

## Preface

Popayán is a provincial town in southern Colombia, with some pretensions to importance because of its history. In this century Cali, its neighbor to the north, has overtaken Popayán; it is today the undisputed center of southern Colombia. Given the town's relative insignificance, one might ask, Why study the colonial antecedents of such a place? For a Popayanejo or a Colombian there is an easy answer: it is a part of their own history that needs to be reconstructed patiently, with attention to events, individuals, and places, and also to groups, economic structures, and social movements. The elements of such a history are being assembled today, for the writing of history is becoming a professional enterprise in Colombia. But this history has an interest independent of the perspectives of locality or nation. It is here, perhaps, where this book can make its contribution.

When I started this work, I had in mind a detailed study of the functioning of one town council. My idea was to study the imperial machinery of government at the point where it most closely intersected with the interests of Spanish settlers in America. Such a study, I thought, might allow a realistic appraisal of how imperial government operated; it also might show how towns as nuclei of Spanish settlement functioned in a new environment. But the town council, by itself, has turned out to be an unsuitable vehicle for dealing with these questions. My earlier ideas as to how to proceed are still visible in this work, but on the whole I have followed an eclectic approach, using evidence where I could find it. At a later stage of my work the marvelous catalogue of the Archivo Central del Cauca—a veritable calendar at times—has helped me quite a bit, but it opens its riches only to the cognoscenti. The method, then, has to take account of the sources, as is only natural. It begins with the assumption that a town's life forms a coherent whole that one can unravel like a piece of cloth if one begins in the right place. The starting point one chooses is important since it will, to a degree, determine a work's organization and also its argument, as is inevitable. Another point of departure will open up a different per-

spective, not necessarily opposed, and perhaps complementary. The sources for the history of any particular town can be quite varied. Under favorable circumstances, they may allow the reasonable reconstruction of a town's politics, of its social and economic structure, and even of prevailing mentalities. I am only too aware that this book falls short of such a reconstruction, but I hope that it will constitute a contribution toward such a goal.

But what is the purpose of such a reconstruction? A regional study such as this should answer the question of how Spaniards managed to establish overseas settlements in a peninsular image without, in fact, remaining subservient to Spanish ways. Only in this fashion, by perceiving the relations between continuity and adaptation to circumstance, can we explain the particular cohesion of Spanish expansion in the New World, taking account of the immense space and the small number of settlers. The relation between continuity and adaptation varied over time and place. In this particular study I have chosen the seventeenth century because it represents a relatively unexplored hiatus between the period of conquest—characterized by a continuing identification with the peninsula, so we assume—and the later eighteenth century, when metropolitan pressures and American interests entered an assertive stage. Also, so I thought, a town at the margin of empire would offer better evidence for an investigation of this sort than a colonial center in New Spain or Peru. As we see from recent studies, the same social and political forces were at work everywhere in Spanish America. Only their configuration varied. Once we have studied enough cases, we may be able to establish a typology of settlement that is more than a collection of formal attributes. More important, perhaps, Spanish America can then be seen as a series of loosely articulated urban networks that bore some correspondence to the imperial framework but were not congruent with it.

This, then, is the particular purpose of this study: to establish the particular configuration of one region, at one point in time, in its essential elements. If it achieves this for seventeenth-century Popayán, in the context of the "kingdoms" of Quito and New Granada, it will have accomplished its goal.