of Peru and back to, well, Extremaduran petty nobility. This is not the story of Francisco Pizarro, in fact, nor is it that of his famous rebel brother, Gonzalo, nor of the less-known Juan (nor the unknown Francisco Martin). For dramatic details on the conquest, subsequent rebellions, and assassinations for which early Peru is best known (in spite of James Lockhart's venerable but still counter-intuitive *Spanish Peru, 1532-1560*,[2]) one must turn to other works; here the figure that provides continuity is Hernando Pizarro, a fighting *perulero* in his time, to be sure, but one whom Varon convinces us found courtroom battles and courtly jockeying in Spain infinitely more fascinating. It was Hernando who managed, against daunting odds, to salvage something of the estate his brothers and he had won and all but lost within the space of a decade. By marrying his brother Francisco's mestiza daughter in 1552 and by tirelessly working the appeals process in Spain, this last of the great Pizarros was able to die in peace in 1578 with a mayorazgo as his legacy. After years of imprisonment in the castle of La Mota in Medina del Campo, and blind no doubt from his candlelit struggles with crabbed notarial hands, Hernando Pizarro had paid his dues. In *Francisco Pizarro and his Brothers* , Rafael Varon Gabai takes the reader on an extended tour of Hernando's labyrinth.

Though probably too detailed a book for readers unfamiliar with the basic narrative of conquest-era Peru, this is a study which will no doubt prove useful to specialists in the area, to those interested in the dynamics of conquest and royal patronage generally, to students of elite family history, and even to some ethnohistorians. *Francisco Pizarro and his Brothers* , near simultaneously published in Spanish as *La ilusion del poder: apogeo y decadencia de los Pizarro en la conquista del Peru* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos/Instituto Frances de Estudios Andinos, 1996) grew out of doctoral dissertation work at the University of London's Institute for Latin American Studies and draws from years of archival work in places as disparate as Potosi and Simancas, and even includes selections from the municipal holdings of Trujillo (Spain). It is a remarkably thorough work of scholarship based largely on original research, and its timely publica-

tion in English translation, finely rendered by Javier Flores Espinoza, is representative of the efforts of a select group of university presses to bring more Latin American works of history to an English-speaking readership. In participating in this long overdue effort, in spite of today's tight budgets and market constraints, the editors of the University of Oklahoma Press deserve to be applauded.

The text of *Francisco Pizarro and his Brothers* is divided into two main parts and ten total chapters. Part One, entitled "The Dynamics of Conquest," follows the "Pizarrista enterprise" from its roots in Old Trujillo to the legal battles over the post-rebellion remainders fought by Hernando Pizarro and the Peruvian Viceroy Toledo in the early 1570s. Part Two, "The Men and the Properties," is a more detailed treatment of the various relatives, *criados* (dependents something like medieval squires), and mayordomos attached to the enterprise over the years and of the income-producing parts of the brothers' estates, including huge encomiendas, grain estancias, cane plantings and distilleries, stock ranches, and mines. Two appendices follow, one outlining in chronological order the various royal grants given to the Pizarro brothers between 1521 and 1541 and the second a mathematical explanation of the figures used to represent tributary populations in the text. A useful bibliographical essay precedes the usual list of relevant titles and mostly proper names are included in a brief index. Though it falls short in failing to include a basic chronology or general overview of the conquest, this book will certainly be valued as the standard reference work on all aspects of the Pizarro enterprise.

Chapter One, "Before the Conquest," follows Francisco and his brothers (but mostly Francisco) from Extremadura to Peru, carefully sorting out fact from legend in terms of the great conqueror's apparent illegitimacy and connections to swine-herding. Neither was a source of shame, according to Varon (in a country in which fine hams are esteemed above fine wines, it is difficult to argue for shame unless the swine were thin). More important was the fact that his father, Gonzalo the Elder, was a military man, a veteran of Granada who died in the war for Navarre in 1521. Francisco set out for the Indies in the first decade of the sixteenth century and quickly established a reputation for bravery, leadership ability, cruelty to indigenous enemies–whom he took to calling "curs"–and gold lust in skirmishes and conquests ranging from Castilla del Oro to Nicaragua. He was named one of the founders of the city of Panama and from here, with an encomienda on the off-shore island of Taboga to support him, he began to choose partners for a southern campaign.

At this point, Varon describes the nature of the Castilian *companya*, or "conquest company," in some detail, as it relates to his thesis of entrepreneurial precedence. He contrasts it with the italianate merchant *companyia*, yet properly emphasizes the essentially capitalist nature of both forms of joint enterprise. Following Lockhart and Schwartz, the author favors poverty and rivalry over the thirst for adventure as motives for conquest. Unfortunately, aside from some preliminary discussion of the crucial Capitulacion of Toledo (1529), much of what remains of the chapter treats post-conquest events and connections, and even refers to several individuals as "men from Cajamarca," apparently a near-miss translation of Lockhart's title phrase (James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca*, Austin, 1972). Since unlike Lockhart Varon gives no summary of events or chronology anywhere in the text, this skipping forward in time and attempting to connect individuals to "common knowledge" events such as the capture of Atahuallpa in Cajamarca in 1532 will no doubt confuse many readers who think they are still "before the conquest," as the chapter's title tells them.

Chapter Two, "Capitulacion, Grants, and Controls," treats the Capitulacion (or list of monopoly rights and privileges) of Toledo in detail, then launches into a very detailed discussion of the crown's early attempts to rein in the Pizarros after their venture succeeded. The upshot of the discussion seems to be that the crown at this time simply equated tax payment, in this case the quinto, or royal fifth on plunder, with loyalty. Thus Hernando's prompt payment of the crown's share of the loot of Cajamarca served as a kind of "proof of purchase," and yielded a bounty of titles and other perquisites for him and his brothers, including the habit of Santiago, the right to distribute encomiendas and vacant lands, and the right to import slaves duty-free or at reduced rates (including four white females, p.44). Though Varon emphasizes the commercial value of these mercedes, especially the right to import 100 mine slaves duty-free, it is evident from the actions of Hernando and his siblings that these jealous Extremadurans were not uninterested in status symbols of less tangible economic value. Though it may simply be an issue of cultural parallax, in the opinion of this reviewer reducing the conquistador to a kind of *homo economicus* seems as unfair and at least as boring as reducing him to *homo neccans*.

The king and his advisors clearly distrusted the Pizarro brothers in any event and informants such as Fr. Tomas de Berlanga arrived in the brothers' wake to snoop around for quinto fraud (again, the easiest means of prov-

ing disloyalty). These early visitas resulted in little immediate change, but they prompted Francisco to note wryly that, "when he went about conquering the land and had the knapsack on his back he was never helped, and now that he has it conquered and won he is sent a stepfather" (p. 61). Here the author's painstaking attention to detail yields a valuable anecdote, but other sections of the chapter are less rewarding. Once again the narrative skips from the capitulation of 1529 to later events and back again, forcing this forgetful reviewer to consult Lockhart's *Men of Cajamarca* and John Hemming's *Conquest of the Incas*[2] for reminders of what came when. Also, participants in the Cajamarca expedition of 1532, and the events of that expedition itself, are repeatedly referred to as "mythic," implying that either these individuals did not exist or the events the rest of us take for history did not occur.

Though its title suggests otherwise, Chapter Three, "Francisco Pizarro, Governor of Peru (1532-1541)," fits closely together with the two chapters just after it: "The Pizarro Estate under its Guardians (1541-1553)" and "Hernando Pizarro and Dona Francisca: Marriage and Estate Unification." All three chapters trace the development, loss, and attempts at consolidation of the various Pizarro brothers' estates, mostly in terms of Hernando's personal struggles in and at court. Francisco's governorship is useful here only insomuch as it yields financial rewards, and evidence abounds to support Varon's claims that the Pizarros took the lion's share of Peruvian spoils, mineral, human, and otherwise. Still, Varon demonstrates the brothers' business acumen by emphasizing their quick shift from plunder and extortion to rational agropastoral and mining enterprises, the latter of which apparently yielded the greatest cash income in the longer term. The author's mention of the use of encomienda Indians in mining (p. 81) is treated as revealing of this vigorous spirit of enterprise, but given the widespread and exhaustive abuse of *curicamayos* (indigenous mining specialists) held in encomienda in contemporary gold districts such as Quito, this action appears neither unique nor wise. In reminding the reader of continued *huaqueria*, or grave-looting, and extortion of some caciques for similar forms of liquid wealth well after the conquest (e.g., Chan Chan, near 'New' Trujillo), the argument that the Pizarros were pioneers of rational capitalist development in Peru seems further weakened.

Chapter Four describes the uncertainty of the years following Francisco Pizarro's assassination in 1541 by the son of his old rival, Diego de Almagro. After some sacking of Francisco's various urban properties the estate fell into the hands of an able criado named Juan de Barbaran, then was passed on to Gonzalo Pizarro upon his return from the search for La Canela (east of Ecuador). After Gonzalo's rebellion and execution in 1548 (the New Laws as investor's nightmare?) the estate fell into the slippery hands of crown officials, but was soon wrested from them, at least in part, by the ever-vigilant Hernando. A true pragmatist, he sealed his connection to Francisco's inheritance by marrying his niece, Dona Francisca, daughter of Dona Ines Huaylas Yupanqui, in 1552. From this point to his death Hernando was engaged in a determined battle to wrest a mayorazgo, the Marquesado de la Conquista, from the crown for his family's efforts. His story in fact makes up the core of *Francisco Pizarro and his Brothers*.

Indeed, no clearer thesis statement can be found in the entire book than the first paragraph of p. 121, which bears repeating:

Hernando's real success lay in drawing out the trials so no definitive verdict against him could be given, thereby long avoiding the loss of the Peruvian estate. The many suits and appeals, the constant transfers from one jurisdiction to another, and the frequent requests for reports to and from Spain and the colony made this delay possible, but the royal designs of controlling the government of Peru without any interference from the Pizarros was swiftly achieved, and there was not much those involved in the fight against the Spanish state could do about it. Because of Gonzalo's rebellion, Hernando did not even dream of trying to recover political control of Peru. Instead he dedicated all his efforts to retaining the properties he and his brothers had acquired when power was in their hands.

Even if Varon is most interested in the legal struggles of don Hernando, he does not fail to fill in the wider cast of characters in Part Two. Chapter Six, "The Personnel," is most apt in this regard, and although the discussion approaches the impenetrable thicket of names and connections of the book's earlier genealogical sections, there is within it an engaging analysis of the hidalgo-criado relationship. Also noted are the Pizarro brothers' connections with members of the clergy, mostly Dominicans and Mercedarians; careful not to upset their well-armed and wealthy conquistador sponsors, most stayed mum on the "Indian question" (the Mercedarians openly opposed the New Laws on economic grounds).

Chapter Seven, "The Andean World and the Conquerors," does bring the indigenous side of the whole "Pizarrista enterprise" into view, albeit in less detail than one might like. It is a worthy effort, however, given the paucity of written sources. In treating the Huaylas

encomiendas, particularly, Varon is on firm ground; he has published researches on this region before (*Curacas y encomenderos: acomodamiento nativo en Huaraz*, Lima, 1980). Temporary Spanish allies such as the Canyaris of southern Ecuador and the interpreters Martin and Felipe, captured south of Tumbes in 1528, are also mentioned here, along with the Limas, Charcas, and others. A few late (1573) testimonies offered by the *other* "men of Cajamarca" suggest an unsurprisingly universal hatred of all the Pizarros among indigenous groups. One witness claimed that Spanish gold lust was so incomprehensible at first that some native Peruvians assumed gold and silver horse fodder (p. 161).

Chapters Eight and Nine, "The Estate of Francisco Pizarro and his Children" and "The Estate of the Pizarro Brothers," respectively, are essentially detailed catalogues of the various repartimientos held, worked, and lost by the brothers between conquest and the Toledo administration of the 1570s. These include numerous encomiendas, agropastoral properties, and mines. As Varon notes, the great Potosi bonanza was largely missed by the Pizarros, but their holdings in Porco did apparently yield substantial income (in lieu of production figures this remains only a suggestion, however). Though the author is probably correct in suggesting that "Mining was the Pizarros' main enterprise" (p. 229), more evidence needs to come to light before one can agree with his assertion that their mining operations absorbed significant amounts of "metropolitan capital and technology" (p. 46). Elsewhere in the book Varon seems to demonstrate a lack of familiarity with sixteenth-century mining terminology; for example, "La Salteada" (p. 123) is not a proper name for a vein but rather a general term for a working mine (as opposed to a second, marked claim to be worked in the near future).

But these are trifling criticisms given the overall level of detail and careful documentation of the book (averaging well over 100 footnotes per chapter). Given the vastness of the Pizarro record and the cloud of legend surrounding it, it is good to see much of the fine print set straight. A final, though by no means damning criticism would be that the tenth and final chapter, "Conclusion and Epilogue," seems over-long and quite repetitive. This may be the result of using a previously published article as the basis for this section, but in any case a reduced level of detail and more general review of the arguments presented would have been very helpful given the already extensive "microhistory" of the family presented in the first nine chapters. The epilogue demonstrates the triumph of genealogy (and the weakness of the later crown), though again mention of the Marquesado de la Conquista (alive in the twentieth century) probably still conjures up images of slaughter and pillage rather than entrepreneurial foresight in the popular mind.

In terms of thesis, *Francisco Pizarro and his Brothers* proves difficult to classify. Though the author occasionally entangles the reader in spider webs of family and other interpersonal connections and generally stays anecdotally attached to his documents, he seems throughout to be striving for a more far-reaching conclusion. Though only noted explicitly at the end of the book, one line of argument seems to question the existence of any "feudal" (read: uneconomical) elements in the conquest of Peru and its aftermath; Varon clearly seeks to paint the Pizarros as rational capitalists before anything else.

Another, even less explored theme in the work is comparative rather than theoretical. Given that even relatively successful conquerors were as rare as successful pirates in the early modern era, there are few possibilities for direct comparison beyond the usual suspects. Varon leaves Columbus out of the picture, perhaps wisely given the experimental nature of his venture, but only briefly discusses the situation faced by the only slightly less besieged Conqueror of Mexico, Fernando Cortes (p. 285). Had this line of analysis–which begins and ends with a bottom-line comparison of tributaries and net worth–been carried further, this book might have merited a graduate students' reading list. As it is, the only conclusion this reviewer was able to reach was that the conquest of foreign empires in the age of Spanish expansion was an exercise in futility, both financially and politically. Perhaps the impetuous rebel Gonzalo had a clearer sense of this "illusion of power" than his tireless, by-the-book brother, Hernando, after all.

Notes:

[1]. Lockhart, James. *Spanish Peru, 1532-1560: A Colonial Society.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968.

[2]. Hemming, John. *The Conquest of the Incas.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970.

(The title was originally translated as: Varon Gabai, Rafael. *Curacas y encomenderos: acomodamiento nativo en Huaraz, Siglos XVI y XVII.* Lima: P. L. Villanueva, 1980)

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