

## Trends in Peruvian historiography

*Review Essay by Michiel Baud*

- *Homenaje a Jorge Basadre. El hombre, su obra y su tiempo*, edited by Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy, Mónica Ricketts Sánchez-Moreno. Lima: Instituto Riva-Agüero, 2005.
- *Memoria y destino del Perú. Jorge Basadre: Textos esenciales*, compiled by Ernesto Yepes del Castillo. Lima: Fondo editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2003.
- *La historia y los historiadores en el Perú*, by Manuel Burga. Lima: Universidad Nacional de San Marcos/Universidad Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, 2005.
- *Más allá de la dominación y la resistencia. Estudios de historia peruana, siglos xvi-xx*, edited by Paulo Drinot y Leo Garofalo. Lima: IEP, 2005.
- *The Plebeian Republic. The Huanta Rebellion and the Making of the Peruvian State, 1820-1850*, by Cecilia Méndez. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005.

Jorge Basadre (1903-1980) is without a doubt the father of modern Peruvian historiography. He wrote a number of fundamental books, the most important of which are arguably *La multitud, la ciudad y el campo del Perú* (1929), *Perú: problema y posibilidad* (1931) and the eleven volumes of *Historia de la República del Perú*. Born in the provincial environment of Tacna, he came to Lima when he was nine years old. In 1919 he entered San Marcos University. Following the university reforms of that same year, he began to work with a group of students who were voluntarily cataloguing archival materials in the archives of the National Library. In the process, he developed a historian’s mind and rapidly integrated into the intellectual circles of Lima. He was Director of the National Library from 1943 and Minister of Education in 1945 and from 1956-58.

Basadre’s continuing importance as an historian is rooted in his erudition and profound knowledge of Peruvian reality. His intellectual inspiration was demonstrative of a great intellectual independence that allowed him to openly admire intellectuals as diverse as Pedro Zulen, José Carlos Mariategui, Francisco García Calderón and José de la Riva-Agüero. The attention he gave to the preservation and analysis of historical documents is symbolic of the transformation of history writing from a general pastime to a professional occupation. But above all he was important because in the first half of the twentieth century he had incorporated in his analysis of Peruvian political history what we call today the ‘subaltern classes’. In this way, he opened new windows for the interpretation of Peruvian history and already anticipated the new social history that would become so important in the 1970s and ’80s.

In 2003 the Lima-based Instituto Riva-Agüero organized an international congress in celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jorge Basadre’s birth. The contributions to this congress have now been published in a book that, as the title conveys, is a *Homenaje a Jorge Basadre*. Despite the inevitable hagiographic tone and the

uneven quality of the essays, the book is a worthy starting point for understanding the problems and possibilities of Peruvian historiography, and greatly complements the anthology that Ernesto Yepes del Castillo assembled in 2003. This anthology brought together important fragments of Basadre's oeuvre and provided a useful and well-published introduction to his ideas, but because the selection of works was somewhat arbitrary, it requires historical contextualization.

In the first place, *Homenaje a Jorge Basadre* demonstrates the variety of occupations and debates in which Basadre was involved. And at the same time it provides an eloquent insight in the position of intellectuals and their work in a Latin American country such as Peru. The interesting contribution of Alfonso Quiroz connects Basadre's not very successful involvement in politics during his two periods as Minister of Education with his merciless analysis of corruption as an endemic problem in Peruvian politics. In this position he confronted in daily reality what he had been describing with such analytical rigour in his historical work. Looking back he observed: '[E]l problema esencial está en que el hombre que vive en el mundo del pensamiento tiene una visión de las cosas que choca con lo terriblemente prosaica que es la vida política' (in Pablo Macera, *Conversaciones con Basadre*, 1979, p. 117). As most intellectuals find out sooner or later, this is not an easy task!

Following the personal reminiscences of the first part, the book is divided in three sections. Not surprisingly, the reader is first presented with Basadre as historian. In ten essays, the different aspects of his historiographical labour are analysed. A number of authors draw attention to his provincial background to explain his unorthodox and in many respects innovative vision on Peruvian society, and especially on the nature of the Peruvian nation-state. Vincent Peloso sees this background as the prime explanation of Basadre's regional perspective that – long before Benedict Anderson – considered the Peruvian nation-state as a project of constant construction and reconstruction. In this same context, Frederica Barclay presents an interesting comparative analysis of Basadre's views on the Amazon region and the southern provinces of the country. In his *Historia de la República* Basadre asked himself why the Amazon provinces had stayed within the realm of the Peruvian state in spite of the federalist rebellion in the 1890s, the havoc created by the Guerra de Pacífico, and the difficult means of communication. As Barclay suggests, this question found its origin in the fate of his home province, which at that time had been occupied by Chilean forces. Despite that situation, the people of Tacna and Arica remained loyal to the Peruvian nation-state. They felt that they belonged to something called Peru, to what Basadre calls 'la patria invisible'. Basadre drew much optimism from the strong nationalism that existed in the southern provinces in spite of decades of foreign occupation.

Only in the latter part of his professional life did Basadre manage to integrate the ethnic question and, more specifically, the position of the indigenous population in his historical analysis. Where he had emphasised the crucial importance of the mestizo in his earlier work, in his writings of the 1950s the role and cultural heritage of the Indians became a recurrent theme. Augusto Ruiz Zevallos even claims that he was more radical in his belief in the Indian population than, for example, José María Arguedas, who saw the Indian population as an obstacle to national unity. In line with his ideas on the Peruvian national identity, Basadre included the indigenous population in his analysis, but he left no place for separatism or ethnic chauvinism. 'Luchemos con todas nuestras fuerzas contra el colonialismo

interno, [pero] no fomentemos los micronacionalismos' (quoted by Ruiz Zevallos, in *Homenaje*, 204).

The rest of the book is divided somewhat arbitrarily in Basadre's political position and the relationship with his intellectual colleagues. Basadre remained first and foremost an intellectual who tried to understand rather than change history. There is no doubt that his opinions had political consequences, and that as a good Latin American intellectual he ventured into the realm of politics, even more, of course, in his ministerial functions. The image that emerges from this book is that of an eminent intellectual who deserves acclaim and continues to make his work relevant for today's generations. He reinstated both a regional and a social dimension into Peruvian history, and in doing so he provided Peruvian history writing with a profoundly democratic element.

Manuel Burga drew attention to another element of Basadre's work in his 1993 essay 'Para qué aprender a historia en el Perú, Basadre's *Historia de la República* was, in his view, the last attempt to cover the entire Peruvian history, 'el último gran esfuerzo por construir una historia nacional' (p. 59). This essay has now been republished with a number of more recent articles in an interesting but not always sufficiently edited book, *La historia y los historiadores en el Perú*. Burga basically looks at the profession of history writing after Basadre by considering the different intellectual and political projects proposed by historians. Doing so provides the reader with a concise but sharp intellectual history of twentieth-century Peru.

In his noteworthy essay, Burga presents a well-argued and passionate plea for a professional Peruvian historiography. In the process he also implicitly presents a provocative agenda for future historians. After Basadre's pioneering work, new forms of history writing emerged. The first wave of Andean ethnohistory that began with the pre-Columbian civilizations switched rapidly to consider the structures and cultural logic of present-day Indian society. Secondly, the agrarian history that developed everywhere in the world in the 1960s received an additional impetus in Peru because of the military government of general Velasco. The government's far-reaching agrarian reforms and the expropriation of large landholdings gave historians the opportunity to rescue and research an abundance of agrarian hacienda archives. A third wave of history writing, strongly influenced by Marxism and associated with the name of Alberto Flores Galindo, gave attention to the subaltern classes. However, within the Peruvian context, it also focussed on the heritage of the Indian cultures in Peru, and especially, on what became known as the 'Andean utopia' (*la utopía andina*).

Within these three waves of history writing, different '*discursos históricos*' can be distinguished which reflect the complex reality of twentieth-century Peru. Many historical tendencies share, in Burga's view, a vision of Peruvian history as a 'lost good' (*bien perdido*) and of missed opportunities reflecting in one way or another the 'failed state' of contemporary Peru. Another continuing element in twentieth-century Peruvian historiography is the role and place of the indigenous population. From the early *indigenista* visions, which were strongly influenced by anthropological thinking, to the recent more *indianista* vision that attempt to re-vindicate indigenous claims, the place of the Indians in the Peruvian nation state has been a recurrent topic. Using the ideas of Flores Galindo, Burga suggests that only by focusing on a popular, indigenous proto-nationalism will it be possible to bring back the 'national' in Peruvian historiography. In a somewhat apocalyptic analysis, Burga sees such a historiographical development as an important (the only?) way

to counter the danger of a demagogic Indianist nationalism and so to avoid the disintegration of Peru as a nation. It is surprising that there is no reference here to Nelson Manrique's now-famous book on *Las guerrillas indígenas en la guerra con Chile* (1981) which, according to Cecilia Méndez (p. 11), has been a 'true milestone' in Peruvian historiography, provoking one of the few significant debates about the 'national question' in contemporary Peruvian historiography.

The other contributions in the book present a number of reflections on the reality of history writing in Peru based on the personal experience of Burga himself. They are sometimes insightful and amusing, sometimes repetitive and somewhat disjointed. All in all they give an interesting overview of the topics and debates in twentieth-century historiography and the relationships between its practitioners. Influenced by discussions in French historiography, Burga and many of his colleagues resorted to the consistent use of historical sources, in this way modernizing history writing in Peru. But they did not keep aloof of the pressing problems of Peruvian society and continued to look for large-scale visions and all-encompassing societal proposals.

Almost as a counterpart to this essayistic tradition, from the 1970s onwards a new kind of history writing emerged in Peru that was more strictly professional and did not pursue direct political or societal objectives. In a way, the historians in this school took up the challenge of historical materialism and the new social history emerging elsewhere. Seeking to write a new subaltern history, they began using new sources and insights that allowed them to understand the social and political structures underpinning Peruvian history. Historians like Luis Miguel Glave, Nelson Manrique, Christiane Hünefeld, José Luis Rénique, Carlos Aguirre and Carlos Contreras, to mention just a few, introduced a new social history. Although they were strongly influenced by the nestors of Peruvian historiography mentioned before, they tried to combine their suggestions with a clear adherence to historical materialism and a critical viewpoint towards the Peruvian state. To find arguments to substantiate their ideas, these historians went back to the historian's skilful work in the archives. They tried to understand the history of the masses and their role in Peru's political and social transformation. In the process and because of the availability of sources, they often returned to analyses on a regional level. In the same period, professional contacts with foreign, most U.S. and French, scholars allowed a more intensive contact with the international academic arena. This led, among other things, to an increasing number of younger scholars acquiring a PhD from foreign universities. Stronger links with the Anglo-Saxon academic world, especially, is starting to change Peruvian historiography. It has introduced new themes, ideas and methodologies into the historical debate and at the same time, has educated a group of younger historians who have lived (part of) their professional life outside Peru.

A number of essays by this new generation of Peruvian historians have now been brought together in the collection *Más allá de la dominación y la resistencia. Estudios de historia peruana, siglos xvi-xx* edited by Paulo Drinot and Leo Garofalo. In their short introduction the editors clearly posit themselves as a generation of young historians who wish to present a new way of looking at Peruvian history. Making use of the ideas and insights they have encountered abroad, they aim to present a different perspective on Peruvian history which, in their view, has been polarized between conservative *hispanista* and critical, subaltern viewpoints. They want to go, as the subtitle says, 'más allá de la dominación y la resistencia'. Their

point of departure is that the professionalized history of the 1980s and '90s has been unable to shed its ideological feathers and has tended to reduce Peruvian history 'a una historia de dominación por parte de elites o de poderes extranjeros y de sus representantes comerciales' (p. 11). Instead, the historians contributing to this book aim at an analytical framework that 'privilegia el análisis del punto de encuentro entre la dominación y la resistencia' (p. 12). They clamour for a more eclectic kind of history that is prepared to use different theoretical and ideological points of departure and innovative sources.

The resulting book is interesting for different reasons, but does not completely fulfil all its ambitions. Its strength lies in a number of well-researched and provocative articles that have succeeded in shaping new visions of Peruvian history. It is impossible to mention all the contributions here, but I was especially impressed by the articles written by Rachel Sarah O'Toole and Leo Garofalo. These articles clearly demonstrate the strength of the new pragmatic history writing that is promised in the introduction. In her fascinating 'Castas y representación en Trujillo colonial', O'Toole looks at ethnic representations in the northern city of Trujillo. Making creative use of judicial documents, she shows how historical subjects tended to play with ethnic categories in colonial society. On different occasions they tended to perform and present themselves differently. When it suited their interests, mestizos performed as Indians and vice versa. In the same vein, mulattos started to identify themselves as a social class when they expected rewards from their recognition by the colonial state. Colonial legislation created its own structures of behaviour and representation. O'Toole stresses that it was not so much a matter of social mobility, but much more a manipulation of the system. Ethnic performance was a continuing and ever-changing negotiation among colonial subjects in the context of changing legislation and state ruling.

Garofalo also looks at the social and ethnic interaction in colonial Peru in his 'La sociabilidad plebeya en las pulperías y tabernas de Lima y Cuzco, 1600-1690'. Closely connected thematically to O'Toole's article, he shows how the rigid differences between classes and ethnic groups suggested by official documents were a myth. The public drinking places as spaces of interaction provided a diverse, complex and dynamic picture of colonial society.

It could be that the distance to the colonial period might allow for more provocative interpretations, but the contributions on the nineteenth century are nevertheless less innovative and appear more mainstream. They provide interesting views on regionalism, the civilizational projects of the state and the agency of the subalterns, but apart from being firmly grounded in documentary research, they are only loosely connected and do not provide a radically new historiographical perspective. What this collection has managed to do, however, is identify a number of new topics and viewpoints. Implicitly, it takes distance from the exclusive and sometimes somewhat obsessive attention to the relationship between the state and the indigenous population that has characterized much of the more recent historiography. It draws attention to the intermediate groups, the mestizos, the poor, labouring whites, the protestant missionaries, and the public employees who tried to find their way in the interface between political projects and daily reality. In the light of this diversity, it is surprising that only one of the contributions, a short article by the Norwegian historian Tanja Christiansen, looks explicitly at the position of women. Women were all but absent in Basadre's work. Although this is no longer the case in modern historiography, it appears that they have not yet captured

a specific place in mainstream historiography (in spite of the interesting note in the article by José Deustua on the significant combination of *indigenismo* and *feminismo* in the work of Clorinda Matto de Turner, *Homenaje*, 391-2).

Most contributions focus on small cases and draw modest conclusions. This may be a result of the Anglo-Saxon emphasis on the historian as a professional, but it may also be a consequence of the stage in which most of the authors find themselves. Whatever the explanation, it is a clear rupture with the broad generalizations and daring interpretations of traditional Peruvian historiography. On the one hand the professional attitude to history is refreshing because it is based on solid documentary research and distances itself from the rhetoric, often unsubstantiated, of traditional historiography. On the other hand, it may be asked to what extent this collection has succeeded in presenting the new perspective on Peruvian history suggested by the editors. The theoretical and empirical consequences of the research presented in this book need further work. Fortunately, these young historians have plenty of time to convince us of the value of their position.

These promises of the new professional history writing are clearly present in the monograph *The Plebeian Republic. The Huanta Rebellion and the Making of the Peruvian State, 1820-1850* by the young Peruvian scholar Cecilia Méndez. She analyses the monarchist movement in Huanta at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Many of the themes treated above are present in her painstaking study that presents a return to a classic theme of national Peruvian history. At the same time it is a repudiation of the nationalist biases in its analysis. It is no coincidence that Méndez articulates the aim of her book in almost the same words as the editors of the book presented above. She writes that the book's aim is 'less to trace a history of 'resistance' than of relationships – asymmetrical, more or less violent, convenient or inevitable – between the emerging republican state and a rural society of the south-central Peruvian Andes' (p. 12). She uses the relatively short-lived rebellion in which Indian peasants, mestizo intermediaries and a number of local hacendados resisted the imposition of republic rule to present a nuanced and sophisticated analysis of regional society within the context of large-scale and sometimes dramatic political changes. Méndez returns to what we may consider classical political history, but she blends it with the insights of the new social history that has drawn attention to popular history. In this way, the book considers classical themes such as the military operations of the War of Independence and the animosity between Simón Bolívar and the Peruvian elites, but, at the same time, analyses Indian leaders who favour a return of the Spanish monarchy and regional processes of social and economic transformation.

The rebellion under the direction of the Indian leader Antonio Huachaca that took place in 1827 was in itself not so important had it not been for its symbolic significance in this period of political turmoil. It demonstrated that the indigenous rural population could act as a historical agent in this kind of liminal threshold. It also questioned the separation between the *castas* and demonstrated that inter-ethnic alliances were forged everywhere in the republican and the monarchist camps. The rebellion was certainly not an exclusively indigenous rebellion; Indians in higher and lower areas of the mountains and with different occupations were divided among themselves. On the other hand, local and regional elites who saw their interests threatened by the Bolivarian laws allied themselves with the movement and tried to maintain (part of) their independence. In addition, there was a confused ideological struggle over what it meant to be in favour of the monarchy.

Méndez argues convincingly that the rebellion was not a backward looking movement, but a movement in which ideas about the future and modern objectives were often couched in monarchist rhetoric. It is also interesting to note that after the failure of the rebellion the leaders, Spaniards, criollos and Indians were not harshly punished; many of the leaders re-emerged later in official positions. This supports the suggestion by Méndez that these struggles were just as much about politics and economic measures as they were about peasant resistance. The rebellion and its constituency demonstrated that the struggle over the Peruvian state and its authority not only took place in the large cities but in the rural context of the sierra as well.

It may be considered symbolic that this review ends with the period of the wars of independence that also so fascinated Jorge Basadre. With this study of Cecilia Méndez, it would appear that Peruvian historiography has come full circle. The political topics that fascinated the first generations of historians and which were replaced by other themes in recent decades have again been placed in the spotlight. Nevertheless, they have been approached with completely new questions and methodologies. Supported by similar tendencies in international historiography and the work of some U.S. historians especially, Peruvian historians seem to be moving towards a new mix of political and social history in which old themes are seen in a new light. Three innovations may be underscored here.

Firstly, political history has included the influence and agency of subaltern classes. It is therefore linked to processes of social and economic change and sees politics and state activity as a result of constant negotiation. It has redirected historical research towards the state and its political and societal projects without ignoring or denying subaltern agency.

Secondly, it has given new importance to regional history. Where the history of the state has become fragmented and multidirectional, a regional and even local perspective has acquired new importance. The work of the new generation of historians reviewed here demonstrates the importance of a vision 'from the periphery' to understand the workings of the Peruvian state.

Thirdly, it is clear that the new political history aims at understanding political processes, without placing it within preconceived ideological frameworks. Basadre's description of himself and his colleagues in the prologue of his *La multitud, la ciudad y el campo*, as having 'una actitud de rebeldía a veces beligerante' was also true for later generations of historians who were strongly influenced by Marxist ideas. They considered the position of intellectuals as being invested with a clear moral responsibility and were intent on having a clear impact on political debates in their country. In contrast, the new generations, often educated abroad, tend to see consider their work more as professional. They are socially and politically engaged, as is clear, for example, from Cecilia Méndez's introduction in which she refers to the assassination of eight journalists in 1983 in the region of her research and the subsequent discussion on the nature of indigenous society. However, they tend to privilege the analytical task of historians over their possible political involvement.

These new insights may have led to a kind of history that has lost some of its urgency and direct societal relevance, but they have also shaped a historical discipline that increasingly allows us to understand Peruvian history in all its complexity and contradictions. In the end, both the essayistic, political and the more professional, empirical kinds of history writing need to come together to forge a historical vision that will underscore the particularities of the historical development in

Peru, but does not exclude comparative perspectives. In this way, this new history writing may help to find solutions for the pressing problems of contemporary Peruvian society.

\* \* \*

**Michiel Baud** is Professor of History and Director of CEDLA.  
<J.M.Baud@cedla.nl>