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Robert S. Weddle. *LaSalle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf; Three Primary Documents*. College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1987.

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Robert S. Weddle. *LaSalle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf; Three Primary Documents*. College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1987.

News of the French explorer LaSalle's navigation of the Mississippi to its source, and his subsequent establishment of a fort on the Gulf Coast in the 1680's, prompted Spanish officials to look hard at their colonial policy in Northern New Spain, especially Texas. The "French Menace," as it has been termed, is an important theme in the history of the Spanish borderlands in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Robert S. Weddle's recent publication of three primary documents dealing with the LaSalle ventures and the subsequent Spanish response offers readers an insightful glimpse into how the territorial struggle between these two European powers was intrinsically related to geographic exploration. The three documents include: 1) a two-part journal by Minet which details LaSalle's preliminary explorations in Canada prior to 1682 and the journey down the Mississippi, and the 1684-85 voyage from France which had as its objective the founding of a colony on the Mississippi; 2) the log of Enriquez Barroto, pilot under the command of Captain Martín de Rivas, who was sent by Spanish authorities to locate the LaSalle fort; and 3) the record of the interrogations of the Talon brothers, who as children had lived in the LaSalle fort on Matagorda Bay in 1685.

Minet's navigational log is an especially pertinent historical document since LaSalle's failure to relocate the mouth of the Mississippi, when he sailed from France with four vessels and 280 colonists in 1684, probably expedited the demise of his colonial venture. The exact reasons for founding the colony on the Texas coast are historically debatable. Based on their reading of Minot's document alongside another navigational journal from one of LaSalle's ships, the editors have added their own interpretation of this lost-at-sea episode. They note that during the period when the "fleet" traveled from Haiti to the U.S. Gulf Coast, no two latitude readings are precisely the same in these two logs, suggesting that the mislanding was a navigational error. This interpretation has been suggested before, along with the idea that LaSalle intentionally landed in Texas because he harbored secret military designs on northern New Spain. Still another possibility, according to the editors, takes into account the quality of the maps LaSalle had at his disposal. On page nine, Weddle has reproduced "Rouillard's map of America, 1692," based on current French

knowledge of the Gulf Coast seven years after LaSalle's venture. It clearly depicts the Mississippi as swinging west an entire longitudinal degree, emptying forth from the Texas coast. The same map shows a bay fed by minor tributaries precisely where the Mississippi should have been. Thus LaSalle's mistake.

News of LaSalle's penetration into the Gulf of Mexico alarmed Spanish officials, and spurred several overland and seaborne expeditions intended to locate the French colony. The diary of Enriquez Barroto chronicles the most serious of these retaliatory searches for LaSalle. Under the viceregal orders of the Conde de Monclova, two shallow-keeled, highly mobile vessels called *piraguas* were outfitted with supplies and crew to reconnoiter as far north as the 30th parallel, the supposed latitude of the Bahía Espíritu Santo. Barroto's log is a highly detailed compilation of meteorological data, descriptions and charts of the coast from Tuxpán to Mobile Bay. The high points of the voyage were the discovery of the abandoned LaSalle colony on Matagorda Bay--demobilized by a Karankara raid--and the discovery of the Mississippi delta. While the Spanish had previously invested resources towards Pacific Exploration, the discovery of the Mississippi promoted an increase of scientific exploration of the northern Gulf Coast.

The final document, perhaps the most interesting, is the so-called "Talon Interrogations" of 1697. The Talon brothers were children when LaSalle and company landed on the Texas coast. When the colony was destroyed in an Indian raid only the children were spared; and thus Jean-Baptiste and Pierre Talon were raised among Indians. Ethnographically, the "Talon Interrogations" are a gold mine. As Weddle states in his introduction, "whereas Cabeza de Vaca lived among the Indians, the Talon brothers were Indians." The questions which the French authorities asked the brothers are also revealing in that they succinctly summarize France's territorial interests in the region. The Talons are not only asked about the fate of LaSalle's colony and the reasons why, but their enlightened opinion is also solicited about the possibility of mineral wealth and mines, their geographic knowledge of the Mississippi, and their understanding of Spanish geo-political designs in the borderlands.

Weddle's purpose as general editor has been to commemorate the 300th anniversary of LaSalle's death with the publication of new material relevant to the life and times of the famous French explorer. *LaSalle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf* is an extremely handsome book which utilizes a sophisticated format. Each docu-

ment has been prefaced by a scholarly introduction, and in the case of the "Talon Interrogations" three commentaries--one by Rudolph Troike on Karankara linguistic data, one by Mardith Schuetz on ethnological data, and one by Del Weniger on the natural historical information embedded in the Talon text--are appended to the document. On the whole, the quality of the writing is first rate. Robert Weddle, especially, wields the language in the tradition of the great American naturalist-authors of the nineteenth century--Thoreau, Aggasiz--with economy, precision, and lucidity. Speaking of the scientific voyage of Barrato and the discovery of the Mississippi, for example, he writes: "the mariners limned the bird-foot subdelta and registered the various capes and river mouths."

The book is above all the product of team effort, and as such it distinguishes itself in terms of density of fact and expertise from most other historical books on exploration. A brief comparison with what is considered to be another classic book on exploration--Carl Sauer's *Road to Cibola* (1932)--is warranted here. First, both works deal with overlapping expeditions: Sauer looks at a half dozen overland *entradas* from the Mexican Pacific coast into modern day Arizona and New Mexico; Weddle's book looks at two navigational logs of the 1680's, one Spanish and one French, which record the exploration of the Louisiana and Texas coasts. (The student of the iconography of science is invited to study these two documents comparatively, as records of the contrasting styles, approaches, and state of scientific knowledge brought to maritime exploration by different European nations in the late seventeenth century.)

However, this is where the similarity ends. In the 1930's Sauer was locked into a less than gentlemanly debate with some of his contemporaries over the specific routes of early Spanish explorers. Sauer's very tone frequently betrays that he was not immune to a level of competitiveness more appropriate to the gridiron. In his endeavor to make his arguments airtight, Sauer leaves very few tracks for his readers--there are almost no footnotes, and all archival evidence is summarized rather than quoted. In the end, he asks us to accept his authority based on his years spent in the field, but the ultimate effect is to invoke a healthy skepticism in the reader. In contrast, the main purpose of Weddle's book is to translate and publish primary documents, not summaries. Add the authoritative commentaries and the result is a testament to scholastic cooperation. More than a mere collection of conference papers, Weddle has collected the energy and expertise of five workers and woven their contributions into an astonishingly adept design that

should be equally useful to historians, ethnohistorians, anthropologists, linguists, and even naturalists and ecologists.

As for drawbacks I have only one minor quibble. Though the book is illustrated with sketches and drawings from the original documents, along with a reproduction of the Rouillard map (which also adorns the cover), I often found myself wondering where I had misplaced my road atlas of the Gulf Coast area. A good map included in the text and marked with the probable routes of expeditions would be a welcome addendum for future editions.

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**Norman B. Schwartz.** *Forest Society: A Social History of Petén, Guatemala.* University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.

For many years cultural anthropologists interested in Mesoamerican Indians during the colonial period shunned the use of documentary sources preferring instead to rely on material evidence to construct their histories. The work of such giants in the field as Eric Thompson demonstrated to anthropologists the many benefits that derive from working with colonial manuscripts. Norman Schwartz, himself an anthropologist, follows in the footsteps of his predecessors in his use of sources. Schwartz attempts to study the Maya of the Petén region from the colonial era to the contemporary period. Woefully Schwartz demonstrates a poor understanding of colonial documents. While the book does make some interesting points it falls short of fulfilling what the title promises, a social history from the colonial period to the present.

Taking a cue from the pioneering work of Robert Carmack for the highland region of Guatemala, Schwartz worked heavily in both local, national, and foreign archives. The archival work unfortunately yielded little for the colonial period since the Petén region was the epitome of a fringe area. Petén was such a marginal area that it depended on the Yucatán, itself an area of little economic activity until the advent of the henequen boom. Thus Schwartz, much like Linda A. Newson in her book *Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua*, suffers from a severe lack of documentation. When he does come upon numerous documentary sources, mainly for the 1890s on, he fails to exploit them fully. By concentrating on in-