Overall, this is an excellent book, carefully crafted and judicious in its judgements and interpretations, one which can be read with great profit. The author's careful examination of the colonial *cartas cuentas* is exemplary, even more than the compilers of the original account summaries could have hoped for.

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Por voluntad divina: escasez, epidemias y otras calamidades en la ciudad de México, 1700–1762. By AMÉRICA MOLINA DEL VILLAR. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1996. Notes. Bibliography. Appendix. 159 pp. Paper.

This work sets out to probe the social impact of natural disasters in Mexico City. It comprises three essays, each a separate study but sharing the common objective to examine "governmental and social responses [to disasters] . . . in a historical context of transition toward a new way of conceiving life" (p. 14). Molina's transition dates from "the germination of New Spain's Enlightenment" (p. 14) in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The first essay examines the politics of food supply in Mexico City through four episodes of scarcity from 1711 to 1750. The author seeks to sort out the relative impact of the "natural" and the "human" during times of "agricultural crises." She looks mainly at material that documents official responses to scarcities and she relies to a great extent on data collected by Enrique Florescano (*Precios del maíz y crisis agrícolas en México, 1708–1811*), Charles Gibson (*The Aztecs under Spanish Rule*), and others. Molina del Villar adds little to the meanings they attached to such "natural" events of scarcity, for they too recognized that hoarding, profiteering, distribution problems, and regional disparities in supply and consumption ordinarily accompanied these occurrences. It is hard to understand why Rosa Feijoo, Louisa Hoberman, Douglas Cope, and Chester Guthrie do not figure in this discussion (although Jonathan I. Israel and J. Ignacio Rubio Mañé do), for all of them have analyzed the social impact of food shortages in seventeenth-century Mexico City with great care.

In her second essay, Molina examines the *matlazáhuatl* epidemic of 1736–39. "Some physicians," she finds, had begun to view religious processions as occasions that were more prone to spread rather than contain disease. Thus a perception of epidemics as "naturally" contagious and spread through "pernicious vapors" (p. 70) began to displace the notion that they were supernatural visitations to punish sins. Antiplague measures of isolation and quarantine that had been worked out in Europe—"a mix of ideas and experiences implemented during the Black Death of the fourteenth century . . . [and] enlightened ideas that originated in New Spain" (p. 58)—stood as a more effective response than processions of the saints and appeals for their intercession.

Yet since the fourteenth century and before, both God and government had been invoked to deal with plagues and disasters. And appeals to both would continue to

coexist, but with different relative force. This seems to be the point of Molina's third essay on "religiosity, government, and society." But again, the seventeenth century would seem to be the crucial period, more crucial than Molina's brief references imply. She notes, for example, that during the great flood of 1629 the Virgin of Guadalupe was brought to the Mexico City cathedral by canoe in an extraordinary entreaty for her intercession. But she does not give due attention to the projections and projects of engineers and scientists and the resources put at their disposal for controlling floods of that era.

More generally, we know that intellectuals of the seventeenth century engaged in intense speculation, made minute observations, and stressed experience over authority. They also acquiesced in the authority of the Church. Who better to symbolize this than don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, who during his entire life, spanning the second half of the seventeenth century, petitioned to be reinstated in the Jesuit order from which he had been expelled after a youthful indiscretion? In the most dramatic and astonishing intersection of reason and faith, of baroque and enlightenment that we have, in 1700 don Carlos ordered in his will that "in God's name" an autopsy be performed on his death to better understand the cause of the excruciating pain in his right kidney and bladder, so that physicians "may have data to guide them in administering to other sufferers" (quoted in Irving Leonard, *Baroque Times in Old Mexico: Seventeenth-Century Persons, Places, and Practices*, p. 214).

After Norbert Elias, Molina seems to see the interactions between religious and human impulses as complex "figurations" evolving in a "process" that will see the latter ever more dominant. Part of this "civilizing process," Elias says, suggests that urban elites will need to differentiate themselves from the popular classes. Molina says they increasingly did so in eighteenth-century Mexico City by seizing greater control of urban space, public ritual, and popular myth in order to maintain social control.

Por voluntad divina reads as a still preliminary statement of research in progress that has identified an important subject. Yet the case for transition still needs to be made in its full complexity and with a wider range of evidence that touches on individual sensibilities. As John Tate Lanning has shown for the late eighteenth century, a period after the so-called transition, a kind of "anarchy" remained in the understanding of disease and its causes. "Superstitious lore [that passed] from person to person," he writes, continued to coexist with systematic scientific inquiry (*The Royal Protomedicato: The Regulation of the Medical Professions in the Spanish Empire*, pp. 362–63). Transitions are complex because they are never simple. But that is why they are interesting.

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