

David R. Ringrose, *Spain, Europe, and the 'Spanish miracle', 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xv + 439. £45)

The title of this book is deceptive. Little space is devoted to Europe, although Spain's development is considered as part of the continent's accelerating growth from the mid-seventeenth century. The 'Spanish miracle' refers to the post-1960 boom years which, it is argued, could not have taken place had it not been for the long-run evolution in 'attitudes, political culture, and entrepreneurial drive'. In particular, the author contends that market forces and entrepreneurial activities were widely present from the eighteenth century, although historians have frequently failed to identify these because of their 'ingrained habit' of writing about nation-states and the technological change associated with the industrial revolution. Thus, he argues, the economy performed much better over these two centuries than is usually thought. A second argument is to stress the 'underlying continuities in the economic and political evolution of the country' between 1700 and 1900. Neither claim is as novel as Ringrose makes out, but his wide secondary reading and the emphasis on regional urban networks, providing a fresh approach to the subject, will ensure that the book is widely read.

Ringrose argues that economic and political decision making during these centuries cannot be understood in the context of 'Spain', but instead identifies four urban systems—the Mediterranean; the Cantabrian north; Madrid and the Castilian interior; and the lower Guadalquivir basin (Andalusia). Four chapters examine the response of individuals to changing economic and political opportunities both within, and outside, each region. One interesting conclusion is the emphasis on towns as 'extensions of and service centers for' rural society instead of simple recipients of rural rents. Of the external political and economic networks, particularly intriguing is the divergence shown in Andalusia after 1820, with the region's political elite playing an important role in national government, but its business classes rejecting Madrid and instead turning their attention to London and the major French ports.

The suggestion that Spain's economic growth was continuous over the two centuries, instead of experiencing a major setback from about 1780 to 1820, is much more controversial. Three arguments are presented to defend this theory, namely the continued growth in population, the fact that exports were higher in real terms in 1820 than in 1780 (despite the loss of most of the country's colonies), and Tortella's estimates for per caput income growth in the late eighteenth century. However, it can be argued that exports, as Ringrose himself notes, contributed only a very small part to national income, and Spanish growth estimates, especially before 1850, are notoriously unreliable.

Although many will continue to emphasize the various economic and social indicators which show Spain slipping behind the other leading European countries over the nineteenth century, or the economic dislocation caused by the Napoleonic wars, Ringrose has written a provocative book. He will probably not eradicate the concept of 'failure' from the vocabulary of most economic historians, but he should at least be able to divert some of their attention to trying to explain more clearly the changes that did take place.

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