

J. Michael Francis, *Invading Colombia: Spanish Accounts of the Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada Expedition of Conquest*

University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007.

Pp. xix, 125, bibliography, index, tables, maps

Rick Goulet / Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania

Invading Colombia, by J. Michael Francis, is the lead publication of a new series entitled Latin American Originals published by The Pennsylvania State University Press. The series “features primary source texts on colonial and nineteenth-century Latin America, translated into English, in slim, accessible, affordable editions that also make scholarly contributions.” This volume succeeds admirably in fulfilling these stated goals.

The subject of this book is the important, but little known, conquest of New Granada (present day Colombia) beginning in 1536. Francis rightly points out that this underappreciated conquest story is, “worth telling, if only to challenge some of the general assumptions about the nature of the Spanish Conquest of the New World and the conquistadors who participated in these early campaigns,” and so “this book aims to reconstruct the compelling tale of the Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada expedition and the early stages of the Spanish conquest of Muisca territory” (xvii). Here we see a connection to the work of the series editor, Matthew Restall, and his acclaimed *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford UP, 2003).

The Introduction discusses some of these “general assumptions” that this conquest story challenges. Francis provides tables that indicate the relative New World inexperience, youth, and attrition rates of the New Granadan conquistadors when compared to the Peruvian conquistadors who fought under Francisco Pizarro. More importantly, he indicates that while most accounts of the Jiménez expedition contend that its goals were “to discover an overland route to Peru, and to follow the Magdalena River to its source, which many believed would lead them to the South Sea,” (8) an examination of the primary sources from the conquistadors themselves reflect an unsurprising interest to discover “new lands” and attain the conquest booty that would go along with them. Finally, and of significant scholarly value, the book challenges “perhaps the most enduring misconception of the Spanish conquest of Muisca territory”: the Zipa-Zaque civil war. (11) Here, Francis chides the early chroniclers (but non-participants) and subsequent historians for borrowing elements of the conquest narrative of Peru and perpetuating a story which Francis argues, based on his research of primary sources, should be viewed with “deep suspicion”. After a useful discussion of the seven documents he uses to reconstruct the Jiménez expedition and conquest of the Muisca territory, all written by Spaniards, Francis ends with a note of caution: the “significant silences” of the sources that “reveal virtually nothing of the scores of black slaves, or native carriers, guides, cooks, and translators, all of whom played important if forgotten roles in this story.” (16) As well, while the Muisca are described in some detail their voices

are not heard, and non-Muisca peoples are invisible or downright misrepresented, such as the supposedly cannibalistic Panches.

The rest of the book consists of four chapters which reconstruct the story of the conquest of the New Kingdom of Granada based on the earliest documents available. Chapter Two contains the initial proposal of Don Pedro Fernández de Lugo, governor of the Canary Islands, to (re)settle and (re)conquer the province of Santa Marta; his son’s (don Alonso) revised proposal; and the final *capitulación* or agreement between don Pedro and the Spanish Crown for what would be the conquest of the Muisca. Chapter Three begins the “conquest” narrative in earnest by presenting four documents that recount the initial months of Jiménez’s expedition beginning in April of 1536 from Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast, up the Magdalena River, and the start of its climb into the eastern highlands. The journey across the Opón Mountains and the expedition’s entrance into the land of the Muisca in early March 1537 is chronicled by three sources in Chapter Four. One of the sources, the “Epítome de la conquista del Nuevo Reino de Granada,” also provides details of Muisca culture and society. The last chapter presents the roughly two-year period during which Jiménez’s group conquers the Muisca, beginning with the sack of Tunja in August 1537 and ending with Jiménez de Quesada’s return to Spain in July 1539. Along the way, the Muisca’s principal *caciques*, Bogotá and his successor, Sagipa, are both killed; there is a military campaign against the Muisca’s enemies, the Panches, followed by a brief search for Amazon women; and the booty of the conquest is distributed. The arrival of two rival groups of Spaniards – those led by Nicolás Federmán from Venezuela and Sebastián de Belalcázar from Quito – is the motivation Jiménez needs to return to Spain to press his claim to the newly discovered region. And here the book ends.

The book has no conclusion. Perhaps it is unnecessary in this useful and splendidly assembled little tome since Francis provides insightful commentary and explanatory notes throughout. The lack of a conclusion is also quite understandable when one considers the purpose and target audience of the book. *Invading Colombia* is designed to be “affordable” (read: brief) and “accessible” and while it will be of interest to scholars of colonial Latin America since it provides translations of documents that have hitherto not been available in English (and some never before published); its main audience seems the undergraduate or graduate student who will be enthralled with the “other Andean conquest” and be challenged and questioned by its narrative. However, this reviewer would have enjoyed some concluding observations and arguments by Francis, perhaps in response to

the question posed by the series editor in the foreword when pondering whether this invasion was more typical of Spanish experiences of the era.

But just as Jiménez and his men, no doubt, were pleased with even the smallest of the 1,815 emeralds they collected in plunder, readers will be pleased with this little gem of a book. Francis has ably translated the seven main sources he weaves together into a compelling chronology of invasion. He demonstrates the historian's craft through his opening remarks,

his introductions to each chapter, and with the numerous useful footnotes that flesh out the narrative with explanations and clarifications gleaned from his indefatigable archival research sifting through "thousands of pages of *probanzas de méritos*" and a masterly command of the secondary literature. Footnotes, rather than endnotes, and the illustrative maps and tables are also much appreciated and contribute to an excellent first volume of a series from which one looks forward to the next offering.