Students and Society in Early Modern Spain

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Bureaucratic organizations, public and private, have two essential operating requirements: specialized knowledge and a steady supply of manpower equipped with this knowledge. Although bureaucracies of many ages and empires have relied upon institutions of higher learning to supply them with the second of these fundamental needs, far too little is known about the long-range effects of this demand upon the evolution of the educational institutions involved. Nowhere is this more true than in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, an age marked by the emergence of strong, monarchical government as well as growing popular interest in universities and schools. One of the central themes of this book is the concept that these phenomena were closely linked, and, in essence, the book is an attempt to measure the response of Spain's universities to the growth and recruitment policies of the Habsburg state.

Of course, to suppose that "education" responds only to "bureaucracy" is a gross oversimplification of the truth. Educational institutions do far more than supply governments and other bureaucratic organizations with the manpower they require; conversely, governments are not the only ones to demand the expertise in which schools and universities specialize. Nevertheless, it is the contention of this study that the rise of bureaucratic institutions in Spain in the years between 1500 and 1700, and the changes in Spanish society that this occasioned, were the most important and far-reaching influences upon Spanish educational history during that period.

With "bureaucracy" and "education" as the starting points, this survey is not intended to be a "standard" history of education. Works of this nature are generally concerned with the history of curriculum, pedagogy, and scholarship, not to mention the history of the governance of universities and schools. Then, too, they have a special fascination with the educational planks of political parties, the lives and writings of famous teachers, and various projects for academic reform. However important, such topics are not this inquiry's primary concern. Rather, the aim here is to explore changes in the extent, utilization, and role of educational institutions within a society—in this case, Habsburg Spain—and then to assess

3See below, Introduction.
how these changes affected the character of the educational institutions involved.

Castile, the heart of the Spanish monarchy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, provides the setting for this inquiry. Following the rise and fall of the Spanish empire itself, education in Castile went from its own epoch of buoyant expansion and prosperity in the sixteenth century to one of deterioration and collapse in the era that ensued. This story is nothing new; certainly, it is common knowledge among students of Spanish history and literature that Castile in the Siglo de Oro possessed a number of flourishing universities, all of which declined, both in quality and prestige, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, there are already numerous books and articles dealing with the internal history of Castile's schools and universities during this period. So rather than duplicate their findings, this study intends to take up where they often leave off and to set the educational institutions of the Habsburg era within their social context. In short, its aim is to consider these institutions from the perspective of an historian interested especially in the reasons for their spectacular rise and equally spectacular collapse. This approach will not be particularly pleasing to readers who are more interested in the lives of famous teachers like Luis de León or Benito Feijóo than in the matriculation records of a crowd of anonymous students; but this study, on the other hand, is directed primarily to those who are interested in the evolution of Castilian society within the early modern period, and especially in the phenomenon known as the "decline of Spain."

However, there is a paucity of material now available on the history of Castile during the Habsburg era. Studies on the nature and development of cities, population, private wealth, social classes, institutions, and other topics vital to the elaboration of this study are relatively few. And with the background evidence so flimsy, exact answers to questions associated with the history of education in early modern Spain are frequently difficult to obtain. In many instances, no more than crude hypotheses and suggestions are possible, and it is probably best to mention now, at the beginning, the tentative and exploratory nature of this study.

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