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Well-founded and Not so Well-founded Expectations: The Civilizing Effect of Commerce and Other Economic Topics in Travelogues about Mexico (1811–1909)

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Though travel literature is not usually consulted to follow the evolution of economic reflection, a certain number of these works about Mexico in the nineteenth century allow a reading from this point of view. Beginning with the famous Alexander von Humboldt, a good number of foreign travelers were intent on elucidating certain economic questions whose relevance sharpened in a social and political scenario as the Mexican one. One concern was the question about the civilizing effect of commerce. Another one was about the so much emphasized principle of self-interest as an unfailing motive for economic dynamism. Finally, some travelers asked themselves to which degree the construction of an administrative apparatus was the decisive factor to put Mexico on the path of economic progress. The survey includes the works of several significant European travelers and covers until the year of 1910.

KEYWORDS Alexander von Humboldt; Carl C.Sartorius; Raoul Bigot; Travel Literature on Mexico; Mexican economy

Bien qu'on ne consulte pas d'habitude les récits de voyages pour suivre l'évolution de la réflexion économique, un certain nombre de ces œuvres sur le Mexique au dix-neuvième siècle nous permettent une lecture de ce point de vue. En commençant avec le célèbre Alexander von Humboldt, de nombreux voyageurs étrangers étaient résolus à élucider certaines questions économiques dont la pertinence devenait plus importante dans un scénario social et politique tel que celui du Mexique. Un souci était la

question de l'effet civilisateur du commerce. On se préoccupait aussi du principe si souligné de l'intérêt de soi, comme un motif inépuisable de dynamisme économique. Finalement, des voyageurs se sont demandé à quel point la construction d'un appareil administratif serait le facteur décisif à mettre le Mexique sur la voie du progrès économique. Ce survol comprend les œuvres de quelques voyageurs européens importants jusqu'à l'année 1910.

MOTS CLÉS Alexander von Humboldt, Carl C. Sartorius, Raoul Bigot, les récits de voyages sur le Mexique, l'économie mexicaine

Si bien no se suele consultar la literatura de viajes para seguir la evolución de la reflexión económica, cierto número de estas obras sobre el México del siglo XIX permiten una lectura desde este punto de vista. A partir del famoso Alexander von Humboldt, un buen número de viajeros extranjeros se dedicaron a dilucidar ciertas cuestiones económicas cuya relevancia se agudizaba en un contexto social y político como el mexicano. Una preocupación era la cuestión del efecto civilizador del comercio. Otra se refería al tan enfatizado principio del interés propio como motivo infalible de dinamismo económico. Finalmente, algunos viajeros se preguntaron hasta qué punto la construcción de un aparato administrativo era el factor decisivo para poner a México en la senda del progreso económico. Este estudio incluye los trabajos de varios viajeros europeos significativos y cubre hasta el año 1910.

PALABRAS CLAVE Alexander von Humboldt, Carl C. Sartorius, Raoul Bigot, Literatura de viajes sobre México, economía mexicana

As is well known, nineteenth-century Mexico was visited by many travelers whose books form a whole of social, political, cultural, and anthropological descriptions of great interest, just to mention some of their most frequently recognized contributions. Studies of these writings have become common over recent decades. However, one of the least examined perspectives in these kinds of approaches is the economic one. Though Mexico was one of the most important producers of silver in the world and many travelers visited it guided by interest in silver and other economic resources, the number of specialized studies dedicated to the point is small. It is true that historians have appreciated and used travelogues for their research as an important source of information and analysis. Nevertheless, their interest has been usually drawn to the precise information offered by travelers rather than their way of reasoning and their ideological framework.

A very interesting aspect of this literature is the anticlimactic discomfort experienced by some travelers when their preconceived and well-learned economic opinions were tested by realities they encountered in Mexico. Acquainted with the ideas of Adam Smith, Jean B. Say, Thomas R. Malthus, etc. (either in

their pristine form or just in popular and vulgarized versions), some travelers expected to see verified in Mexico the kind of economic developments described by these writers. However, reality was often different and this is why they were frequently forced to find the causes of this distortion, usually widening their point of view and combining the economic with other perspectives. Frequently, geography, ethnography, and other fields of knowledge provided meaningful guidance to the perplexed analysts.

In the following pages, we will present a sequence of travel works about Mexico that let us perceive this kind of dilemma. Turning to well-established economic truths or theories, these travelers confirm them or deviate from them in a slight or very visible manner in order to understand what they see. As a nation in continuous political disarray, the nineteenth-century Mexico posed an interesting challenge to those who tried to explain why the progress of an apparently rich country was not easy and fast. The principal attention will be given to three cherished assumptions held by nationals and foreigners after the independence of this supposed horn of abundance (a label associated with the country's shape and natural wealth), Mexico.

Humboldt and His *Political Essay*

Any account about travelers' economic perception of Mexico must begin with Alexander von Humboldt's famous *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811), which continues to be the most famous work about Mexico by a foreign author.¹ Being to a great extent a work on economic and administrative matters, almost every later traveler seems to have read this book and taken ideas and inspiration from it in regard to these questions.

Three of Humboldt's economic ideas, as articulated in *Essay*, are important for the present article: (a) the bonding role he assigns to commerce in relation to states and continents; (b) his certainty about the economic motivational effect of self-interest; (c) his conviction about the important role played by specialized knowledge and information in any modern and competent state administration.²

There's no better way to characterize Humboldt's idea of commerce than by contrasting it with two opposing theoretical positions about it, both very influential when he wrote his *Essay* on colonial Mexico, or New Spain. On one side, there is a conception according to which commerce is a civilizing and humanizing practice through its pacifying and refining effect on nations, making merchandise exchange preferable to war. This is the famous idea of the *doux commerce* (sweet commerce),

¹ Perhaps only comparable, in the American context, to Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835–1840).

² Alexander von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre el reino de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1966). For Humboldt's ideas on commerce see von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre el reino de la Nueva España*, pp. 17–18, 445; for his ideas on self-interest see von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre el reino de la Nueva España*, p. 238; for his ideas about an enlightened administration, with emphasis on statistical information about economic and demographic phenomena (for these last, the so called political arithmetic calculus) see von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre el reino de la Nueva España*, pp. 37, 92, 93–94, 106, 108.

shaped among others by well-known and widely read authors of the Enlightenment Age, such as Jean Melon and Montesquieu.³ On the other side, we have a republican conception of commerce in the style of Rousseau, who condemned this softening and polishing effect of commerce on the customs and the political behavior of nations; he decried a similar impact from the sciences and the arts.⁴ Practical consequence of the contrast between these conceptions cannot be ignored: the supporters of sweet-commerce recognized the good economic consequences of *luxus*, while Rousseau and similar-minded authors denied this and considered *luxus* as something vicious or even degenerating. Humboldt's idea of commerce can be placed in a middle point between these two extremes. Moved by a cosmopolitan spirit, he pointed out the growing extension and intensity of economic exchange as a very civilizing and pacifying feature. However, he also established a distinction (in the manner of Adam Smith) between trading with luxurious goods and trading with indispensable commodities and considered the latter as much more beneficial from the national point of view.

Humboldt's idea about self-interest and its high economic utility appears in the fourth book of *Essay*, where he affirms that individual search for gain in mining activity in colonial Mexico has inspired human settlements into far and inhospitable sites: new consumption centers, mines, and metallurgical mills strongly stimulate agricultural production in nearby and distant regions.⁵ Due to these circumstances, gold and silver extraction do not inevitably detract from agricultural prosperity, as, Humboldt explains, economists have wrongly assumed. Humboldt's geographical research has shown him the extent to which mining stimulates agriculture in countries like Mexico and Peru.

Humboldt's exigence of a scientifically based administration derives from his judgments on the relatively backward state of things in New Spain, which is deficient in its territorial organization because of the enormous contrast between the large territorial demarcations in the northern part and the bulk of others in the south, which are considerably smaller and have much higher population densities. As a consequence, the different rates of density reflect a lack of equilibrium. Humboldt follows the rational imperatives of the Enlightenment or even those applied by the French revolutionaries. His advice for the Spanish authorities in regard to colonial Mexico was to establish a system of departments similar to the French one.⁶ Another contribution of science to an enlightened administration is to calculate, on a statistical basis, the rank and power of a country or a territory in an international and geopolitical frame.⁷

³ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 58–63, 80.

⁴ These ideas were exposed by Rousseau in his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750). An interesting commentary about this positions by the famous Genevan philosopher, in Paul A. Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift. Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 82–91.

⁵ Humboldt, *Ensayo*, p. 238.

⁶ Humboldt, *Ensayo*, p. 108.

⁷ Humboldt, *Ensayo*, p. 6.

Clearly, Humboldt was not an economist or prominent authority in treasury matters. Nevertheless, he was well read by some of the most important authorities in the political economy of his age. In *Essay* we find mentions of such important works as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), Thomas R. Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), and also works by influential Spanish and Spanish American writers and politicians of the period, such as Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, Melchor Gaspar de Jovellanos, and Manuel Abad y Queipo. For the present purpose, it is pertinent to underscore the impact of his scientific profile (principally as a geographer) on his economic evaluation of colonial Mexico. This is significant not only for his conclusions about the economic situation of the country, but also for the influence he exerted through his opinions and information on later travelers.

A good question about Humboldt's famous work is the following: how should it be understood as a political book, as its title indicates? The political character of Humboldt's *Essay* involved the aim of providing useful information to rulers, administrators, and statesmen in charge of New Spain's government. Humboldt addressed more directly the results of his geographical, statistical, and economic research of the country to this group. *Essay* was therefore written with practical consequences in mind. As Humboldt explained in the prologue of *Essay*, one of his goals was to provide an exact idea of the state of economy of New Spain so that rulers and administrators had a more accurate and more certain geographical, demographic, and economic information to implement policies.⁸ It is therefore evident that Humboldt was not inclined to consider economics as a separate or autonomous field from politics. In his opinion, no enlightened politician could ignore or remain indifferent to research of this kind, useful as it was for determining the degree and causes of public prosperity. In the last instance, he reckoned, an effective administrative achievement was unthinkable without the continuous gathering of statistical, geographical, and cartographical data.

Now, a last remark on Humboldt's scientific research in New Spain, specifically on his statistical and geographical purpose for determining the international rank and power of this kingdom. The intention of providing this knowledge, or more precisely this calculation, is very similar to Jean Jacques Rousseau's endeavor in his famous *Social Contract* (1762).⁹ A reading of Rousseau and Humboldt reveals their common emphasis on territory, demography and economy, and their analysis of the development of social institutions and the character ("energy") of population, necessary elements to determine the international power and influence of the state. The similarities go deeper when we consider the general thematic sequence, which Humboldt follows as he examines the territorial, demographic, and socio-political issues in the first chapter of *Essay*. Humboldt, in the first book of *Essay*, speaks of

⁸ Humboldt, *Ensayo*, pp. 1–2.

⁹ Juan Jacobo Rousseau, *El contrato social o principios de derecho político. Discurso sobre las ciencias y las artes. Discurso sobre el origen de la desigualdad* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 2004), pp. 32–36, 58–59. For a similar formulation by Humboldt see *Ensayo*, pp. 6, 21.

the political force of the state as an important aspect of its sovereignty and exterior political strength in a way that echoes Rousseau, a sequence of similitudes that continues when the German traveler calculates the demographic growth of New Spain and deduces from it the degree and causes of prosperity.¹⁰ This is very much in tune with Rousseau's principle that demographic growth reflects, with the greatest possible accuracy, the quality of a government.¹¹

Commerce, Civilization, and Sociability: The Writings of Calvo, Ruxton, Löwenstern and Rivero

Among the travelers through the northwestern part of Mexico we have Vicente Calvo, a Spanish-speaking man whose nationality still remains unclear. Some evidence suggests he was a Spaniard, other information suggests Spanish American. In any case, he is the author of *Political, Physical, Moral and Commercial Description of the Department of Sonora in the Mexican Republic in 1843*, preserved as a manuscript in the National Library of Spain and published as an edited book in Mexico some years ago.¹² Calvo was a businessman to whom the Sonoran landscape and society seems to have been familiar, so it seems plausible to assume that he made several journeys through those regions. In Calvo, we find the conviction of the civilizing effects of commerce, an opinion in agreement in many ways, though not in everything, with Humboldt's. What kind of trade is ideal to civilize an unrefined people? This is a question for Calvo.

That commerce will bring welfare, peace, and civilization to the dry and still widely unpopulated regions of northwestern Mexico is a clear presupposition in Calvo's physical and social description. When he writes about the town of Guaymas, he assures that "civilization is invading, as is the case with other American peoples, and overcoming earlier primitive habits and constructions. However, here, more than in anywhere else, this becomes notorious, as is the case in Mazatlán, because neither the physiognomy, nor the style of the houses, nor the inhabitants are like those of the towns of the interior part."¹³ As a port on the Pacific coast, Guaymas has received a certain number of foreign merchants, whose beautiful houses appear aligned with some others of a different kind, built by some Mexican immigrants from the departments of Chihuahua and Durango. The regular arrival of foreign ships in Guaymas has attracted these poorer people, who live in very much humbler houses (*jacales*). As a consequence, a really new town has been emerging, and though most of the houses seem poor and simple, they are also characterized by a regular and very urban disposition. In any case, nature still poses many impediments to this urban growth, as is the case in many other settlements in the department of Sonora,

¹⁰ Humboldt, *Ensayo*, p. 50.

¹¹ Rousseau, *Contrato*, p. 59.

¹² It was edited only recently by the Mexican historians Eduardo Flores Claire and Edgar O. Gutiérrez López.

¹³ Vicente Calvo, *Descripción política, física, moral y comercial del Departamento de Sonora en la República Mexicana por Vicente Calvo en 1843* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2006), p. 98.

where the flat soil and the lack of forests, even of the smallest size, predominate. No lime nor any other kind of workable stone can be easily found, and workable wood is lacking in the department.

Though not precisely a great descriptor of nature or *Naturschilderer* like Humboldt, Calvo is not completely uninterested in a geographical understanding of the places he visits. The way he compares Guaymas to two other Mexican ports on the Pacific coast is significant: “The topographical position of Guaymas is very advantageous, due to its location in the port and its closeness to the village of Pitic, which is to the Guaymas Port what El Rosario is to Mazatlán and Tepic is to San Blas, and also because of the towns located in the surroundings and of the [nearby] department of Chihuahua, which has relations with Sonora and consumes many of the items that are introduced in Guaymas.”¹⁴ Though he does not explicitly affirm a superiority of Guaymas over Mazatlán and San Blas, Calvo could have something like that in mind when he refers to trade between that port and the inland of Sonora, a commercial activity that is connected to simultaneous trade with Europe and the United States. In this comparison, he does not discuss the important question of public health, specifically when it is challenged by the tropical diseases of the coast, a significant inconvenience for anyone who ponders the possibility of emigration and settlement in any of these places. In any case, Calvo’s commentary about a certain kind of geographical pattern for the port settlements on this Pacific side of Mexico should not pass unnoticed.

As an author of a particular description, Calvo does not spare references to the landscape and natural resources in the surroundings of Guaymas, Pitic, Hermosillo, and other towns in Sonora. But, again, it does not take much to realize that he is not particularly interested or talented in landscape descriptions. More interesting are his observations about the Indigenous population of the department. Though he gives some information about the Apaches, Ópatas, Seris, Yumas, Cocomaricopas, and Papagos, his principal remarks are about the Yaquis and Mayos, who live in closer contact with the non-indigenous population than the other tribes.

Calvo’s interest in these Indigenous peoples includes his discussion of their violent uprisings in the years 1825, 1826, and 1827, before they were finally defeated by general Mariano Paredes Arrillaga. However, they also attract his attention, and in a more decisive way, because of their involvement in the economic activities of the department, principally in connection with trade. While Calvo maintained they were naturally inclined to drinking and this natural tendency (or trend) was to blame for their laziness, he also acknowledges that the Yaquis do the heaviest work in the port of Guaymas. Loading the bales, pulling the carts, serving the water, etc., figure among their tasks there, done to such a degree that they are simply irreplaceable. Guaymas’ traffic and dispatch would be unthinkable without them. Our traveler concludes that their bias to laziness and drunkenness should not be seen as a fatality;

¹⁴ Calvo, *Descripción política, física, moral y comercial del Departamento de Sonora en la República Mexicana por Vicente Calvo en 1843*, p. 105.

in fact, he speaks about their “most brilliant dispositions to work.”¹⁵ Highly important is knowing *how* these Indigenous people can be induced to industriousness and diligence, a question that involves how to dissuade them from the temptation of uprisings and the claim of being independent, almost a separate nation within a larger one.

The right manner to do this, according to Calvo, is to provide them with a real moral and political education, as they have never had until now. In Calvo’s view, the old missionary system has proved completely useless in this regard. Though spiritually served by an able and philanthropic priest, the Yaquis are not a genuine Christian people. No effort, even the greatest, will succeed in awakening their receptiveness to the Gospel, in the same manner in which the Christian religion will never fill their hearts with the most basic sense of virtue and truth. If conveniently subjected to wise legislation and a good government, there can be no doubt that so urgent and decisive a goal as the establishment of peace and the banishment of ignorance will soon be reached in the province of Ostimuri, where the Yaqui River flows. Calvo’s conclusion, at this point, introduces the argument of the subsequent steps of introducing the Indigenous people to sciences and arts, after the Yaquis involvement in commerce. Though with their daily work in Guaymas the Yaquis already take part in the Sonoran economy, it is also true that they will not be entirely accepted in Sonoran society while their customs remain unrefined due to their lack of education.¹⁶

If commerce triggers economic progress in Sonora, according to Calvo, a natural question arises about the actual and potential productions of these regions. This department does not lack agricultural activity, principally in the interior and well-irrigated parts, where cheese, honey, beverages (sweet and alcoholic ones), and soap are produced.¹⁷ However, no product would be better there, as in the whole of Mexico, than cotton, a very neglected commodity in the whole country. Wages are very low in Sonora, and nothing makes better sense than producing cotton and similar products in the department. Up to now, breeding cattle, horses, and mules stands out as one of the preferred activities in the estates or *haciendas* of this department. Besides this kind of production, Sonorans could resume the extraction of pearls from the Californian Gulf and bring life to the old cherished dream of rendering this activity a very significant export from this coast. Industry has also made some progress here, though in general it remains at a very low productive level and still has a long way to go if it will become, at any time, really significant. Mining is an inherited branch from colonial times that could trigger activity and be an effective magnet for a useful and diligent population. According to Calvo, current conditions stand far from the high level of production that could be reached under

¹⁵ Calvo, *Descripción política, física, moral y comercial del Departamento de Sonora en la República Mexicana por Vicente Calvo en 1843*, p. 135.

¹⁶ Calvo, *Descripción política, física, moral y comercial del Departamento de Sonora en la República Mexicana por Vicente Calvo en 1843*, p. 136.

¹⁷ Calvo, *Descripción política, física, moral y comercial del Departamento de Sonora en la República Mexicana por Vicente Calvo en 1843*, p. 128.

a more intensive and propitious entrepreneurial strategy. If one considers the good results rendered by the exploitation of gold located near the surface by isolated individuals, as has frequently been the case, the prospect of more systematic and organized mining is very promising. Not only gold but also silver and copper wait for this kind of exploitation. Actually, and not surprisingly, goldsmithing is the most advanced industrial activity in Sonora, followed by the art of baking and confectionary, which reach the standard of Calvo's taste. Furniture production exists, but only precariously here; in fact, most of it comes from outside the demarcation.

How can it be explained that this department, with natural riches and good commercial bonds with the surrounding areas in Mexico as well as with other countries, simply does not experience the productive take-off one would expect after two decades of independent national existence? No other factor can be blamed for this disappointment more than the peculiar mentality of population, invariably inclined to think of today without any sense of the future, reflects Calvo. From a historical point of view, contemporary scholars would also point to the protectionist policy of those years, which thwarted the importation of necessary items for many industries, as well as for a more comfortable or even pleasurable consumption for the masses. Though Calvo concedes that this protectionism stimulates smuggling practices, he does not blame the government for it, as many other foreign travelers did during the times of the Central Republic. He points to some "rich and vociferous men" as the originators of this situation without giving more explanation. In any case, he assumes, recent measures taken by the central government, such as allowing foreigners to purchase landed estates and buildings, promote a new wave of positive investments in the entire country.

Calvo's argument concerning the lethargic Sonoran people's lack of interest in the exploitation of wealth and the future seems rather abstract and general when one reads it in the early pages of *Descripción*. It becomes a concrete and tangible reality with further reading, however. According to Calvo, the Sonorans (creoles and metis) have a strong and commendable inclination to meet socially and to chat in within an open, unprejudiced society, principally when the sun sets and the warmest hour of the day is past. In the evening, travelers will see Sonorans leaving their homes and meeting others, including the socially accepted behavior of paying unannounced visits without considering it annoying or impertinent. There is, however, an unmistakable social flaw among Sonorans: their taste for gossip. In fact, things cannot be otherwise, acknowledges Calvo, if their villages and towns are underpopulated and geography condemns them to a considerable isolation from the rest of the country and the world. Consequently, they are fond of chattering about what happens to their neighbors, with the consequence that all topics of conversation are soon exhausted. Sonoran women play a peculiar role in this situation, who receive praise but also critical commentaries by Calvo. They are charming and attractive, but also fond of dressing as young people do, even when their age makes it inappropriate. And they have no real education in

reading and writing.¹⁸ Here, again, we have a description of Sonorans as well-meaning people, but deficient in their intellectual refinement.

As he moves away from Guaymas and the Pacific coast to the continental part of Sonora, Calvo realizes the increasing difficulty of incorporating the Indigenous people into the Mexican nation. Northern Mexico will become wild and even dangerous in the next years, not only because of the incursions of nonsedentary Indigenous people but also the war with the United States in 1847–1848 and the subsequent hostility between both countries.

Let's steer our glance to a British traveler who visited Mexico during these very difficult and conflictive decades. George Fredrick Ruxton was an English military official who came to Mexico in 1846. Earlier he had traveled and lived in a Spanish-speaking country, where he took part in a civil war in Spain, where he had fought as a partisan of Queen Isabel, whose legitimacy was questioned at that time. On the American continent, he witnessed the war between Mexico and the United States. His book *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains* (1847)¹⁹ contains his experiences in both countries during the first phase of the war, with very interesting remarks, by the way, on the difficult life conditions on the Mexican-American frontier.

After sailing from La Habana to Veracruz, where he arrived almost simultaneously with General Santa Anna, Ruxton made a short stay in this Mexican port, after which he headed to Mexico City; after a brief stay he continued to the northern states of Durango and Chihuahua and, finally, the United States.²⁰ In Mexico City, he found a bombastic and officially organized personality-cult for Santa Anna, received as a hero who would lead the army against its neighbors.²¹ Archs of triumph, official decrees to rename streets after Santa Anna, torch parades, and other official initiatives were carefully organized to show the patriotic fervor of the day. As a parallel phenomenon to this warlike élan, this British traveler perceived everywhere a deep antipathy for the Americans. As an Anglo-Saxon, Ruxton lived the experience of being occasionally taken for an American, vindicating himself as a European, which put him in the paradoxical situation of being celebrated as an example of good *güero* (blond man), not an aggressor from the United States.

A reading of *Adventures* quickly makes it clear that this Briton was not fond of cultural tourism. He writes almost nothing about the monuments of the capital, heading to the northern part of the Republic as soon as possible. There he witnesses the hard life of the inhabitants, who are forced to repel the attacks from what Ruxton characterizes as wild Indians, whose hostility grows as they suffer the pressure of the Anglo-American expansion. In Ruxton's pages, we find a supplementary perspective to Calvo's when reflecting about the way to manage

¹⁸ Calvo, *Descripción política, física, moral y comercial del Departamento de Sonora en la República Mexicana por Vicente Calvo en 1843*, p. 185.

¹⁹ Edited by Murray in London.

²⁰ He died of fever contagion in the United States.

²¹ We use the Spanish version: George F. Ruxton, *Aventuras en México*, trans. Raúl Trejo (Mexico City: Ediciones "El Caballito," 1975), pp. 50–59.

the coexistence with uncivilized Indigenous peoples. Ruxton describes a scenario of war and unsurmountable hostility between these Indigenous people and the local inhabitants.²² There seems to be no possibility to renew, or reinitiate an attempt to establish, a peaceful and civilizing relation between local inhabitants and Indigenous peoples. Society is increasingly admitting a good number of European and American immigrants who join in the war against Apaches, Comanches, etc. One of them is Santiago Kirker, an Irish warrior who successfully leads an armed gang against Indigenous people. He has begun his military activities against Indigenous people in the American Far West and has transplanted his campaign to northern Mexico after relocating his headquarters in Chihuahua. His armed gang is just one among several societies charged with the defense of this region against what Ruxton depicts as ferocious Indigenous inhabitants of the surroundings. Created by the method of subscription, these societies have been particularly active in Chihuahua during the last months before Ruxton's arrival. It is in the capital of this demarcation, the city of Chihuahua, that Ruxton observes several Native American heads hanging in front of the cathedral. The war with the Indigenous people has become implacable and unstoppable. No one seems to cherish any other possibility to solve the permanent conflict with these Natives than to liquidate them at the earliest possible opportunity.

This hard situation does not mean, however, that trade has lost importance in those frontier regions. If we attend to Ruxton's notices, it turns out that commerce is providing the principal bulwark and financial resources for the Mexican side in the bloody war with the Indigenous people. American, British, French, and German merchants persist in making journeys through these regions, sustaining the commercial network. What emerges progressively from the reading of Ruxton's *Adventures* is a rather obvious conclusion about the preeminence of commercial interests over the patriotic motivation on both sides of the border. He lets us recognize a sociopolitical pattern in the frontier zone that makes it infeasible to expect the kind of European military spirit in North America (i.e. Mexico and the United States). The Mexican army has not taken advantage of the opportunity to fight the rebellious Indigenous people when there have been contact between the two groups in Durango and Chihuahua, encounters that have not been infrequent. Contributing to the weakness and vulnerability of its own civil population, the Mexican government has forbidden the free distribution of arms. Ruxton's account also includes some interesting remarks about the war between Mexico and the United States from this point of view. He registers the lack of real military spirit among the Americans. Very clearly, he identifies the real military spirit with the European military, which is implied in his discussion about the challenges of creating an American military:

The American can never be made a soldier; his constitution will not bear the restraint of discipline, neither will his very mistaken notions about liberty allow him to subject himself to its necessary control. In a country abounding with all the necessaries of life,

²² Ruxton, *Aventuras en México*, pp. 156–61.

and where anyone of physical ability is at no loss for profitable employment; moreover, where, from the nature of the country, the lower classes lead a life free from all the restraint of society, and almost its conventional laws, it is easy to conceive that it would require great inducements for a man to enter the army and subject himself to discipline for the sake of the trifling remuneration, when so many other sources of profitable employment are open to him.²³

On the basis of very different social and economic conditions, Americans do not see the point of looking for employment and sustenance through the military career when more appealing options remain open. Ruxton does not mention why Mexicans have frequently preferred to leave defense or even the commercial activity in their frontier zone to others. But we can ask ourselves: why should they embrace the military and live in so difficult a milieu when they could find refuge in places with greater security, as is the case with some large, well-fortified *haciendas* in southerner parts?

For sure, the intense war against Indigenous people and (temporarily) against the Americans drove many Mexicans to question the civilizing impact of commerce or the socially incorporating effect of trade, so important in Calvo's opinion. We can explicitly or implicitly find a very similar question in other travelers who had central Mexico in view. The once held expectations of harmony and good understanding between independent Mexico and the European states also began to seem insufficiently backed up by real facts.

The Austrian traveler Isidore Löwenstern, author of *Le Mexique. Souvenirs d'un voyageur* (1843), wrote very interesting commentaries about this last question. His journey in Mexico followed the route of many travelers, arriving in Veracruz and moving soon to Mexico City and to the archeological sites surrounding the capital, with subsequent stays in Querétaro, Salamanca, Guadalajara and finally in Mazatlán, from where he left for Asia. Löwenstern denies that commerce has established the much trumpeted profitable and friendly bond between Mexico and its European partners. He does not even admit a good relation between Mexicans and Europeans at the diplomatic level, which is not surprising to someone who witnesses the French blockade of Veracruz (1838), caused by commercial and financial controversies. His book is full of recriminations against the policy and Mexican attitudes during and after the signing of the agreements of trade, friendship and navigation with Great Britain and other countries. He denounces, for example, that the agreement with Great Britain was translated into Spanish in a devious manner, so that it included the charging of extraordinary loans to the British residents in Mexico as if they were common inhabitants of the country, which should not be the case.²⁴ Löwenstern observes that Mexicans generally have an unfriendly disposition toward foreigners, despite the fact that mere interest should dictate to them a very different attitude. That what is termed "enlightened self-

²³ Ruxton, *Aventuras*, p. 208.

²⁴ We use the Spanish version: Isidore Löwenstern, *México. Memorias de un viajero*, trans. Margarita Pierini (México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012), pp. 73–75.

interest,” which supposes regard to the expectations of others, should find its adequate function here, he lets us deduce. But Löwenstern does not notice any kind of civilizing or even socializing effect of commerce, as should occur according to conventional wisdom.

A more nuanced articulation of all this is found in the writings of Spaniard Luis Manuel del Rivero, who lived in Mexico from 1839 to 1842. In *Méjico en 1842* (1844), Rivero evaluates the administrative state of affairs in the country, principally in relation to treasury and economic activities. He persists in assuming the positive effect of commerce and introduces his reader to the economy of colonial Mexico, duly driven by mining, agriculture, and commerce. In contrast, in the Mexico of 1842 industry is the object of all eulogies and of maximum support, if not of worship. The present economic and social state of things cannot be compared to good old New Spain, assures Rivero: economic agents do not act anymore on the basis of trust and good credit; crude egoism, if not cynicism, prevails as a norm in social behavior. If the Mexican government and society were only able to understand that “commerce is the soul of Mexico,”²⁵ demonstrated by the sound prosperity of the last Bourbonic years, rather than being plagued by rebellions, military *putsches* and continuous political disarray, Mexico would show a picture of private and public wealth, moved as it should be by a spirit of confidence and credit. Good faith and auspicious initiative can still become the dominant features of Mexican public life if the country corrects its course. Not surprisingly, Rivero reminds his readers of the old and successful Spanish policy of establishing commercial and peaceful links with the nomadic and rebellious Indigenous peoples of the north, a proved way to awaken in them a peaceful and respectful attitude toward other nations or peoples. This reasonable and efficient approach has been forgotten by independent Mexicans, regrets Rivero.

There is perhaps no need for further transcriptions and commentaries to show that Rivero’s vision of Mexico is in agreement with the central idea of the civilizing effect of commerce. A classic example of a Spanish liberal fond of moderation, Rivero shows himself very critical of the way public affairs and political life are being conducted under the governments of General Santa Anna. Unnecessary severity and hatefulness are the trademarks of his reign during the period of the Mexican Central Republic (1835–1846). Substantially, these critical remarks reveal deep intellectual combinations of Rivero’s political liberalism and his assumptions about the civilizing effect of commerce. In Rivero’s thinking, therefore, we see a convergence of the old economic theory of sweet commerce of Montesquieu with the moderate principles of such liberal thinkers as Mme. de Staël, Benjamin Constant, and Francois Guizot, who were widely read and admired in those years. Clearly, an intermixing of an old economic idea and a new political ideology plays a role here.²⁶

²⁵ Luis Manuel del Rivero, *Méjico en 1842* (Madrid: Imprenta y Fundición de D. Eusebio Aguado, 1844), p. 253.

²⁶ About this blending of ideas in moderate liberalism see Aurelian Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds. Moderation in French Political Thought, 1748–1830* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 62–66, 194.

Delving into the Geographical Factor: German Travelers Mühlenpfordt and Sartorius

German Carl Christian Sartorius slightly modifies Humboldt's theory about the role played by gold and silver mining in the process of territorial expansion in New Spain and later in independent Mexico. Humboldt spoke of self-interest as an important trigger for territorial expansion and population growth: once an individual or several individuals commence with a gold or silver exploitation, the mine emerges as an important consuming center and a significant market for agricultural and artisan production. In *Mexiko als Ziel für deutsche Auswanderung*,²⁷ Sartorius refers to this and explains it as an example of how "reciprocal necessities produce the most lively trade."²⁸ In this way, he sets aside the point of self-interest. If we continue reading this little book, a propagandistic writing to stimulate German emigration to Mexico, we soon become aware of an interesting conceptual reformulation. In this writing, as well as in his longer and more famous book *Mexico. Landscapes and Popular Sketches* (1858, German original from 1852), Sartorius depicts Mexican economy and society as a contrasting reality from the European one, which he presents as a battlefield with combatants moving in a very competitive cauldron. According to him, a German immigrant will not have to fear a highly competitive Mexican society in which a furious and stressful individual struggles to obtain property and achieve social status, as it is happening in Europe, principally in overpopulated Germany. Rather, the opposite will be the case: the European will quickly notice the friendly disposition of Mexicans toward any useful and well-mannered immigrant. According to Sartorius, Mexicans admire the efficiency and moral virtues of Europeans, above all the Northern and Germanic peoples. Under this peculiar perspicuity of Sartorius, Mexican society seems a much more fertile ground for the material and useful self-interest than many European societies.²⁹ This persuasion goes so far as to depict the Mexican collectivity, under a characterological and sociological perspective, as a much less problematic one than usually assumed, notwithstanding its real proclivity for political conflict.

Evidently, Sartorius's arguments about Mexico's economy, including generous predictions of its future, pick up the concept of individual interest, but do not give it full scope. German writing about Mexico in the middle of the century has delved into the geographical perspective and also incorporated some important social perspectives, encompassing a wider framework. That had already been the case with Eduard Mühlenpfordt, who in his *Versuch einer getreuen Schilderung der Republik Mejico* (1844)³⁰ had expressed tremendous enthusiasm about the natural resources of Mexico and the good character and cultural creativity of its inhabitants.

²⁷ Translated into English, the title is *Mexico's Goal of German emigration*.

²⁸ Carl C. Sartorius, *Mexiko als Ziel für deutsche Auswanderung* (Darmstadt: Verlag Reinhold von Auw, 1850), p. v.

²⁹ Sartorius, *Mexiko als Ziel für deutsche Auswanderung*, p. 64.

³⁰ An English translation of the title: *Essay of an Accurate Description of the Republic of Mexico*. Mühlenpfordt, an expert in mining, worked for an English Company in Mexico, where he lived from 1827 to 1834.

This friendly countenance had not hindered him, however, from critiquing Mexican economic policy during the decades of the 1830s and 1840s, when politicians and entrepreneurs were intent on rapidly initiating and developing industrial manufacturing.³¹ According to Mühlenpfordt, such a policy was not unreasonable at all. The establishment of a special bank to promote industry was not a bad idea, he argued, and the same could be said about the other initiatives of the secretary of State Lucas Alamán, who was the principal promoter of Mexican industrialization. The first setback, however, was the constant political chaos in the country, which Mühlenpfordt understood as an unsurmountable obstacle to this program and the high expectations put on it. He maintained it was also illogical to promote industry since mining and agriculture remained undeveloped on a national scale, making it challenging to foster an industry without massive demand for its products and without a people fond of technical innovations. To these inconveniences, Mühlenpfordt added the popular classes lack of taste for the hard and enduring industrial wage work, and, finally, beyond all these disadvantages, this author invoked geography, climate, and customs as the most decisive factors that hindered the effort to industrialize. Definitely, the best path for Mexico would be, according to Mühlenpfordt, to exploit the riches of its soil (i.e. mining and agriculture) and to achieve welfare through these economic branches, whose utilities would afford the means to import every necessary manufactured product.

Self-interest as a motivational thrust for economic activity is not entirely absent in Mühlenpfordt's and Sartorius's writings about Mexico. But we have seen how other perspectives also play a role, which are frequently explored in depth when these Germans explain the actual and potential economic development of Mexico. Very important for them is the tandem town/country, which is not surprising among enthusiastic admirers and emulators of Humboldt's exploratory research. Mühlenpfordt lived and worked in Mexico for seven years, most of the time in the state of Oaxaca, in the southern part of the country. Of the two volumes of his *Versuch*, the second volume includes geographical, ethnographical, and statistical studies of all the states and federal territories of the country, while the first volume, a general description of Mexico, also provides detailed information of this kind in many passages. Sartorius wrote his *Mexico. Landscapes and Popular Sketches* after living approximately 25 years in the country, principally in a sugar producing *hacienda* in the state of Veracruz, near the Gulf of Mexico. Both had deep interest in the countryside and frequent opportunities to take rural excursions and familiarize themselves with the predominant economic activities and social conditions in different towns and regions. Both also had opportunities to learn about Mexican labor conditions. From this point of view, two aspects or topics appear frequently in their pages, both with relevance to our present interest. One is the commercial and labor

³¹ We use a Spanish translation: Eduard Mühlenpfordt, *Ensayo de una fiel descripción de la República de México. Referido especialmente a su geografía, etnografía y estadística* (Mexico City: Banco de México), 1993, vol. I, pp. 339–342.

interchanges between the rural and the urban milieu (cities and market villages); the other refers to the perpetual human bond to the earth.

Mühlenpfordt presents the customs and habits of the indigenous inhabitants from Oaxaca (principally the Zapotecas), where communal life and traditions still determine patterns of behavior. Indigenous people take part in the monetary economy only when they go to the market, selling their wares for coins and spending the obtained money to buy necessities and some alcoholic beverages.³² Their rationale is that of strictly meeting their needs. They live hand to mouth and do not think about the future. Consequently, time and effort don't have economic value for them. They can walk 20 km for the sole purpose of selling and buying items worth no more than 2 or 3 German cents before returning to their native community. Curiously enough, if it actually happens that some coins survive in the purse of an Indigenous person, he will bury the coins in a secret location. What permits this way of life is the ability to find water and to sleep in open air repeatedly during a journey, a way in which nature supports Indigenous people. From all this, Mühlenpfordt deduces the impossibility of any sense or principle of utility among the Mexico's indigenous inhabitants.

Sartorius refers to Indigenous peoples of a less populated and more exuberant region, the territory between the Gulf and Mexico's central table land. His descriptions emphasize the communal habits of the indigenous inhabitants, as was the case with Mühlenpfordt, though Sartorius also speaks about other Indigenous people with a more individualistic way of life. Regarding the latter, he discusses their custom of planting in the midst of forests or in concealed ravines.³³ These individualistic *indios* travel from the tropical regions of Veracruz to the table land in order to work on haciendas, where they receive a wage, lodging, and food, and also the advantage of exemption from contributions to the parish priest. Indigenous laborers who sow in forest clearances and not in open fields do not like to be observed and identified; they move in circles when traveling to clearances to confound possible intruders. Their attitude about work is therefore basically hermetic and communitarian, principally if their geographical milieu permits them to behave that way. Indigenous people in contact with creoles and mestizos on the haciendas exhibit a more sociable disposition. In Sartorius's description, Indigenous people exhibit a more modern and individualist rationale and behavior than in Mühlenpfordt's. Sartorius does not only sustain that Indigenous peoples' "money-burials" are done with a thrifty spirit, which means thinking about future, but he also points to the important artisan products produced by these natives, a source of useful objects for workshops and domestic units in the cities, thereby making a decisive link between the country and the large towns.

At this point, it is important to recall the mining industry's stimulating effect on agriculture in Mexican economy. According to Sartorius, as we have seen, reciprocal

³² Mühlenpfordt, *Ensayo*, vol. I, p. 200.

³³ We use the facsimile version: Carl Sartorius, *Mexico about 1850* (Stuttgart, Brockhaus, 1961), p. 66. The original title was *Mexico. Landscapes and Popular Sketches*, published in London in 1859.

needs motivate exchange, and the general economic activities and roles of the Mexican groups described by him (Indians, creoles, mestins) are also presented from this point of view. The old concepts of self-interest and personal search for utility are downplayed in these instances by these German authors, who focus more on the interaction between economic sectors (i.e. mining, agriculture, industry). They offer descriptive and explanatory elements about the state of production, interchange and circulation in the Mexican economy with a continuous and detailed attention to the geographic factor. The concept of self-interest loses its earlier importance owing to important structural conditions of the economic branches (agriculture, mining, commerce, etc.). Geographic milieu imposes conditions on societies, according to these German writers. As a consequence, they aim at establishing the intersections among economic activity, geographical adaptation, and characterological features of the different ethnic or social groups.³⁴ Economic needs, grounded in geographical research, gain here a substantial and explanatory function at the expense of the utilitarian notions of self-interest, happiness, public utility, etc.

Fossey: Public Utility, Industry, and Territorial Sanitation

A contemporary of Sartorius, the French emigrant Mathieu de Fossey published a thick book on the principal customs, practices, and habits of Mexican people with very interesting views on matters discussed in this article. In *Le Mexique* (1857), he summarized his knowledge of Mexico, where he lived during *ca.* 25 years, earning his bread as a teacher. Echoing the themes and obsessions of his time, he developed an acute interest in social questions and left interesting reflections about the most visible collective phenomena of this country, some of them in philosophical terms. He wrote about the civilizing effects of commerce, the role of self-interest and obstacles the geographical milieu posed to the progress of Mexico's population.

Few things remain so clear after reading *Le Mexique* as Fossey's critique of what he sees as overly positive attitudes about commercial activities, not only in Mexico but practically anywhere. Our French author emphasizes the widespread social acceptance enjoyed by merchants in Mexico, especially the wealthiest of them. This is a heritage from colonial times, he affirms, when society got into the habit of seeing commerce as the surest way to win a good social position.³⁵ As a consequence, Mexicans do not reward and promote truly useful individuals, those who are consistently creative and productive. To sell or re-sell merchandise does not entail creativity or result in an increase in wealth, Fossey reminds us. Besides this flaw, the Mexican people lack a real sense of honorability because

³⁴ These intersections are the point of departure of Mühlentfordt to speak plainly of "social class," specifically of a middle class composed by mestins. See José Enrique Covarrubias, *Visión extranjera de México, 1840–1867. I. El estudio de las costumbres y la situación social. Mühlentfordt, Sartorius, Fossey, Domenech, Biart y Zamacois* (México, Instituto de Investigaciones José María Luis Mora/Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la UNAM, 1998), p. 32.

³⁵ Mathieu de Fossey, *Le Mexique* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1857), pp. 413–4, 570.

there is no social esteem for those individuals who, thanks to their already established good position, carve out a literary, scientific, or professional career. Too much prestige conceded to commercial activity is also an obstacle to a correct sense of public service.³⁶ Fossey uses the Mexican case to elaborate something like a theory about the universal interdependence of *real* public utility and *real* honorability in different occupations and careers. We do not enter into his theory, but only mention Fossey's conclusion: society assesses the degree of utility of different occupations, professions, and forms of public service, according to the celerity, the level of difficulty and selflessness of their achievements.

Fossey evidently insists on the social and not so much individual side of utility. It is from this point of view that he understands the civilizing effect of commerce. When he writes about his three years of residence in the demarcation of Colima, on the Pacific coast, Fossey refers to the recent settlement of German merchants there, specifically in the port of Manzanillo. As a result of the social intercourse between these European businessmen and the native population, many important changes have been taking place in the sphere of customs. The Hamburg merchants have regularly invited the Mexicans inhabitants to their social gatherings and have unleashed in this way an important change in the local sociability. The *colimenses* have not only learned and assimilated new manners and recreations, but also new ways of dressing. Before the arrival of these Europeans, women did not wear but a muslin skirt and a batiste shirt with black embroidery; men did not use any kind of suit, and the local population dressed and behaved in a typical peasant way. Now, they all show a new, better taste, and also display a much more polished profile. The economic prospects of Manzanillo are also relatively good: by the 1850s it has become, according to Fossey, the only Mexican port with merchandise exported to the Californian ports and also to the coastal settlements in the states of Sinaloa and Sonora. The bay is one of the most beautiful on the American continent, and during a half of the year the weather there is very agreeable, better than in Colima, the principal nearby city. Unfortunately, mosquitos and other plagues spoil any residence there during the rest of the year.

Of course, this picture promises stimulation for new values and needs among Mexicans. This reveals the real valuable face of commerce, whose effect is now contrary to the unjustified and distorted social ambitions it has claimed to have previously stimulated. The first effect of the implied transfer of civilization is an abandonment of old habits and an adoption of new standards of sociability. Nevertheless, according to Fossey, Mexican society still has a way to go if it wants to undergo an evolution that hinges on the right understanding of utility and honor that interdependent tandem. The most profound change can only be stimulated by industrial activity. French entrepreneurs have introduced industrial proceedings and

³⁶ As an example, he mentions the case of an individual of aristocratic background who pursued the occupation of customs official. Preserving old fashioned hierarchies, Mexican society misses the real point about public utility, explains Fossey, the permanent interdependence between it and honor. de Fossey, *Le Mexique*, pp. 414-7.

instruments in different parts of Mexico, such as weaving mills in Uruapan, Michoacán, and cauldrons for the sugar industry not far from Colima, or a modern printing press in Mexico City.³⁷ New social relations are in this way inaugurated, which is a good omen for Fossey. He also writes about the salt marshes of Cuyutlán, also in Colima, where workers are justly paid and receive some portion of the final product, almost in a socialist model regime that leaves them and their employers completely satisfied, which significantly contrasts with the agricultural labor relationships in these same regions, where cultivators, who are dependent on financing for supplies (i.e. seeds, tools, etc.), are forced to sell their goods to money-lenders at reduced prices. Hence, these cultivators are very poor and only have enough capital to fulfill their basic needs. This last state of things seems unjustifiable in such a fertile land. To develop another kind of social bonds in line with a new mentality, modeled on the requirements of industrial society (a real productive society), will mark the culminating point of the already mentioned evolution.³⁸

Let us end this summary of Fossey by discussing his acute awareness of the unhealthy conditions in numerous regions of Mexico, frequently caused by fevers, undrained swamps, or harmful altitude effects, and many times by the combined effect of these three factors. When discussing this aspect, Fossey clearly refers to a very important agenda to be pursued before Mexico can become a well-populated country: infrastructure works are necessary to drain damp places, to the same degree that medical researches should be done to determine the most suitable places for white, mixed, or indigenous population. Throughout his book, Fossey mentions how his health was affected by Mexico's different geographical milieus, with particular attention to the varied effects of altitude on his nervous and digestive physiology. Another French immigrant in Mexico, the physician Denis Jourdanet, delved into this medical subject and published a very interesting book about it,³⁹ providing information on healthy altitudes for Europeans. Both Fossey and Jourdanet pointed out the low and medium altitudes of Mexico as the most suitable for white individuals, provided that they did not establish themselves in damp places where they could be particularly afflicted by tropical fevers or close to an active or dormant volcano, whose proximity would be a real danger. This was the case for Colima and other regions, also strongly affected by seismic movements, as Fossey witnessed.⁴⁰

According to Fossey, European colonization could prosper in the healthiest coast regions of Veracruz, which faced the Gulf of Mexico. As many other travelers or emigrants who wrote about Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century, this French resident supported the policy of exporting the cheapest and most easily exploitable

³⁷ de Fossey, *Le Mexique*, pp. 289, 391–2, 397.

³⁸ Covarrubias, *Visión*, pp. 100–1.

³⁹ D. Jourdanet, *Le Mexique et l'Amérique tropicale. Climats, hygiène et maladies* (Paris: J. B. Baillière et Fils, 1864).

⁴⁰ For a summary of Jourdanet's and Fossey's observations about the unhealthy regions of Mexico see José Enrique Covarrubias, "Un país proclive a las catástrofes. Los riesgos de vivir en México según tres viajeros franceses del siglo XIX," in *Historiar las catástrofes*, eds. María Dolores Lorenzo, Miguel Rodríguez and David Marcellhacy (México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la UNAM/Sorbonne Université, 2019), pp. 323–46.

resources in the country, much in consonance with David Ricardo's theory of competitive advantage. According to this, he dwelled not only on the importance of exporting silver (preferably unminted), but also tropical and precious products from the tropical environments of the port of Veracruz.⁴¹ Colonies of foreign immigrants could settle there, or in the nearest high lands, and assure in this way a continuous supply of these items to Europe, while simultaneously contributing to the gradual population of Mexican territory.

Clearly, Fossey picked up the Humboldtian binomial conception of population and territory to state the question of how a civilizing process could take place in Mexico from geographical, economic, and social points of view. He dared to predict that any Mexican region with two of the three main physical obstacles duly surmounted (i.e., fevers, dampness, and excessive altitude), and provided that no catastrophic earthquakes and volcanic eruptions take place there, would certainly become a good landscape for human life and sound prosperity. Converging in many ideas with the main tenets of French positivism, Fossey could not conceive the task of improving a national territory, from the health and infrastructural point of view, without a disciplined and scientifically oriented response by government and people, which one will only find in an industrial society. He sincerely doubted the possibility of realizing this achievement under mid-nineteenth-century Mexican conditions, and congruently supported the famous French initiative of a monarchic intervention in Mexico, culminated with the calling of archduke Maximilian of Habsburg to the throne. As is well known, this experiment failed; it was not under a European sponsored regime that Mexicans faced and progressively surmounted their great obstacles in relation to health and population.

Conclusion: Administrative Capacities Developed

Hopefully, the previous pages have shown the reader the kind of attempts made by these travelers when testing the principle of commerce as a civilizing activity with the unflinching effect of promoting peace and sociability at international and intra-national levels, not less than the principle of self-interest, seen as an equally unflinching stimulus (if not a real impetus) to individual economic dynamism. We have exposed the contradictions between these expectations and reality, and with them the obstacles and favorable elements for a regular and steady demographic expansion. According to our review, these questions have received three different answers by the travelers over the time periods we have covered.

In the approach of the first travelers, we can recognize how these questions stimulate their political conscience. The conflictive and even military situation in northern Mexico leads them to reflect on the challenge of socially incorporating, the independent or semi-independent, nomadic Indigenous peoples. Ruxton presents a picture in which the last and definitive effect of commerce is not so much

⁴¹ Fossey, *Le Mexique*, pp. 482–3.

a pacifying agent but rather a preserving one for an endangered society. Calvo does not witness such a dramatic situation but it is imaginable that he would insist, in the case of attending to it, on the offer of education and economic partnership with Indigenous people. In regard to Löwenstern and Rivero, it seems evident that their point of departure is the moderating and befriending nature of commerce in an international and intra-national sphere, much in a line of *doux commerce*, now resumed by contemporary moderate liberalism. According to their perspective, a grotesque, too elemental modality of self-interest paradoxically emerges as the greatest obstacle to the supposed good effects of commerce. Probably, if questioned about the possible solution, they would invoke the old and enlightened principle of the “well-understood” self-interest, that means, the well-informed practice of it.

The German authors relativize the scope of both self-interest and the civilizing effect of commerce on the basis of the too abstract and general character of those notions. Contrasts and differences among classes and ethnic groups have become more visible to them according to their growing interest in Mexican society, with the consequence that they are more aware of its particularities. It is evident that Mühlenpfordt and Sartorius stand under the influence of the so-called cameralism, which is a kind of economic and administrative modality not only reluctant to abstract generalizations but also aware of the very important role of government and administration in balancing the benefits of regions, corporations, sectors, individuals, etc. So, it is not surprising how they are intent on highly descriptive exercises about the skills, character, labor *ethos*, etc., of the active agents in each field (agriculture, industry, commerce) and about the extent to which the pertaining sector is not only prosperous but well structured, both in its own area as in its interrelations with others.

Finally, Fossey adds a particular accent on public utility, which in his version certainly supposes the following of individual interests but principally the opinion of the whole society in regard to the principal public functions and figures. This Frenchman points out the damaging prejudices of a society too fond of commerce, trade that will result increasingly worsening conditions so long as it is supported for the wrong reasons. Promotion of a new industrial society is irreplaceable for him. Interestingly, Fossey also points to natural geological and sanitary obstacles that hinder the uniform and full demographic occupation of the territory. Implicitly, he understands why Humboldt, regarding territorial division, had taken the density of the population as the best criterion. New demarcations on the exclusive basis of natural regions and resources, or of geographical accidents, as some authors and politicians demanded in Mexico at that time, would mean running the risk that fevers, earthquakes, hurricane storms, and similar phenomena foreordain these territorial experiments to failure.

Interestingly enough, something not entirely perceived or expressed by our travelers was the desired de-politicizing function of sweet commerce and intense economic activity, according to the topic of passions and interests famously elucidated by Hirschman in his already quoted book. As Hirschman showed, a good number of economists and political thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw in

commerce and other economic activities a very good way to deviate from the human inclination to political and military bellicosity to the search of personal profit and well-being, something that ultimately should result in sound benefits for the whole society. The history of Mexico from 1876 to 1910 (the so-called *Porfirian* period) lets us deduce that something of this sort happened in this country, implying a kind of deviation that was previewed by the old authors, though in this case not through a massive overturn either to the realm of commerce (as proposed by Calvo and Rivero) nor to industry (as proposed by Fossey). Rather, the driving force was a general acceptance of the administrative faculties of the state.

This is clearly illustrated in *Le Mexique moderne* (1909), by Raoul Bigot, a Belgian engineer of arts and manufactures who became Belgian consul in the Mexican port of Mazatlán. If something seems a remarkable feature of Porfirian governments to Bigot, whose work appears thirty years after the first presidential arrival of Díaz, it is the peaceful political course of the country and the reasoned disposition of Mexican people to abstain from political strife, a true token of gratitude to the efficient bureaucratic work they have been receiving. According to Bigot, this widespread satisfaction has gone so far as to keep many citizens from voting, convinced as they are that it is simply unnecessary.⁴² In such a scenario, there is no place for doubts about the preeminently technical and reasonable character of the government. A social picture like this was what Montesquieu and other thinkers had imagined as fruitful result of a generalized practice of sweet commerce at international and intra-national scale. He and others had not seen in good administration a mean to that end.

So it was the third Humboldtian topic, the scientific administration, the one that revealed itself to be pertinent and efficient, when it came to achieving the social cohesion and pacification that many had expected from economic activities. For sure, the cameralist orientation of the German authors and the positivist one of Fossey may have let them glimpse something of an outcome they would not personally see. But history has its mysteries and frequently reserves the right to conceal its deepest designs. It certainly did not reveal to Bigot in time the fact that Mexico was about to get into a bloody revolution and the pretty picture included in his writings would be lost. But it let him know, at least, something that our travelers would have loved to predict.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

⁴² Raoul Bigot, *Le Mexique Moderne* (Paris: Roger, 1909), pp. 20–21.

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