

ILARIONE DA BERGAMO (ca. 1727–1778)

VIAGGIO AL MESSICO (JOURNEY TO MEXICO) (ca. 1770)

The city of Mexico has more than one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants. Moreover, such is the daily concourse of other people from the city and other surrounding towns that there is a continual ebb and flow of people in the streets and plazas, providing the semblance of a continual fair.

As for the women, it is true that they are very beautiful and of a fine disposition, spirited, pretty, and with considerable rhetorical talent, so that they far surpass our Italian women. But they are ambitious (as in every other country), proud, dainty, and indolent. Many favor the Europeans (who are called *gachupines*), and they more willingly marry them, even though impoverished, than their own compatriots called creoles, even though wealthy. They view them—that is, the creoles—as lovers of mulatto women, from whom they have imbibed bad customs with their milk (1). Consequently, the creole men hate the Europeans.

The women adopt the Spanish style of dress—that is, the ladies as well as the merchant and artisan women who can [afford to]. The rest are attired as their status permits. Because there are different castes of people, each person thus dresses not only on a level with her wealth but also according to her caste. If a woman is an Indian, though wealthy, she dresses in accordance with Indian custom, however opulently; if she is mulatta, according to mulatto custom, etc.

The mulattos are born of whites and blacks and vice versa. The mestizos are those who are born of Spaniards with Indian or creole women and vice versa, so that they have a varied physiognomy. Thus, there are six castes of people in this realm: Europeans, creoles, mulattos, Indians, and blacks.

A few descendants of that emperor [Moctezuma] still survive. When I left Mexico in 1768, a canon of the cathedral, who was a descendant from the direct masculine line of the aforementioned Moctezuma, was still alive. The aforementioned descendants have always enjoyed great privileges, honors, and titles granted by the king of Spain.

I will move on to provide a brief account of popular customs, mainly involving the Indian folk [who] are more industrious and sharpwitted than the creoles because they readily imitate whatever they observe.

Generally speaking, the creoles, Indians, and mestizos, along with mulattos, are sluggards, drunkards, thieves, swindlers, and lechers—and that is also true of the women. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there are people of every status, sex, and condition who are very good Christians, are generally charitable, and give alms. They are cordial, though somewhat averse to foreigners. Though they have an inherent esteem for the Spaniards, they confuse them with other Europeans, whom they all call *gachupines* . . .

Taken from Ilarione da Bergamo, *Daily Life in Colonial Mexico: The Journey of Friar Ilarione da Bergamo, 1761–1768*, trans. William J. Orr (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 85, 88, 91–93, 115–116.