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Obituary of David Ringrose (1938-2020)

Pamela Radcliff

pradcliff@uscd.edu

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David Ringrose
(1938-2020)

David R. Ringrose, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California San Diego, died on September 10th, 2020 at the age of 82. Ringrose was an internationally renowned historian of Spanish and European economic history. He received his Bachelor's degree from Carleton College in 1960, where he met his wife Kathy of 59 years, and went on to get his MA and Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin in 1966 with the distinguished economic historian Rondo Cameron. David spent the first decade of his career at Rutgers University (1965-74), where Kathy earned her Ph.D. in Byzantine history. In 1974, David was recruited to come to the University of California at San Diego, still a young department that was looking to build a serious research and graduate training profile. He was hired along with H. Stuart Hughes and Judith Hughes from Harvard, as part of a cohort of scholars from research institutions. The first generation of department faculty, who had come from small liberal arts colleges, established a strong undergraduate teaching foundation, while Ringrose and his cohort focused on establishing a competitive graduate program in European and Spanish history. David started to train students in both early modern and modern Spanish history, and was instrumental in recruiting a second modern Spanish historian to replace Gabriel Jackson, the modern Hispanist who retired in 1982. David and Pamela Radcliff, who joined the department in 1990, continued to build the Spanish history graduate program until his retirement in 2008. His program-building legacy lives on in the continuing reputation of UC San Diego as a center for Spanish historical research and training.

More broadly, David had a distinguished and generous service record at UC San Diego, which included a term as chair of the History department (1980-84), stints as Provost of ERC College (1993-4) and as Dean of Arts and Humanities (1989), and a long term leadership position in the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies (1978-93). It is worth noting that he also served as Faculty Coordinator for the two year "Making of the Modern World" (MMW) general education sequence in its initial ambitious development stage (1991-1995), when faculty across disciplines came together to create what was then a vanguard global studies curriculum.

David's commitment to the institutions that support the academic mission extended beyond his own department and university. He and Kathy continued as active alumni of Carleton College, including co-chairing the fundraising committee for their 50th college reunion. He also had an ongoing substantive commitment to the Society for Spanish and Portuguese Studies (SSPHS), now the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Studies (ASPHS). He twice served as the Association's President (or General Secretary as it was then called) (1973-75, 2003-5) and hosted two memorable annual conferences at UCSD. The first (1999) included a reception at the spectacular Scripps Aquarium, and the most recent (2016) was held at the San Diego Maritime Museum, with sessions held on the museum's ships. Since his retirement, David had volunteered as a docent for over a decade at the Maritime Museum, and was recognized with the honorific

appointment of Chair of Maritime History at the Museum in 2017. In addition to hosting the conferences, David, together with Helen Nader at the University of Arizona, initiated another project in 1996 for Spanish historians to share their work, the Southwestern Symposium for Spanish history. The Symposium operated on a workshop format, and has been especially valuable for graduate students to get substantive feedback on work in progress. The Symposium not only continues at UC San Diego but also served as a model for other “regional meetings” which are now supported by the ASPHS.

What is remarkable is that David combined this deep sense of service to the university and the profession with a stellar and prolific scholarly record and reputation. Thus, David was first and foremost an internationally-respected scholar of Early Modern/Modern Spain, and more broadly, of the early modern/modern capitalist economy. He published dozens of articles and four major monographs, in both English and Spanish language editions. He was one of the few Spanish historians in the field whose work crossed the modern/early modern divide, with a concentration on the origins and development of economic transformation in the 18th and 19th centuries. David was also on the cutting edge of global history, writing a textbook published in 2000 that grew out of his MMW teaching, *Expansion and Global Interaction, 1200-1700*, and showcased in his final monumental project, *Europeans Abroad, 1450-1750*, published in 2018, a decade after he retired.

His major works on the Spanish economy explored how Spain fit into the larger European and global patterns. At the start of his career, he faced an established paradigm that contrasted successful and normative “European modernization” with Spanish failure to launch, and in which all of the questions were devoted to explaining that failure. Several decades and books later, Ringrose’s body of scholarship had challenged that paradigm and he had become a major revisionist figure in the field of Spanish history. Challenging an economic interpretation epitomized by Jordi Nadal in his influential 1975 book, *The Failure of the Industrial Revolution in Spain, 1814-1913*, Ringrose’s long term analysis argued for a continuum of gradual growth that culminated with the so-called “economic miracle” of the 1960s. While scholars had been questioning the “failure” framework that had isolated modern Spanish history from the rest of Europe, Ringrose’s book marked a definitive break with that model and set out the parameters of a new interpretive framework based on comparisons with the rest of Europe along a spectrum.

At the same time that his work broke down the binary opposition between failed Spain and successful Europe, it also problematized the unit of the “nation” in economic history before the 20th century. Instead he created a framework that treated social and economic regional networks rather than nations as the core units of analysis. Beginning with his first book on the humble carters who transported goods across inadequate roads in 18th century Spain, *Transportation and Economic Stagnation in Spain, 1750-1850* (1970), Ringrose developed his long-term interest in economic and social networks and how they functioned on the ground. His next book, *Madrid and the Spanish Economy, 1560-1850* (1983), is one of the classic studies of how such networks intersected to produce the

economic and social development of an early modern city, a framework which was then taken up by his student Jesus Cruz, in his study of elite familial networks in Madrid. In *Spain, Europe and the "Spanish Miracle", 1700-1900* (1996), David identifies four different regional trading networks in the Iberian Peninsula, a framework that undermines any unified narrative of a "Spanish economy." His final book, *Europeans Abroad, 1450-1750* (2019), has taken the study of networks to yet another level, by studying Europeans in the world as they cross national political boundaries. In an era where international, comparative and global history has become fashionable, David's work has always used economic structures as a way to transcend national boundaries, while never losing sense of the nuts and bolts way that things work on the ground.

Ringrose's first book, *Transportation and Economic Stagnation in Spain, 1750-1850*, began with the question of why the Spanish economy was slow to modernize by focusing on the crucial transportation system in the late 18th century. Given the lack of navigable waterways, the mountain ranges and sparsely populated interior, the carting system faced significant challenges in adapting to economic change at a time when state policy reforms and rising productivity encouraged the construction of a national market. The combination of environmental factors and the rigidity of the traditional carting system turned transportation into one of the key factors leading to stagnation, Ringrose argued. The book began to explore some of the major themes of his later work, including the growing gap between a coastal and an interior regional economic network dominated by the huge consuming capacity of Madrid.

Madrid and the Spanish Economy, 1560-1850 provided answers to three major historiographical questions: when, why, and how the early modern prosperous Castilian economy entered into a process of decline, the role of Madrid in that cycle of decline, and the impact of this development on the whole Spanish economy. Ringrose argued that Castilian decline was mainly caused by the political decision of transforming Madrid into an imperial capital. As Madrid grew artificially during the seventeenth century it provoked a disruption in the well-off and long-established market networks of Castilian urban centers. The book provided the first comprehensive study of early modern Madrid with new data to understand its economic and social structures. It was also methodologically innovative because it introduced the model of urban economic networks to explain the shift from an inland to a coastal economy in early modern Spain.

Spain, Europe, and the "Spanish Miracle," 1700-1900 built on the regional network approach of Ringrose's earlier book to offer a sweeping and, at the time, provocative interpretation of Spain's economic history. Bridging the habitual chasm between the 18th and 19th centuries imposed by political history, he examined four networks based on cities in very different parts of the country: Bilbao in the north, Seville in the south, Barcelona in the east, and Madrid in the center. Arguing that Spain experienced fundamental continuities across two centuries that generated steady, long-term economic growth, the book was a head-on challenge to the prevailing vision of Spanish failure and led the way towards the new interpretative paradigm that would displace it.

Ringrose's last book, *Europeans Abroad, 1450–1750*, challenges traditional notions of the role that Europeans played in world history. The cultural baggage that Europeans carried with them and their reception abroad shape the central arguments of the book. Regardless of nationality, kinship and commercial networks formed the core of their identity and loyalty, enabling them to understand and often merge with similar networks abroad. Far from leading an inexorable march toward world domination, however, Europeans abroad were always outnumbered and vulnerable. Though Spaniards were able to defeat the existing empires in the Americas, elsewhere the picture was far different. In Africa and the various parts of Asia, Europeans survived and prospered by working with local elites and by tapping into local commercial and social networks. Similar patterns characterized North America. Linking the emerging world economy together was the silver mined in New Spain and Peru, which spread globally through trade by land and sea. Based on deep and broad reading and a sophisticated understanding of world history, *Europeans Abroad* demonstrates David's range and endless curiosity as a scholar.

In addition to being a respected and productive scholar and colleague, David Ringrose was an exceptional mentor of graduate students. He was a generous and expert resource for all of his graduate students and his extraordinary library of Spanish history was open to them. He was a patient and sensitive listener and teacher, modeling the behaviors he hoped his graduate students would employ when they earned their academic appointments. He was a careful and sharp-eyed editor of his graduate students' writings, which invariably improved their prose. Many a Ringrose-student dissertation was markedly better owing to his input. David Ringrose was a keen observer of human behavior such that he always applied the right touch, whether that was a gentle nudge or a more forceful shove, to help get that student through their graduate studies. His mentorship was indispensable to a great many of his students who owe a good portion of their career success to his tutelage.

David's wife Kathryn survives him, as do his three siblings Donald, Margaret and John; his sons Daniel and Robert; daughters-in-law Kathy and Megan; and three grandchildren, Alexander, Celia, and Susan.

Pamela Radcliff
University of California, San Diego