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**Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies**

**Title**

La Herencia Medieval de Mexico (review)

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5cf3700t>

**Journal**

Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 16(1)

**ISSN**

0069-6412

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**Publication Date**

1985-10-01

Peer reviewed

**Luis Weckmann**, *La Herencia Medieval de Mexico*, Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, Centro de Estudios Historicos, 1984. 2 vols. 837 pp., 24 illus. (19 color, 5 b/w), index, bibliographies.

Luis Weckmann's two volume work *La Herencia Medieval de Mexico* is the result of thirty years of research on the "medieval roots of Mexican culture." The author, an historian and Mexico's ambassador to Italy, set out to identify the medieval legacy of Mexico — to prove that "numerous juridical, political, economic and above all ideological characteristics of New Spain in the XVI and XVII centuries have a clearly medieval origin." Relying mainly on an extensive bibliography of primary sources, Weckmann presents the medieval legacy as it was imposed on the New World, especially New Spain, between 1517 and 1650 by "conquistadores, missionaries, explorers, administrators, judges and bishops." His thesis that the culture "introduced" into New Spain was "still essentially medieval" is confirmed, he states, if one considers the history of the Conquest of the New World as a "new chapter in the medieval expansion of Castile . . . and of Aragonese overseas enterprises." Weckmann's dense, fact-filled chapters should lead us to no other conclusion.

Indeed, the reader can easily find the medieval origins of institutions, rituals, liturgy, paintings, dress, place names and legal practices, just to name a few of the categories covered. Weckmann has provided access to this wealth of information through clarity of organization: the material is divided into four major parts: "Conquest and Discovery," "The Church," "The State and Economy," and "Society, Law and Culture." Each of these is subdivided into sections, including: doctrine, rite, liturgy, commerce and navigation, urban structure and the administration, and so forth. Organized thus, and laden with citations and references, the reader has a bonanza of documentation in this book. Weckmann has produced a valuable reference tool.

We certainly cannot quarrel with Weckmann's intention to assert and document the medieval heritage of Mexico, nor with the evidence adduced to prove that such a legacy exists. Weckmann's toils show just how tangible this legacy is — visible even today in buildings, names, legal titles, etc. The problematic aspects of his work lie more in what is not said, rather than what is said.

Weckmann, for example, confirms his reliance on "primary and secondary" sources in his preliminary note. These sources are listed in a lengthy bibliography. Most readers who are familiar with the history of Colonial Mexico would be familiar with the bulk of Weckmann's sources. They would also be aware of the dangers of taking chronicles and other records at face value. This pertains not only to descriptions of European (medieval) history, but especially to descriptions of the New World. Historians of various aspects

of Mexico are beginning to revise their notions of the post-conquest and colonial periods precisely because primary sources which have come to serve as "truth" are, in fact, "interested" versions of history (The deck is always stacked, for instance, against the indigenous version of history.). It would have been helpful to have had a section analyzing the various categories of sources used. This would have also assured the reader that Weckmann's material was not selectively used. His own claim that he used every source available (in print or "within his reach") is not sufficient as a bibliographic analysis for a work which is based so profoundly upon primary sources.

Next, what is the significance of the the medieval heritage within the historiography of Mexican history? Weckmann, Charles Verlinden and Silvio Zavala (the latter two wrote brief introductory essays for the book) acknowledge — indeed lament — the fact that the medieval heritage of Mexico has been neglected in systematic, scholarly analyses. All three speak of the subject with the enthusiasm of scholars entering into a new field of study. If this neglect is real, and judging from the paucity of materials cited by all three authors it is, why has it been so neglected? Weckmann asserts that the conquest of New Spain was a continuation of the medieval expansion of Castile, requiring the imposition, re-use and adaptation of certain medieval institutions. Does this assertion contradict previously or currently held positions? Is not the historian's role to take to task the neglect of a problem that he/she considers significantly under-, if not mis-represented? We would like to have had Weckmann's critical analysis of this problem. That so few authors have undertaken to explore this subject surely cannot be due to lack of evidence to prove the existence of this medieval heritage. Without this critical and historiographical reflection, scholarship runs the risk of existing simply to contribute to a neglected field of study, the proverbial filling of scholarly lacunae. Weckmann's contribution was certainly not thus intended.

Finally, we would like to understand better Weckmann's notion of history. Is a legacy or heritage the same as history? Is this book a history of the first one hundred years of colonial domination of the New World? It seems too convenient to divide history into sections of culture which lend themselves to easy transfiguration into this thing called 'heritage'. This leaves out the very object of this medieval expansion of Castile, the "receiver" as the author put it, of this heritage — the Indians of the New World. This medieval heritage was, after all, introduced forceably and often brutally to the Indians in this process of conquest. Weckmann does refer to indigenous practices and survivals. He says, for example, "Mexico is not Spain, nor exclusively Indian; nevertheless, in our culture, which is a branch of the Occident, but with indigenous essences, the contribution of the Indians is that which has kept on creating the

profile of that which is authentically Mexican."

The assertion of an indigenous legacy has been part of a discourse of power which originated with an historical imperative defined by creole nationalists in their struggle for independence in the early nineteenth century. It was later rearticulated by the 19th Mexican liberal state. Then, as today, this discourse promotes the indigenous culture of Mexico as the major component of *Mexican* culture (the disjunction between ancient Indian glories and contemporary Indian realities has always remained visible). Weckmann's assertion of the medieval legacy comes as an interesting proposition in the face of this discourse of indigenismo-nacionalismo. Further consideration of the relationship (or non-relationship, even opposition?) between these two legacies would have brought greater contemporary relevance to Weckmann's book. Perhaps it is a debate of some controversy, but the conquest itself remains a controversial historical issue.

We understand clearly Weckmann's intention to reaffirm the medieval heritage, and that the thrust of his work was not directed toward the indigenous legacy. Nevertheless, an expanded introduction, or better, a concluding chapter (which is entirely lacking), could have been the place to touch upon these provocative and important issues. Perhaps Dr. Weckmann will address them in future works.

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