

IN MEMORIAM: *Noble David Cook* (1941–2024)

Noble David Cook, distinguished historian of colonial Peru, sixteenth-century Andalusia, and the early modern Spanish Atlantic, died in Miami, Florida, on April, 8 2024. Cook, who spent most of his long career at Florida International University, was author and co-author of several landmark books, along with seminal articles and numerous reviews. Some were written with his spouse, historian Alexandra (Sasha) Parma Cook, and others were collaborative works with eminent historians and historical geographers, including Franklin Pease, David J. Robinson, and W. George Lovell. Cook also advised graduate students and nurtured the careers of several Peruvian historians.

A highly versatile scholar, Cook ranged from Indigenous demographic history drawing from tribute rolls and similar documents to transatlantic microhistory based on trial records and the history of religious proselytization and clerical self-fashioning, using parish archives and even hagiographies. A through line in Cook's extensive body of work, including demographic and "disease" work, is an interest in early modern mentalities, a hallmark of the *Annales* School scholarship that influenced him from the start of his career. Equally notable throughout Cook's work is total devotion to archival sleuthing, to chasing down every lead. Beginning in the 1980s, Cook and his family lived part time in Seville's Triana neighborhood to be close to the Archivo General de Indias and other repositories. Together, and with their daughter Karoline (Kaja) Cook, also a historian, they made the most of these ample resources.

Cook earned his PhD in history at the University of Texas at Austin in 1972, under the direction of the great Spanish demographic historian Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz. Cook's first book, building on his dissertation, was *Demographic Collapse: Indian Peru, 1520–1620* (Cambridge University Press, 1981). On the basis of a careful reading of census data and tribute rolls (rather than gross estimates offered by conquistadors, priests, and other observers), it remains the standard work on post-contact Indigenous population decline in the central Andes. The book was translated to Spanish and published in Lima in 2010. Cook

also published censuses for Lima from the early seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that historians regularly consult. He had an uncanny ability to ferret out and publish such vital documents.

In 1982, Noble David Cook also published a small, focused monograph, *The People of the Colca Valley: A Population Study*, which formed the basis of the much more elaborated and ethnohistorically rich book, *People of the Volcano: Andean Counterpoint in the Colca Valley of Peru* (Duke University Press, 2007), co-authored with Sasha Cook. Cook's interest in the Colca Valley (near Arequipa) went back to his earliest days in Peru, working with Franklin Pease and his team of crack Peruvian scholars. The cache of primary sources relating to this region was rich enough to yield several large volumes, several of which Cook co-edited.

In a quite different vein from Cook's interest in demography and disease was the co-authored book *Good Faith and Truthful Ignorance: A Case of Transatlantic Bigamy*, which appeared with Duke University Press in 1991. An exercise in microhistory based on close reading of an enormous bundle of court documents and ancillary materials, this book explored the strains of transatlantic migration on couples and families in the sixteenth century. A model of the form, it is still regularly assigned at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

In the same year, with historical geographer W. George Lovell, Cook published the edited collection *Secret Judgments of God: Old World Disease in Colonial Spanish America* (Oklahoma, 1991). Cook was still working on Peru, but he was also expanding his purview. This came to fruition with publication of the essential survey text *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492–1650* (Cambridge, 1998). Here and in other work on disease and demography, Cook always offered a measured approach to surviving evidence while still acknowledging the crushing effects of the so-called Columbian Exchange at its very worst. Cook always sought to emphasize Indigenous resilience in the face of catastrophe and to point out wide variations in population loss and recovery by region and time. He was determined to counteract sweeping claims of cultural disappearance.

Always given to favoring period voices, whatever their angle or perspective, the Cooks together published an annotated translation of the most dramatic portions of Pedro de Cieza de León's *Discovery and Conquest of Peru* (Duke, 1998). For those who had only mined the early 1550s Spanish text for regional or topical anecdotes, the Cook translation was a revelation, a reminder that this early post-conquest traveler was possessed of an extraordinarily keen eye and a healthy

conscience. Cieza was revealed to many readers as a critic of conquest even as he participated in it. Ambivalence reigned.

It seems that a truly transatlantic perspective helped to keep the American story, for all its horrors, in perspective. In *The Plague Files: Crisis Management in Sixteenth-Century Seville*, published by Louisiana State University Press in 2009, David and Sasha Cook used a range of archival materials to explore the complexity of disease control in a pre-modern cosmopolitan city. Seville was repeatedly hit by bubonic plague in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, along with numerous other ills, at times losing up to half of its 100,000-plus population. Yet like so many early modern cities, its population also rebounded. Ravaging epidemics were a part of early modern life worldwide, and responses to them ranged from the bizarre to the soundly reasoned (*au plus çe la change . . .*, we might say).

Noble David Cook's final co-authored book appeared just before his passing. *Luis Gerónimo de Oré: The World of an Andean Franciscan from the Frontiers to the Centers of Power* (LSU Press, 2023), draws on Cook's long interest in this energetic Peruvian *doctrinero* and from his 1998 edition of Oré's *Relación de la vida y milagros de San Francisco Solano*. This final project demonstrates Cook's remarkable versatility as a scholar as well as his unusual ability to follow distinct research strands to their logical conclusions. We are forever in his (and Sasha's) debt for this substantial and always innovative body of work. Noble David Cook was a model scholar who embodied the Andean principle of reciprocity.

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