

Colonial sugar production in the periphery of Quito, Ecuador in the late 18th century.

An environmental history of provision management

The contribution summarises the results of the PhD project in Environmental History of provision management of a sugarcane hacienda in the Chota-Mira Valley, Ecuador.

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Abstract:

Sugarcane had considerable long-term effects for nature and society wherever it was cultivated in plantations. Its cultivation needed massive interventions in the pre-existing natural conditions, such as creating bush- and treeless areas. This case study of the *Hacienda La Concepción* in the Chota-Mira Valley focuses on the long-term consequences of colonial schemes of sugar cultivation and processing with slave labour on landscape and society.

The Chota-Mira Valley is an inter-Andean valley about 150 km north of Quito and it is different from neighbouring locations. The majority of the inhabitants are black, descendants of slaves brought here from the 17th century onwards. They till irrigated land on plots they call their own since time immemorial. They have very distinct names, speak a particular dialect and have a strong identity as a group. Land use and land ownership in the valley is complex, based on a structure inherited from the time of colonial sugarcane haciendas. The idiosyncrasies of the valley have defied understanding, leading to a host of competing explanatory attempts, none of them having gained wider currency.

Investigation period is the late 18th century after the expulsion and expropriation of the Society of Jesus by the Spanish crown. In this period the former Jesuit estates were administered by the *Junta de Temporalidades*, an administrative body of the Spanish crown, and subsequently sold to private landowners. The written sources are

rich and allow studying the agro-ecological and metabolic consequences of the breakdown of a centralised system of exchange between Jesuit haciendas.

The dissertation studies the agro-ecological and metabolic setting of the sugarcane hacienda La Concepción in the period right after the expulsion of the Jesuits. Sugarcane plantations are conceptualized as socio-metabolic entities within a broader socio-natural network, connecting peripheral places of sugar production with urban centres of colonial Ecuador. The subsistence of the slaves was part of the economy of any sugarcane hacienda and the archival sources allow to reconstruct it. Therefore, the changes can be studied not only on the level of land-owners, but also on the level of slave livelihood and the day-to-day management of sugarcane production. The investigation of the environmental history of one such sugarcane hacienda focuses on re-arrangements of agro-ecosystems and society, studied as co-evolutionary history of social and natural systems.

Key words:

Colonial sugar production, Model of an agro-ecosystem, Social metabolism, Provision management