

Colonial Latin American Historical Review

Volume 7
Issue 2 *Volume 7, Issue 2 (Spring 1998)*

Article 8

4-1-1998

Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1803*

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Recommended Citation

McCarty, Kieran. "Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1803*." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 7, 2 (1998): 222. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol7/iss2/8>

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Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1830. By Cynthia Radding. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997. xx + 404 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$59.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

The depth and thoroughness of Cynthia Radding's personal grasp and articulate presentation of every aspect of the challenging Sonoran desert is unparalleled in the desert's expanding historiography. This book has been

rightly acclaimed "The most important work on the history of Sonora in a generation" (SMRC Newsletter, June 1997, Arizona State Museum, Tucson AZ).

Lest beginning students of the Spanish colonization period assume that the book, judging from the title, is exclusively about nomadic peoples, Radding informs the reader as early as page 26 that "For more than a millenium before Spanish contact, (Sonoran) village cultivators acquired the accoutrements of sedentary life." Highland Indians of the Sierra Madre Occidental harbored traumatic memories from the days of the early conquest of forays of slave-raiders into their highland home. The author traces these same peoples through the beginning of the mission period, observing that "The missionary project appeared benevolent to highland nations, embroiled in chronic warfare, who recalled earlier, violent encounters with slaving expeditions. Moreover, the missions offered material benefits and new deities in this time of crisis" (p. 35).

The eternal conflict in the colonial world between communal and individual ownership, extant even today, is well expressed on page 60: "The contradiction between pre-Hispanic values, rooted in the ritualized reciprocal exchange of gifts, and the colonial marketplace accounted for the uneven (native) integration into the colonial economy." Another aspect of the same phenomenon is also unveiled: "Spanish institutions designed to redirect the flow of Indian productive energy to colonial enterprises undermined the traditional regulation of communal labor" (p. 64).

Radding also summarizes the desert economy: "Three economies clashed in the upland communities: 1) the Indians' procurement of a variety of resources for subsistence; 2) the missionaries' husbanding of agricultural surpluses in order to sustain their economic and religious system across an extended territory; and 3) a certain mercantilist promotion of commercial enterprises to augment Crown revenues and benefit private interests" (pp. 98-99).

In all studies of Native Americans, demographic estimates always seem to be of prime importance. Radding's treatment of this "old chestnut" on page 117 is most enlightening: "The drop in the number of persons counted as Indians reflects not only high levels of mortality, but also their geographic and social mobility" (p.117). Moreover, she comments, "The apparent population decline...reveals not so much the biological extinction of native peoples as the destruction of the native community as a fixed entity and its reconstitution in other forms" (p. 137).

An age-old practice of O'odham society and culture, as alive and influential today as it was under Spanish rule, is presented on page 139: "Indigenous conventions treated marriage as an agreement between families rather than a contract between individuals." Radding offers this as a major difference between native New World marriage customs and those of the white society. The Apache story is also a favorite in colonial history, and Radding

comments on page 279 about this phase of colonial life: "The Spaniards became adept at manipulating different bands of Apaches, alternating harsh treatment with clemency, and using their prisoners to gain further knowledge of fugitive *rancherías*."

There is something in this book for everyone, for the professional ethnologist as well as for the avid seeker of entertainment.

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