

GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEWS

GARDENS OF NEW SPAIN: How Mediterranean Plants and Foods Changed America. By WILLIAM W. DUNMIRE. xviii and 375 pp.; maps, ill., bibliog., index. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 029270271X; 24.95 (paper), ISBN 0292705646.

To many readers the title *Gardens of New Spain* may well conjure up an image of ornamental gardens with fragrant flowers, murmuring waters, and singing nightingales. That is not the case in William Dunmire's attractive volume, where gardens simply are places to grow crops. The implicit theoretical framework is that migration diffusion is closely linked to the transfer of economic plants, livestock, and the cuisines they represent. More specifically, in the wake of the Columbian Encounter Spain served as a conduit for extensive diffusion of a large array of Old World plants in the Americas, to somehow create a beneficent complementarity. But this challenging proposition is immediately rendered moot by the author's declaration that the book is not about political ecology, class, or environmental consequences (p. x). Instead, its goal is to depict the colonial-era plantways that shaped modern gardening, farming, and eating in "America."

Dunmire is a retired National Park Service naturalist who took undergraduate geography courses at the University of California, Berkeley and has published works on wild plants and native peoples in the Southwest. He begins with an overview of Spanish agriculture, technology, cultivars, and cuisine on the eve of 1492. Then he turns to pre-Hispanic Mexico, highlighting *chinampas* cultivation, crops, and cuisines as well as the gardens of the Aztec rulers. Setting the stage is completed by a brief review of early indigenous irrigation agriculture in the Greater Southwest. Each chapter closes with a group of interesting thumbnail sketches of representative plants.

In the second part Dunmire follows early Spanish plantways to the Caribbean and Mexico. Here he touches on Columbus's colony in Hispaniola, the first sugar plantations, the arrival of Spanish livestock, and the expansion to Cuba and Central Mexico. Cortés now established a new agroecology alongside the indigenous lifeways, facilitated by the discovery of silver and by missionary goals. New irrigation techniques, tillage, livestock expansion, and transportation are discussed.

The second half of Dunmire's volume is to a greater degree historical in organization and focused on the Spanish agricultural legacy in the Greater Southwest: New Mexico's first Mediterranean gardening; the *entradas* into Sonora and Arizona; the Texas "corridor"; the return of Hispanic farmers to New Mexico; and the Mediterranean biological heritage of California and Florida. A brief epilogue humanizes the bicultural agricultural world of New Mexico by introducing two empathetic farm families.

Most of the author's photographs are very good, and the maps and illustrations drawn by Vangie Dunmire are attractive. Documentation is provided by an unob-

trusive discussion of sources, complemented by some 400 references, many of which have been either not read or not digested, despite the evident industry of the author. Therein lies the dilemma. *Gardens of New Spain* will delight a large general audience, but, like the sound bites and facile images of a National Geographic television special, it does not begin to do justice to the complexity, contradictions, and problems in the topic. The depth and implicit critical insight of a Ken Burns or Bill Moyers are missing.

There are far too many inaccuracies to count, and not a few stereotypical phrases or ecological misconceptions. The chapter on pre-Columbian Spain is particularly annoying. We learn that the Visigoths “had robust appetites for meat and dairy products” (p. 13), but the lack of Spanish success at dairying in Mexico is unnoticed (there were no immigrant farm women). The Arabs were “builders on inventions of others” (p. 16) (shades of “imitative Asians”), yet Roman irrigation was only “modest” (p. 14) (it was spectacular). Arab soldiers from Syria and Persia (alas, there were no Persians) “brought with them planting stock for orchard fruits” (p. 14) (they were introduced incrementally, beginning with the Umayyad elite). Expulsion of the Moors “fostered the ascendancy of meat diets” (p. 18) in the Spanish interior (but transhumance knew no ethnic or religious boundaries, and large herds or flocks belonged to rich or corporate owners). “Huertas still abound in valleys of northern Spain” (p. 19, caption to fig. 15) (the photograph shows irrigated terraces, not a huerta, which is a complex of irrigated orchards). Dates, rice, and bananas are given as leading products of coastal eastern Spain, from Catalunya to Almeria (p. 4, map 1.1) (at the northern end of their range, palms are found only at one locale near Alicante; bananas are restricted to an enclave on the southern coast). The book moves to firmer ground in the Greater Southwest, but that does not change the fact that the author is overextended and that part of the New World treatment appears patronizing toward indigenous peoples.

The underlying problem of quality control transcends the author, to university presses that must break even, and a peer-review system that is not working the way it should. Without singling out the University of Texas Press, which publishes more than its share of socially acerbic and thought-provoking books, scholarly presses must turn out a steady stream of feel-good books that appeal to wider audiences. This favors a selection of “soft” referees, perhaps easily dazzled by a megacanvas. That also seems to explain the positive book reviews of neo-Spenglerian works in top-of-the-line scientific journals.

But does it matter? I believe it does. The important question for the subject of gardens is not that diffusion took place but why indigenous agriculture out-competed Old World introductions in much of the Spanish Americas. Yes, why? Maize yields were ten times those of wheat; because wheat is prone to rust during Mexico’s summer rainfall season, it is uneconomical to grow with scarce winter irrigation water. Spanish lovers of bread made from hard winter wheat long staved off the inevitable, but today all but the Mexican elite choose maize tortillas. Indigenous peoples, and early immigrants too, found Spanish spices too tame (except, perhaps,

for garlic) next to the invincible chili pepper. Old World condiments can now be found only in the market stalls of witch doctors, who proclaim their medicinal magic. Cultural preferences and resistance are indeed important. They are at the heart of what can make cultural geography so interesting.—KARL W. BUTZER, *University of Texas, Austin*

CULTIVATED LANDSCAPES OF MIDDLE AMERICA ON THE EVE OF CONQUEST. By THOMAS M. WHITMORE and B. L. TURNER II. xviii and 311 pp.; maps, ill., bibliog., index. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. \$125.00 (cloth), ISBN 0199244537.

More than a decade has passed since the momentous Columbian Quincentennial observations focused attention not only on the empirical-historical facts of New World exploration and conquest but also on the less tractable interpretive terrains represented by the encounter and its legacies. A range of positions and perspectives were engaged. Critical currents such as New Historicism and postcolonialism gained traction, while more tested approaches demonstrated their durability. Fittingly, geographers were conspicuously present and perspicacious in their contributions to debates as well as in their generation and presentation of data. William Denevan's 1992 "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492" (*Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82 [3]: 369–385) has become a citational classic and point of reference for important sectors of the Columbian Encounter scholarship that has followed. By any measure, Whitmore and Turner's *Cultivated Landscapes of Middle America on the Eve of Conquest* is a signal addition to this larger literature. Its origins, however, date back two decades to Denevan's vision of a Columbian Quincentennial project that would map out Amerindian land use on the eve of conquest. Whitmore and Turner's volume completes the project. It joins Oxford companion volumes by William Doolittle (*Cultivated Landscapes of Native North America* [2000]) and by Denevan (*Cultivated Landscapes of Native Amazonia and the Andes* [2001]). Taken together, these three volumes constitute a compendium of, and treatise on, cultivation practices and landscapes in the pre-European American realms likely not to be replicated and only selectively supplemented. Beyond the dubious prospect of ever matching the combined experience and knowledge of these authors is the nature of the venture itself. Sauerians by filiation and varying degrees philosophically, collectively the authors have produced a monument to central Berkeley School concerns that will not only stand time's tests but also keep the hearth lit. Moreover, Whitmore and Turner's Middle American volume surveys the landscapes most central to Sauer's own fieldwork and writing, especially Mesoamerica and the Caribbean.

Although the best book reviews eschew simple recountings of chapter contents, an accurate rendering of this work would demand mention of at least some of those details. At base it is a massive elaboration on, and celebration of, cultigens and cultivation strategies, tools and tillage techniques, tenure and production regimes, and—foremost—agricultural landforms in all their mundane and magnificent vari-

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