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MCEVOY, Carmen, 2016, *Chile en el Perú. La ocupación a través de sus documentos, 1881-1884*, Lima, Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú. 855 pp.

“Today the bell towers remain silent, the army rabble fills the streets, the public plazas; the echo only reverberates the sound of Chilean trumpets, and what is the most surprising [...] is the profusion of Chilean soldiers and flags; one-starred standards flutter everywhere: over the forts, over the buildings, over private homes. The troops of the conqueror are camped out everywhere: in the barracks, in the middle of the avenues, on the monuments [...]. A mournful silence reigns over the city [...] the silence of cities occupied by the enemy”³ (p. 26). It is in this somber and moving tone that French Navy Lieutenant Albert Davin describes the Chilean presence in Lima. Davin does not fail to notice the arrogance of the officers of the invading army, whom he compares to Spanish conquistadores. He writes that those who walk along the streets “drag their sabers along the stone pavement; step with disdain on the conquered ground, making the stars of their spurs resound on the paving stones and each seems to say: I am Peru!” (Albert Davin, *Cuando los chilenos tomaron Lima*. Quito: Universidad Estatal de Bolívar, 1995, pp. 26-27). Davin’s perception of the character of the Chilean military is confirmed by the German journalist and translator Hugo Zöller. A privileged witness of the military occupation of the Peruvian capital and Callao, Zöller writes that in these two cities, Chileans introduced “an excessively rigid regime, perhaps even despotic and dictatorial, [one] could not observe even the slightest trace of the delicate consideration with which, on the part of the Germans, after the war with France, the occupied regions of that country were treated.” The whole administration, Zöller observes, was made up of Chilean citizens (Estuardo Núñez, *4 viajeros alemanes al Perú*. Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1969, p. 133).

In the history of nations, few processes are as dramatic as the military and political occupation of territories by invading forces. The occupation of the coast and some regions in the Peruvian interior by Chilean military and political authorities between 1879 and 1884 was no exception. The writings of Davin, Zöller, and other foreign travelers are testimonies to the human dimensions of this process. These can be labeled as impressionistic and even almost fictional, but they acquire credibility as first-rate historical

3 All translations in this book review are by *Apuntes*.

sources when they are contrasted with other more prosaic writings, such as administrative sources.

This new book by Carmen McEvoy about the Chilean occupation of Peru offers an invaluable set of texts for understanding how Chile turned the occupation of Peruvian territory into an exercise in administration whose principal, but not only, objective was to obtain enormous economic benefits. It is a compilation of 419 texts. The majority are documents of the Chilean administration, but there are also personal letters, newspaper articles, among others, from the historical archives in Santiago de Chile. To facilitate understanding, the author has grouped them into five sections: the logistics of the occupation, the army of the occupation, the ideological machinery, the correspondence of Domingo Santa María, and proposals from civil society.

In her extensive and valuable introduction, the author points out that the purpose of the compilation is to narrate the process of occupation – that is, to demonstrate that it was “a system of economic exploitation and political domination, a machinery created in Antofagasta, which was steadily improved until reaching its peak in Lima”⁴ (pp. 15). Certainly, reading the documentation permits the reconstruction of the social, political, military, ideological, and economic dimensions of the Chilean occupation. This occupation has traditionally been seen as an eminently military process, viewed nationalistically. It is not a question of lamenting the misfortunes that every war and every military occupation brings. Also, to paraphrase Lucien Febvre, we should not take it upon ourselves to be deputy judges from the valley of Jehoshaphat when assessing what happened in the war of 1879. On the contrary, as the author herself suggests, the point is to try to understand the nature of the events of the past – in our case, of the occupation – of what historically was a process; or, better yet, as McEvoy aptly describes it: “a machinery.”

In order for this “machinery” to work, a large human contingent was required, which the Chilean state had no qualms about installing in Peru – as Zöllner observed at the time and as is demonstrated in the documentation published by the author. Thus, there was a need for troops to fight what remained of the Peruvian army and the *montoneras*, for judges to apply justice, for gendarmes to maintain order in the towns, for government employees to administer port customs, for engineers to supervise urban sanitation, for telegraph operators to manage – and control – communications,

4 Translation by *Apuntes*.

for “hired pens” (*plumas rentadas*) at the service of ideological propaganda, for typesetters to operate the printing presses, and for priests to cure souls, among many others.

The “machinery” had to operate in the service of the Chilean state but, as the documents reveal, it was not long before it generated conflicts between its representatives and the participants in the occupation over the division of the spoils. Far from the control of their Chilean superiors, some officers engaged in vandalism and looting. The expedition of Lieutenant Coronel Ambrosio Letellier in the central Andes is an example of this. The prospect of quick and easy profits really was tempting in a context of war in which authority was imposed through the fear of arms and the practice of terror.

In addition, the documentation collected in this volume illustrates the difficulties that the civil population experienced in bearing the weight of the war. The imposition of quotas for the maintenance of the Chilean army was an onerous burden for the rich shopkeeper, the professional, or the humble agriculturalist. In Paita, Trujillo, Chimbote, Casma, Lima, Callao, and Ica, many had no choice about whether to accept payment in cash or in kind. But it was not always possible to meet such demands, as is demonstrated by a petition from an agriculturalist in Huarmay to a Chilean official. And in addition to the Chileans, the *montoneras* and the Piérola administration engaged in extortion of the population, on the pretext of punishment for collaborating with the enemy or continuing armed resistance against the invader. In sum, civil society found itself caught between several fires.

McEvoy’s new book, in addition to being a valuable contribution to a better understanding of the occupation of Peru by the Chilean army, notably expands the corpus of documents available about the war of 1879. And it shows us how important it is to access the documentation in Chilean archives; to not be afraid to read it, but rather to contrast it with the output of the Peruvian protagonists of the tragic adventure that was the war of 1879.

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