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Richard Boyer. *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family and Community in Colonial Mexico.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. x + 340 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-1571-7.

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Bigamists in Colonial Mexico

In his work, Richard Boyer has taken research in Inquisition records to a new level in addressing issues of colonial Latin American social history. Drawing on the model and methodology provided by such scholars as Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie and Carlo Ginzburg, Boyer has demonstrated how Inquisition materials can be used to investigate the details of colonial social life. In using Inquisition records, investigators must be careful to always keep in mind the purpose for which the material was gathered. In the case of the records consulted by Boyer, this was to demonstrate the involvement of the accused in a bigamist relationship. For these records to be valuable to the historian, and to free them from prejudice, misinterpretation, and deception, which might have been present in the original court action, the records must be utilized to expand our understanding of things other than the original central issue. Consequently while Boyer indeed writes extensively about bigamy, the over-riding value of the work is the glimpse which it gives us into the social structure and social dynamics of Colonial Mexico.

The work is divided into five chapters, with an introduction and conclusion. One feature which should be noted at the outset, although not normally a feature in scholarly works, this book has a series of lovely white-on-black etchings which illustrate aspects of everyday colonial life. Boyer begins his study with an overview of the literature utilizing Inquisition records for the study of every-day life. He also comments on the general social composition of the cohort of bigamists he studied for the book, and explains the conventions which he used in translating testimony presented in the cases. He has chosen to use a translation style which falls short of reconstructing testimony as a first-person narrative, but which also is not totally cluttered by "dicho" and other stylistic conventions of court notaries.

The first chapter focuses on one particular case, that of Andres Gonzalez. In November, 1762, Gonzalez was denounced as a bigamist, having married the first time a woman in Verapaz, in the Kingdom of Guatemala, and for the second a woman in Escuintla, in the province of Soconusco. Through a rather detailed study of the Gonzalez case, Boyer walks the reader through the procedures of the Inquisition, its history and how it came to have jurisdiction over cases of bigamy, as well as the types of documentation which the scholar can expect from the Inquisitorial process. While this was, strictly speaking, a judicial procedure, Boyer rightly notes that the end of the process was the reconciliation of the accused. The Inquisition sought to redeem the sinner and reintegrate him or her into the social fabric.

One of the most attractive documents for the social historian in an Inquisition record is the confession. When questioned by the Inquisition, defendants did not know the charges upon which they had been arrested, nor often did they know if they were the target of the Inquisitorial proceedings. Rather they were asked to make a general confession and search their souls for any possible flaw or shortcoming which might have offended God. After this admonition, they were asked a series of ge-

nealogical questions, to identify immediate relatives, as far distant as grandparents, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews. Then they were told to tell their own life history. These life stories are indeed rich sources for details regarding everyday life. These narratives, insofar as they do not touch on the issue under investigation, in this case bigamy, can serve as extremely faithful records of the past. Moreover, since many of the individuals mentioned in this autobiography were subsequently questioned by the Inquisition, there is independent corroboration of many of these odd details of life. Boyer points out that when touching on " 'sensitive' matters touching on religious issues" (p. 30), witnesses might expect to be more guarded in their speech. Bigamy was merely a legal category and not a theological concept, and as such seems to have received a far more matter-of-fact treatment in the court records.

In the second chapter, Boyer analyzes the childhood of various individuals who had come before the Inquisition. He notes that childhood was a time in which people acquired skills which they would use during their life. Boys were educated in trades in their fathers' shops. While these early years provided the basis for future work activities, they did not absolutely determine it. A few boys had the opportunity to attend formal schools to supplement the learning in the household. Girls, too, learned at home, their learning normally confined to domestic skills. Among the higher reaches of society, schooling would normally supplement learning in the home, the family would also tend to groom the child to seek out peers among their own social level, and to continue an upward striving towards the ranks of the nobility. Critical in these personal life stories are leave-takings. Boyer has found many cases of youths running away from home, to seek out their own fortunes, either from the family or from the workplace. Families scattered and, in spite of cases where family members sought one another out in the Indies, most would never again have contact with their families.

Marriage, which is the central feature of Boyer's book, serves as the topic of the third chapter. It was a public recognition of a private transaction. Boyer discovers a wide range of variations among the marriages. Regardless of the circumstances whereby the parties entered into marriage, all recognized the indissoluble nature of the sacrament. What Boyer found was that where young people when entering into marriage tended to be compliant to societal pressures with regards to marriage, older and with more experience, the bigamists studied in this book exercised greater personal control over the second marriage, perhaps due to age, perhaps due to understandable caution confronting an illegal act. Boyer discovers different mores for different social groups; not unexpectedly the lower classes were far more likely to enter into informal liaisons than the higher social groups. Boyer reinforces the findings of Patricia Seed, that betrothal and acts of betrothal were sufficient to consider that marriage had been contracted.

The main focus of the Catholic Reformation was to increase the access of the individual to the sacraments of the Church, to return bishops and priests to "frontline" activity. Likewise the Church then sought to enter into a contract with parishioners to focus on all aspects of spiritual life into the parish. One of the key chapters of Boyer's study is the one which deals with married life. It was in the household that male dominance was played out at its most basic level. While the strictures of married life sought to confirm male dominance, and from the middle ages guarantee the known paternity of children, everyday life also reinforced male social control over women.

One might conclude that there was a qualitative difference between the first and subsequent marriages of the bigamists. On the contrary, Boyer finds similar joys and sorrows, suffering and success, love and hate, in the former as the latter. Boyer studies the implications of the reforms of the Council of Trent, which while strengthening the role of free will in the contracting of marriage, provided ample grounds for confusion and "folk casuistry" in attempts to get out of marriages. Likewise, society seemed far more bent on "finding illicit but consenting couples than running down rapists" (p. 113). Individuals who for one reason or another fled their marriage were also targeted. The marriages they left could as often as not be considered good and solid. Yet many, women and a few men, abandoned abusive relations and emotional situations with which they simply could not cope. The central feature, however, was that the social system was highly patriarchal and male dominated, which in most ways determined the potential courses of action for both men and women. As Boyer puts it, "married life can, therefore, serve as both a reference point and a vantage point for viewing the larger [societal] system" (p. 164).

The last chapter deals with what Boyer calls "The Flow of Information;–the means whereby notice came to the Inquisition of bigamist relations and the general flow of information within plebeian society. People were, and are, curious about one another. That curiosity eventually resulted in stories, true or imagined, about the lives of

others. Those stories then flow as a currency of the social realm. Stories of one another began with personal identity and place of origin. From that starting point, the network of friends, relations, acquaintances, and circumstances filled in the necessary details. What emerges is the importance of the "patria" (homeland), the desire of people to make connections with one another, and the fact that most places in the Hispanic world were interconnected. (The people did not attack Church doctrine, but tended to internalize it and allow it to become normative.)

In concluding, Boyer revisits the initial purpose for which the Inquisition was established–that people might control one another. Yet the examples show that the peoples' comprehension of doctrine ranged from negligible to substantial, and religious practice from nearly totally absent to daily routine. Most of the subjects of the Inquisition seemed to fear the punishment of the tribunal more than eternal damnation. In short, the initial dream for the Inquisition was too optimistic. Most people simply hoped to avoid hell and gain heaven. Most had little time or interest in abstract notions of morality. It was a society of dominance and subservience, and one's appropriate response to a given situation depended greatly on the position one occupied in society. Oddly enough, many bigamists got into trouble trying to regularize an irregular situation. They wanted to conform, and the second marriage was one way of doing that.

Boyer's study is a rich and fascinating view of society, largely plebeian. It offers many important and subtle insights. The footnotes are rich and varied, and often times are extremely important insights into details of interpretation which Boyer decided not to place in the text.

The only disquieting feature is that Boyer does not directly address the issue of change over time. We know from Patricia Seed's study on marriage choice, that between the 16th and 18th centuries there were significant social and legal changes. We do not see that there was any change among the bigamists, or the society that variously tolerated or denounced them. Boyer refers to cases from the mid-eighteenth century and from the mid-sixteenth century without major distinction. Boyer briefly touches on these issues in footnotes, but allows the work to stand for itself. It might well be that the changes described by Seed were largely a feature of the upper reaches of society, and that plebian society either moved according to its own standards or slowly accepted the norms of the elite, and thus change would have fallen outside the range of Boyer's study.

Boyer's work is an excellent example of the detailed social history which can be written on the basis of Inquisitorial records. His is a well structured study, carefully examined and well reasoned.

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