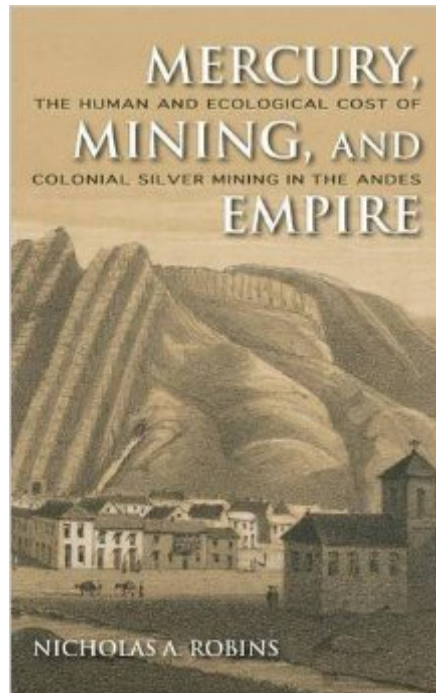


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Mercury, Mining, And Empire: The Human And Ecological Cost Of Colonial Silver Mining In The Andes



Synopsis

On the basis of an examination of the colonial mercury and silver production processes and related labor systems, *Mercury, Mining, and Empire* explores the effects of mercury pollution in colonial Huancavelica, Peru, and Potosí, in present-day Bolivia. The book presents a multifaceted and interwoven tale of what colonial exploitation of indigenous peoples and resources left in its wake. It is a socio-ecological history that explores the toxic interrelationships between mercury and silver production, urban environments, and the people who lived and worked in them. Nicholas A. Robins tells the story of how native peoples in the region were conscripted into the noxious ranks of foot soldiers of proto-globalism, and how their fate, and that of their communities, was—and still is—chained to it.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (4 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

This is a sobering account of the cost of colonial silver mining in the Andes. This includes not only the considerable human cost of near-slavery in the mines themselves, and the toll taken by the processing of mercury for use in the mines, but the large amount of mercury pollution—a sort of gift that keeps on giving even after centuries. Robins estimates that the colonial era left behind 90,000 to 100,000 tons of mercury pollution (another estimate I have seen is 50,000 tons), still affecting people in the Potosi and other areas. The book seems thoroughly researched. Readers should be aware that the book is strongly biased against the Spanish colonial regime. He calls the whole colonial endeavor genocidal. The information is solid, the writing is good, but this is some sobering

material.

Nicholas Robins, the author of *Mercury, Mining, and Empire* is a leading historian of Colonial Latin American history. His present book, based on archival, historical, scientific, and theoretical materials, is a superb study of the Spanish domination in 17-18th century Peru and Bolivia, and of the exploitation of native peoples in the silver mines, which helped to fund Spanish imperialism in other areas of the world. Additionally, the mining process was heavily indebted to the use of mercury to separate silver from rock, and the result was disastrous to the people at the time, but the author shows, continues to afflict those in the areas of the mining even in the 21st century. A work of meticulous historical examination, but one that joins the past with the present, history with the current environment.

An important and well researched book expertly presented. Dr. Robins provides economic, geopolitical, and societal insights in an historical, current, and future commercial contexts useful to anyone interested or working in the Andean region. Tom Blinten Managing Partner and CEO PanaMax Capital

Somewhat difficult to follow at times but excellent information. I highly recommend it to someone interested in this subject.

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