KORPUS 21, VOL. I, NÚM. 3, 2021, 395-418
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.22136/korpus21202142

BETWEEN BUSTAMANTE AND BURKE:

LUCAS ALAMÁN'S HISTORICAL PROJECT

ENTRE BUSTAMANTE Y BURKE:

EL PROYECTO HISTÓRICO DE LUCAS ALAMÁN

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Abstract

The article explores the influences of Carlos María de Bustamante's Cuadro histórico *and Edmund Burke's* Reflections on the Revolution in France *on Lucas Alamán's views on the writing of history and on the process of Mexican independence in his magisterial* Historia de Méjico *(1849-1852). Alamán thought that independence was inevitable and appropriate for Mexico, but that the violence of the decade-long insurgency had been the wrong way to achieve it. He critiqued Bustamante at length for his errors and myth-making, and echoed Burke in condemning theoretical political innovations and the socially and politically destructive effects of revolution.*

Keywords: *Lucas Alamán, Carlos María de Bustamante, Edmund Burke, revolution, Mexico's Independence.*

Resumen

Este artículo explora las influencias del *Cuadro Histórico* de Carlos María de Bustamante y *Reflexiones sobre la Revolución en Francia* de Edmund Burke en Lucas Alamán al escribir sobre el proceso de la Independencia de México en *Historia de Méjico (1849-1852)*. Alamán creyó que la independencia era inevitable y apropiada, pero la violencia durante una década de la insurgencia había sido el camino equivocado para lograrla. Criticó a Bustamante por sus errores y por forjar mitos, y estuvo de acuerdo con Burke al condenar las innovaciones políticas teóricas y los efectos sociales y políticos destructivos como consecuencia de la revolución.

Palabras clave: Lucas Alamán, Carlos María de Bustamante, Edmund Burke, Revolución, Independencia de México.

Lucas Alamán's *Historia de Méjico*: An Introduction

Among the first tasks Lucas Alamán had to perform after he entered the government of the Supremo Poder Ejecutivo as minister of interior and exterior relations in April 1823, following the fall of Agustín de Iturbide, was to arrange for the departure of the ex-emperor and his family from Mexico (May 11, 1823). His role in sending the living former emperor on his way was curiously symmetrical with his equally central role during the summer in removing from scattered locations to the capital the mortal remains of several Independence heroes. Most of the *proceres'* bones were in Guanajuato. Here the severed heads of Father Miguel Hidalgo, Ignacio Allende, Juan Aldama, and Mariano Jiménez had been displayed for a decade in metal cages on the four corners of Guanajuato's Alhóndiga de Granaditas after their trials and execution in Chihuahua in the spring of 1811 (Alamán, 1968: 264).[1] Along with the remains of Pedro Moreno and Javier Mina, the skulls of the independence heroes would be sent to Mexico City to be ceremoniously interred with high public honors in the cathedral. Alamán monitored the process closely at every step along the way, starting with the authorization on August 28 of government funds to construct a *carro fúnebre* to bear the patriotic relics from their resting places to the capital in a stately cortège. On August 31 the skulls of Hidalgo, Allende, Aldama, and Jiménez were exhumed from the cemetery at the church of San Sebastián in Guanajuato, where they had been buried after their removal from the Alhóndiga. The headless skeleton of Pedro Moreno was brought to the great mining city from the Hacienda de la Tlachiquera to be reunited with his skull, brought from Lagos, and the intact remains of Mina arrived from their place of interment in a church in Pénjamo. All the bones were put into an urn together, in which confused state they remain today in glass display cases after their removal in 1925 from the cathedral to the Independence monument on the Paseo de la Reforma.

A route to Mexico City was carefully planned out, leading from Guanajuato to San Miguel (later San Miguel de Allende), Querétaro, San Juan del Río, Cuauhtitlán, and the Villa de Guadalupe, with other stops along the way. The *carro* left Guanajuato with its escort on September 1 and arrived in Mexico City two weeks later, the *ayuntamientos* of the towns along the route offering appropriate demonstrations of patriotic fervor. The military commandant of Querétaro, for example, described in a letter to Minister Alamán the solemn reception of the convoy when it passed through the city as a mixture of ceremonial pomp, religious observance, and military motifs: the bell ringing, the morning mass the day following the arrival of the cortège, and the deployment of cannon in the central plaza. During these same days Alamán informed the Congress of the plan to disinter and transfer to the capital the remains of Miguel Bravo, the father of Nicolás Bravo, buried in 1814. In this case, however, when the paving of the church where the elder Bravo had been buried was renewed, all the cadavers unearthed had been mixed together, making identification impossible and ceremonial re-burial in the Mexico City cathedral out of the question. One can only imagine what the minister of relations and future historian must have thought about all this, especially in view of the strongly negative opinion he would later express in his writings about the 1810 insurgency as a whole, and about Father Miguel Hidalgo's role in particular. There is some irony in the fact

1 Alamán's father, Juan Vicente Alamán, was a member of the Guanajuato city council in the 1790s while Juan Antonio de Riaño was intendant of the silver city, and the families were friendly in Lucas Alamán's youth. Juan Vicente supported the intendant's 1793 proposal to construct a municipal "ever-normal" granary, the Alhóndiga (not actually built until the end of the decade), to modulate the price of maize and supply this cereal of prime necessity during times of dearth. But he objected to Riaño's proposals to lend the building some architectural distinction, suggesting that the funds might be better applied to more pressing needs, such as road building, rather than to erecting a "palacio de maíz". Intendant Riaño would be killed in September 1810 defending unsuccessfully the building, and the people and treasure gathered within the fortified structure, against the besieging forces of Father Hidalgo's insurgency. Hidalgo was also a family friend.

that the barely thirty-year-old minister's key role in initiating the national mythology by facilitating the apotheosis of insurgents into icons gave way to the middle-aged writer's famously strong condemnation not of independence from Spain as such, but of the process by which it had been achieved. On the other hand, in the early 1820s his attitudes had not yet hardened into the obdurately critical position toward the process of Independence he was later to adopt. He was also a sophisticated political realist even at this early point in his public career and may well have realized that the young, politically unstable republic was in need of icons to forge its people into a nation, a goal that he thought had still not been achieved by mid-century (Van Young, 2021: 152-153).[2]

On October 23 1846, twenty-three years after these events, Alamán began writing his magisterial *Historia de Méjico* (5 vols., 1849-1852). Almost six months had passed since the outbreak of armed hostilities between Mexico and the United States on April 25, 1846 in an unprovoked war of aggression launched by the American president James K. Polk (1795-1849), a war in which the northern half of Mexico's national territory was seized by the victors. Although the project was conceived earlier, the timing of the writing in relation to the outbreak of the war conveys the unmistakable impression that the author of the *Historia* was urged forward by his desire to explain how the political instability of the quarter-century following independence had put Mexico in such a vulnerable political and military position. By the time he started writing Alamán would already have learned of the American army's victories at Palo Alto (May 8) and Resaca de la Palma (May 9), the occupation of Matamoros (May 18), and the battles of Yerba Buena (July 10) and Monterrey (September 21-23).

The *Historia* (in these pages generally *HdeM*) is a profoundly intelligent, stylistically brilliant, densely documented, profusely detailed, and (at points) deeply analytical account of the country's independence struggle, and *ipso facto* of its larger history. The narrative of the insurgency is book-ended by an extended prolegomenon on the colonial era in the first volume and a long concluding section on the period between 1821 and mid-century in the fifth. It is arguably the most distinguished work among the rich historiographical productions of the nineteenth century in Mexico, up to and including the great high-Porfirian synthesis of the country's history edited by Vicente Riva Palacio, *México a través de los siglos* (1887-1889) (Riva Palacio *et al*., 1988). The object of this article is less to look at the substance of the *HdeM* as an empirical and interpretive depiction of the independence movement, although some attention to its substantive content is necessary along the way, than as an intellectual project, a work of self-expression, and a political statement. Equally important, the article aims to explore some of the resonances of Alamán's great work with other important histories of Atlantic political upheavals during what has come to be called "the Age of Revolution", those of Carlos María de Bustamante on the Mexican insurgency, and of Edmund Burke on the French Revolution of 1789. The *Historia* was a project in which the trajectory of Alamán's own life and his general beliefs about how history should be written converged. His desire to understand Mexico's past spurred him to a strongly conservative critique of how New Spain had cast off its colonial bonds, if not its colonial heritage, and of how independent Mexico was being formed. As in the work of other major writers of the early republican period, all of whom had had public political careers, Alamán was laboring to shape the country's future as well to understand its past. Historical writing of the early republican decades was as much about what was to come as it was about what had already happened, its object the shaping of a burgeoning natio-

2 BLAC (Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin), Hernández y Dávalos Papers (BLAC-HyD), 16-6.3425-3433, 28 August-1 September 1823; AGN-GSS (Archivo General de la Nación, Gobernación sin Sección), leg. 45, exp. 10, Alamán, Mexico City, to congressional secretaries, 29 August 1823.

nal consciousness. Lucas Alamán offered no prognostications for the country's future although he did suggest some political reforms. The writing of history at this time was therefore a profoundly political activity. As the American scholar Joanne Freeman has written of early post-revolutionary historical writing in the young United States:

> One man's history was another man's partisan diatribe, an accusation that reverberated throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, a period of prolific history writing [...] At the outset of the nineteenth century, the politically minded came to a common realization: a history of the nation's founding had yet to be written [...] History was politics (Freeman, 2001: 277).

Yet behind the political context, as I have noted, there was an organic relationship between Lucas Alamán's life and this massive historical work. A connection like this exists in greater or lesser degree in most forms of writing whether imaginative or "fact-based," no matter the claims of distance or objectivity an author may make. But in Alamán's case the relationship of writing to life is particularly strong: the *HdeM* even has overtones of autobiography, as does his earlier *Disertaciones sobre la historia de la República Megicana* (Alamán, 1942). The *HdeM* is somewhat melancholy in overall tone, reflecting not only his view of the very story he set out to tell, but also its author's personality. The narrative arc of the *Historia* can be seen to follow Alamán's own life-course. The story moved, roughly, from early promise to decline–in his case from a promising youth and early manhood to the failure, or abandonment by subsequent governments, of most of the policies he espoused while in a public role, and the decline of his personal fortune through unsuccessful investments, until his brief return to power in the last Santa Anna administration in 1853 and his death only about six weeks later. This trajectory tracked the country's history from the heady optimism of the early 1820s to near state failure and potential dissolution in the Mexican-American War. In the final volume of the *HdeM* in 1852, Alamán himself offered a gloomy assessment of the state to which Mexico had come:

> In seeing in so few years the immense loss of territory; the ruin of public finances [...] the annihilation of a flourishing and valiant army [...] and above all the complete extinction of public spirit, which has brought with it the disappearance of all idea of a national character; and finding in Mexico no Mexicans, contemplating a nation that has arrived from infancy to decrepitude without enjoying more than a glimmer of the happiness of youth, nor given any other signs of life than violent convulsions, it would seem that we have reason to recognize with the great Bolívar that Independence has been purchased at the cost of everything Spanish America possesses [...] These dreadful outcomes have given reason to discuss if Independence has been a good or an evil (Alamán, 1942, 5: 556ff).

In tracing Lucas Alamán's path to this somber and eloquent statement it is useful to see the *Historia* as the most powerful part of a larger historical and political project, and to consider some of the influences that shaped his work. Two of the most important among these influences have already been mentioned and are discussed below: the writings of his somewhat older Mexican contemporary Bustamante, and those of the Irish writer and parliamentarian Edmund Burke on the French Revolution. The literary and intellectual influence by one writer on another is often very difficult to discern with any certainty, but in Lucas Alamán's case we have explicit acknowledgment on his part of both authors' presence in his thinking.

Alamán's Historical Project: The Disertaciones

The *Historia de Méjico* has generally overshadowed Alamán's other, preceding great work, the *Disertaciones sobre la historia de la República Megicana* (1844-1849) (in these pages generally *DHM*). Much of what he

wrote in the *Disertaciones* about the conquest of Mexico has been supplanted by later works. These days it is very little consulted by historians (or anyone else, as far as I can tell) except for some details about the early urban geography of Mexico City and a few other matters, or as a literary artifact for those interested in its author. Although there are a number of other themes treated in its ten chapters, including a last chapter on the history of Spain itself and its reigning dynasties, the *Disertaciones* chiefly provided a platform, especially in its early chapters, to extoll the virtues, talents, and accomplishments of Fernando Cortés; he is certainly the central personality. The Conqueror's descendant, the Duque de Terranova y Monteleone and Marqués del Valle, a Neapolitan nobleman who lived in Palermo, Sicily and never set foot in Mexico, employed Alamán for three decades in the administration of his substantial properties in Mexico, so despite the historian's genuine, adulatory admiration for Cortés, the encomia he heaped on Cortés could hardly have hurt his standing with the Duque.[3] If he could not restore Mexico to the Spanish Empire in the early republican period (which was never his intention despite what his detractors said at the time and since), Alamán could at least attempt to influence positively his countrymen's attitude toward Spanish rule by researching the history of the colonial period, writing cogently and accessibly about it, and publicizing as widely as possible the beneficent aspects of imperial dominion over Mexico. As the author himself insisted, this three-volume work, and the five-volume *HdeM* whose first volume in print overlapped with the *Disertaciones* by at least several months, should be understood not as separate works but as the first and second parts of a running history of the country from its colonial origins into the early 1850's. Although there are a number of significant differences in substance, approach, tone, and writing style between the two works, the lines of continuity are quite clear, and in fact the *Disertaciones* can be seen as an extended prolegomenon to the *Historia.* Alamán wrote as much in the prefatory remarks to the third volume of the *Disertaciones*:

> This work [i.e., the planned *HdeM*] will be the complement of the *Disertaciones*, or rather, these [the *Disertaciones*] are the introduction to that [the *Historia*]. Since the object of [the *Disertaciones*] is to make known the way in which the crown of Spain acquired dominion over these lands and how it exercised it, [the *Historia*] will show the ways in which [that dominion] was lost (Plasencia de la Parra, 1997: 316).

In addition to its inherent value as the product of deep research and historical thinking (although I cannot explore that aspect here for lack of space), the *DHM* warrants attention because of what it represents as a project laying the foundations for their author's conservative interventions in the history writing of his time, and because of their biographical significance in the trajectory of Lucas Alamán's life.

The written essays published as the *Disertaciones* were originally given as a series of lectures at the Ateneo, a circle of literary men, intellectuals, and prominent political figures established at the end of 1840 by Ángel Calderón de la Barca, the first Spanish minister to Mexico and husband of the more famous Fanny Calderón de la Barca. Espousing a mission to further the sciences and the arts through discussion and outreach, the Ateneo was modeled on a similar group in Madrid and met periodically in the capital for discussions of a scholarly nature.[4] Exactly when Alamán decided to write the lectu-

3 Working for a modest salary and on commissions for the sale of properties, Alamán exercised the Duque's power of attorney in Mexico for nearly thirty years. He administered the Hospital de Jesús in Mexico City, managed or liquidated the huge property holdings Terranova had inherited from the estate of Cortés (including the lucrative sugar-producing Hacienda de Atlacomulco in Morelos), and defended the estate against periodic seizures by the Mexican government during the early Republic. On this relationship see Van Young (2021: 307-351) and Soto Estrada (2015).

4 The Ateneo did not survive the North American invasion, but was revived by Vicente Riva Palacio under a slightly different name in the early 1880s. On the history of the Ateneo see Perales Ojeda (1957).

res is hard to determine: it may have been in the first months of 1844, during 1843, or perhaps even earlier. In the opening pages of the published work he wrote that the lectures/essays were the fruit of study "during a large part of my life," and that "during [my] most anguished moments" their writing had proved a welcome distraction. This hints that he had been working on the essays for some years, perhaps even as early as his internal exile in Mexico City during the fifteen months April 1833 to July 1834, following the fall of the Anastasio Bustamante government (1830-1832), in which Alamán had been chief minister. He went into hiding to evade criminal prosecution by a special congressional tribunal on a number of charges arising from his ministry under Bustamante, principally that he had been joint author with war minister José Antonio Facio of the judicial murder of President Vicente Guerrero in February 1831 during the Guerra del Sur. During this period of internal exile he produced a short book brilliantly defending himself against the charges, as well as the "Memorias de D. Lucas Alamán" that after about fifteen years mutated into the *Historia de Méjico* that we know today (Alamán, 1942, 1: 3). [5] His faltering economic position may have had something to do with the writing and publishing of the *Disertaciones*, from which he might expect to derive some income from sales, although this is admittedly speculative. Since the early 1840s he had been saddled with considerable debt, and his enormous textile factory at Cocolapan, near Orizaba, in which he had invested other people's money and his own high hopes for wealth, was crashing into bankruptcy around this time. Furthermore, most of the Duque de Terranova y Monteleone's urban properties had been liquidated earlier, foreclosing the possibilities for significant commissions on sales for his *apoderado*. But as always with Alamán, the major motives for his writing of the *DHM* and *HdeM* were intellectual and ideological. He simply had something to say about the history of Mexico, and about how the country had arrived where it was, and wanted to be heard. He also felt that his writing could generate respect for the preservation of historical documentation, sources that "are being lost, and disappear every day…The archives of the Audiencia and of the Acordada, for the most part, were sold as scrap paper," he wrote, "and the [archive] of the house of the Duke of Terranova was at the same risk". The preservation of all these old documents would be "a useful and honorable thing… for the nation" (Alamán, 1942, 2: 150, and note 7 on same page).

In a prospectus for the lectures of early 1844, Alamán wrote:

> Persuaded of the necessity to promote the study of our national history from the epoch of the conquest until our days, now that this material can be treated freely [and] with impartiality, considering it from a philosophical point of view, [and] combatting the errors and preoccupations caused by the lack of knowledge and the passions excited by circumstances that happily have entirely passed away, I propose to the Ateneo to make ten lectures (Plasencia, 1997:307-348). [6]

The proposal for the original ten lectures included topics such as a general consideration of the moral, political, and economic

5 "Defensa del ex ministro de relaciones don Lucas Alamán: En la causa formada contra él y contra los ex ministros de Guerra y Justicia del vicepresidente don Anastasio Bustamante, con unas noticias preliminarias que dan idea del origen de ésta", May 1834 (Alamán, 2006: 47-193); and "Memorias de D. Lucas Alamán, Ministro de Relaciones exteriores e interiores en diversas épocas: En las que se contiene la verdadera historia de esta República desde el año de 1808 en que comenzaron las inquietudes que condujeron a su independencia hasta el año de 1843," unfinished and unpublished ms. in Centro de Estudios de Historia de México Carso (formerly Condumex) (CEHMC). Alamán had begun the *Memorias* as a highly personal account of his family's history and some of his own life, revisited it from time to time in subsequent years, and then finally used some of the material for what became the much grander, more ambitious *HdeM* in the late 1840s and early 1850s. The entire episode of the Guerra del Sur, Guerrero's execution, Alamán's prosecution in absentia, and his eventual absolution is treated in detail in Van Young (2021: 465-521). It is worth mentioning that in his very good, quite sympathetic biography of Alamán, José Valadés also used the unpublished *Memorias* to good effect; Valadés (1977). If Alamán did start writing the essays of the *DHM* at this time, or at least outlining them, along with the other two works, it is all the more remarkable since he did not have his very large personal library at hand.

6 Quoted from another edition of the *Disertaciones*.

consequences of the conquest of Mexico; the establishment of the Spanish government; the implantation of Christianity and the extirpation of idolatry among the Indigenous people; the life of Fernando Cortés; the history of the Desagüe of Huehuetoca; the construction of early Mexico City; and a few other themes. A tenth lecture would explore the state of Mexico at the start of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, the sequestration of the Bourbons by the French emperor, and "the causes that drove the independence [movement], what held it back, and what definitively decided it." This last lecture was dropped entirely only to materialize later as his five-volume *Historia de Méjico.* Some other proposed chapters were shed, as well, and the essay on the life of Fernando Cortés expanded into three chapters, the third of which dealt in considerable detail with Cortés's business ventures and family foundations. The first lecture was delivered to the Ateneo on April 9, 1844. The first volume in the printed version of the *DHM*, in which the individual essays were considerably longer than the lectures at the Ateneo, appeared in print in 1844 and sold well; Alamán kept elaborating them into 1848, overlapping with his initial work on the *HdeM.*

Aside from the fact that the *Disertaciones* is clearly the first installment of a larger historical project that Alamán never finished, and is historically, structurally, and chronologically antecedent to the *HdeM*, one of its most interesting aspects is the author's relationship to his chief protagonist, Fernando Cortés. Despite the differences in background, character, life circumstances, and historical context between the two men, it is quite apparent that Alamán identified strongly with Cortés. The author of the *DHM* certainly was no charismatic swashbuckler, but he thought of himself as a decisive man of action in politics, sturdy in the face of adversity, smarter than most of the people around him, and Machiavellian when it was required of him–all of which he was. And although he never explicitly drew the comparison, the other great figure in his historical writings, Father Miguel Hidalgo in the later *HdeM*, may consciously or unconsciously have served him as the model of an anti-Cortés: a confused, indecisive, bumbling egg-head who stumbled into a bloody civil conflict out of naiveté, almost single-handedly bringing down the civilization whose seeds the Conqueror had sown three centuries before.

Alamán used his account of the conquest of Mexico, and especially of Cortés, as a thin disguise for the expression of his own political opinions and personal disappointments, thus violating his own oft-repeated strictures about sticking exclusively to the facts in the writing of history (on which more below). In alluding briefly to a number of Cortés's less than successful business ventures, for example, it is plausible to understand his assessment of the Conqueror's affairs as related to himself and his own reverses with silver mining in the late 1820s and later, with farming on his Celaya hacienda in the 1820s and 1830s, and in the textile industry in the late 1830s and early 1840s.[7] In commenting on one of Cortés's business failures, Alamán editorialized regarding the remark of a business agent of the Conqueror's that "your Lordship was not born to be a merchant":

> Certain it is that the greatest talents cannot do everything, and that he who has proceeded with admirable success in the most arduous human doings does not because of this [necessarily] move with equal good fortune in [affairs] that seem within the reach of ordinary men (Alamán, 1942, 2: 61).

Or again, provoked by the melancholic sight of the ruined Cortés palace in Cuernavaca, partially reduced to rubble (*escombros*) in his day, the author commented on some of the reversals Cortés had suffered after the mid-1520s or so:

> In the fate of men it is almost always to be observed that when someone rises to have some extraordinary success, afterwards everything

7 On all of these activities, none of which brought Alamán the wealth to which he aspired, see Van Young (2021: 255-306, 521-551 and *passim*).

> is adverse [to him], and the same Fortune that elevated him appears to take pleasure in beating him down with repeated reverses, as if Fortune had exhausted its own power or had grown tired of favoring him [...] The fate of great men is typically that during their lives they are targets of criticism and slander, because the ills they have been able to cause are more in view than the benefits owed to them. But death and the passage of time makes us forget the former, leaving vivid the remembrance of the latter, of which we have notable recent examples (Alamán, 1942, 2: 61, 33-35, 53).

Alamán would often express this sentiment of being unappreciated, unrewarded, and even reviled by the countrymen for whom he felt he had done so much, a historical destiny he very much associated with Fernando Cortés. In an undated letter published as an appendix to the *Diccionario Universal de Geografía e Historia* (Orozco y Berra, 1855) and inserted in the first volume of the 1942 edition of the *Disertaciones* by Editorial Jus, Alamán wrote of his election as a corresponding member of the Spanish Academia de Historia:

> Because my countrymen have kept me at a certain distance from everything here that may be called public distinctions, everything [of that nature] coming to me [from Spain] is all the more flattering from a country I still view as my own, since my Navarrese and La Manchan origins do not permit me to forget it (Alamán, 1942, 1: xviii).

Intimately related to Alamán's strong subtextual identification with Cortés, and his redemptive project of rehabilitating the Conqueror, was his use of the *Disertaciones* as a platform for the discussion of his own time, most especially the reverberations of the Mexican independence movement. What he quite clearly intended, as I have noted, was to write a complete history of his *patria*. After finishing the ten essays of the *DHM* he felt he needed to go back and fill in some gaps with essays he had planned but left aside, such as the history of the Desagüe, the Mexico City cathedral, and the Inquisition. He also intended to produce a much more detailed history of the colonial period but never got to it. The *DHM* took the story up to about 1550, and only the first hundred pages or so of the *HdeM* were devoted to a pointed but schematic discussion of the colonial era. A return to a much more thorough treatment of the three decades following the fall of Agustín de Iturbide may also have been on his mind, since in the final volume of the *HdeM* he devoted only 150 pages to them, skipping almost entirely over critical stretches of history such as the story of Texas and the Texas revolution.[8] But as he produced the final volumes of the *HdeM* he felt his time to be growing short (he wrote of this in letters), so that the final volume gives the impression that he had things he wanted to say to his countrymen about the unfolding national tragedy immanent in the process of independence. And he believed that the proper interpretive framework to approach the world-historical significance of the conquest and independence of Mexico was not an absolute moral metric, but one of historical relativism. He wrote in the *Disertaciones*:

> There have been two epochs in which our history has produced significant events of the sort that influence not just the fate of a nation, but that produce great consequences in political life in general, and in the state of the entire universe: such have been the conquest and independence [...] All nations have from time to time suffered these upheavals. These revolutions that change the face of the globe and have the name of conquests should not be judged either with regard to justice, nor [in terms of] the means used to achieve them, but rather by reason of their consequences (Alamán, 1942, 1: 4, 102-103).

Mexicans should dwell not on the *males pasageros* of the conquest, but its permanent effects and the benefits produced by it.

8 He also intended to write a book critiquing the other Mexican authors on the independence movement, but aside from his essay on Bustamante he never got to this, either.

From this perspective Cortés's deeds (and Alamán's own policies when in government) did not appear so heinous compared to other historical cases in his own time in which he felt the ends justified the means. Alamán's vindication of Cortés was not crudely hagiographical, nor did his commentaries on the sad state of Mexican post-independence politics mention the country by name. The implicit link here was his own embattled status as defending the implantation of Spanish institutions at swords-point, the imperatives of political stability, and the long view of historical possibilities. This was a position largely in keeping with the thinking of the Irishman Burke (1729-1797, on whom more below), a thinker Alamán invoked at many points in his writings.

In writing in the *Disertaciones* of the implantation of Spanish royal authority in the newly conquered New Spain, Alamán drew an explicit comparison between the sort of governmental arrangements Cortés was able to establish within a short time, and the chaotic politics of his own day. That the comparison seems far-fetched and decontextualized is less important than what it says about the author's thinking:

> The present offers us the contrast [with Cortés's time] of all the ills produced by the instability of government, the ambition to gain control of it by the most disastrous means, and the unbridled passions of those situated in it. It demonstrates as well that it is not the difference in political forms that makes for the prosperity of nations [...] But unfortunately political institutions have yet to arrive, nor is it probable that they will ever arrive, at a degree of perfection such that they obligate men who govern to work well within the limitation of faculties imposed on them, [so that] everything will always depend upon the personal qualities of individuals. The happy election of these [individuals] is a blessing that Divine Providence reserves in its deep secrets to bestow it on peoples when it desires to have them enjoy that degree of happiness that it is possible to possess on earth [...] (Alamán, 1942, 1: 200-201).

In this passage Alamán is not only identifying Divine Providence as a mover in human affairs, something he was to do repeatedly in the *HdeM*. By this he meant the contingent in history, those aleatory events and processes that govern human life in general, behind which a divine intelligence might be doing its inscrutable will, a force in earthly affairs more akin to Fortuna. He is also ascribing good or bad government less to the nature of political institutions than to the men who hold power within them, and in a somewhat indirect way invoking the Machiavellian notion of *virtú*–the personal qualities required in a leader over and above those necessary in a good citizen (qualities that he felt Antonio López de Santa Anna to lack).

Finally, Alamán was foreshadowing his later argument that national prosperity was not necessarily linked to the prevailing form of government e.g., to monarchical or republican systems as such as long as the men in power were disinterested, knowledgeable, and virtuous. He did come to feel that a monarchy offered the best chances for such government because of the political stability it might bring, but that in the Mexico of his time stability must mean economic development. This was a situational conviction of his rather than a lifelong one, although it certainly reflected his inclination toward a strongly centralized state. He wrote of the ideal government being antecedent to economic development as:

> [...] vigorous and energetic, [which] demonstrates that for nations to be happy it is necessary that authority be obeyed and respected, and that the unity of public power be able to repress anarchy, the necessary result of [political] division, whose unavoidable result is weakness and ruin (Alamán, 1942, 3: 37).

Lucas Alamán's youthful travels, study, and early political activities in Europe (1814-23) had convinced him that the British constitutional monarchy provided these elements, a far cry from the restored European absolutist regimes of the post-Napoleonic

world. This attitude in part accounts for his attraction to the ideas of Edmund Burke. And to drive home unequivocally his admiration for the British system and his sharp criticisms of the Constitution of Cádiz (1812), he also wrote in dissertation ten in the wake of the revolutions of 1848 that:

> England, because of the correct equilibrium [between the aristocracy and the people] has known how to give her constitution a stability that the Spanish has lacked, contributing to all classes the general good, and has succeeded by the fruit of her institutions to rid herself, at least some of the time, from the revolutionary whirlwind that has [...] enveloped in ruins the thrones of the other nations of Europe (Alamán, 1942, 3: 32).

Of revolutions and their consequences in general, and that of New Spain in particular, Alamán had nothing good to say in the *Disertaciones*, foreshadowing the three thousand pages or so he would devote to the theme in the *HdeM.* The anarchy (as he perceived it) of Mexico in his own days he linked to factional conflict and the revolutionary upheavals so prevalent after the winning of independence. With reference to Old Spain, at the very beginning of the first dissertation he compared the "days of glory and prosperity" under the Catholic Kings with those of poverty and confusion to which "the unleashing of [political] passions and partisan furor" had brought mid-nineteenth-century Spain. Despite some conceptual and historical blurring, he conveyed the idea that war and political conflict inevitably bred excess, contextualizing such occurrences relative to the history of other nations, and taking aim at his favorite target, the French Revolution:

> All nations, in the convulsions of revolutions, have fallen into more or less excesses, even those at the forefront of modern civilization [...] [D]uring the French Revolution, by decree of the Convention, the tombs of the [French] kings were opened and the bodies thrown in a ditch, because vandalism is never more destructive than when it is carried out in the name of philosophy and progress. When this revolutionary furor had already passed, the French armies that invaded Spain repeated the same scenes everywhere. In the very church of San Isidro near Seville where the remains of Cortés were first deposited, I have seen the tombs of so many heroes of the family of Guzmán el Bueno opened, and their statues mutilated. We lament, then, that the revolutionary spirit has extended its lash toward us, but we do not believe that other nations have been exempt from it (Alamán, 1942, 2: 52-53).[9]

Alamán wrote that the effects of political disorder were "everywhere and at all times the same, and politics in a state of dissolution always offer the same symptoms" (Alamán, 1942, 3: 122). In the *Disertaciones*, then, he had laid out some of the essential arguments on which he was to base his condemnation of the independence movement in the *Historia de Méjico.*

Alamán and Carlos María de Bustamante

Judging by the text of the *Historia de Méjico*, the two writers that most influenced Lucas Alamán were his friend Carlos María de Bustamante (1774-1848), and the Irishman Edmund Burke (1729-1797). Burke was a man whose work Alamán obviously read and admired. The prolifically cited Bustamante served him as a foil, a ready example of how *not* to write history, while Burke apparently shaped his thinking about the question of revolution, political stability, and innovation, or at least gave expression to Alamán's ideas a half-century before he did. We know he read Burke, probably

9 Alonso Pérez de Guzmán, "Guzmán el Bueno" (1256-1309), was a Spanish nobleman and military hero reputed to be of Muslim extraction. In invoking the profanation of tombs, Alamán must surely have been thinking, without mentioning them, of the instances in the early republican period of various rumors of plots to desecrate Cortés's remains. His bones had been transferred from Spain to Mexico and were interred first in Coyoacán, then the Franciscan monastery in Mexico City, and finally in the chapel of the Hospital de Jesús, where they were moved at least once from one spot to another to insure their safekeeping, and where they remain today.

in English, since Alamán cited him in footnotes and epigraphs in the *HdeM*. But the work for which the Irishman is most famous today, and that has gained him the reputation as the father of modern political conservatism, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), does not appear in the inventory of Alamán's library done in great detail shortly after his death.[10] He cites other historians in the pages of the *HdeM*, almost exclusively Mexican contemporaries who wrote accounts of the 1810 insurgency or early republic such as Zavala, Tornel, Mier, and Mora, either to draw data from them or criticize them, or both. But except for Burke he was not generous in acknowledging modern historical scholars whose works he might have drawn upon as methodological models or who might have influenced him in a philosophical or interpretive key–mostly, one would think, Europeans, since his library was dominated by the books of European writers ancient and modern. The ancient Greek and Roman historians and philosophers supplied him primarily with aphorisms, and he quoted them frequently as an educated writer of the period was expected to do. It may be that Lucas Alamán's failure to acknowledge influences upon his historical writing showed that there were few or none, or revealed his ambition to appear absolutely original, most likely the latter.

In 1897 Alamán's elder son, the lawyer Juan Bautista Alamán, updated the biography he had written of his father in 1854, the year after don Lucas's passing, mentioning the statesman's initial intention that the *HdeM* not be published until after his death, clearly linking its composition to the war with the U.S., and placing Bustamante in the picture:

> He began to write with the intention that it [the *HdeM*] not be published until after his death [...] The first volume finished, he showed it to various trusted friends, and due as much to their insistence as to believing the general ideas vindicated with the passage of time and the disillusionments caused by the misfortunes of the foreign war, he resolved to bring the work to the light of day. But before that he wanted to sound out public opinion, for which he wrote and published anonymously the "Biografía de D. Carlos María [de] Bustamante". Having taken part in many of the events in the war for Independence from its beginning, and having been its historian, although so passionate [in his views] that he sometimes for that reason strayed from the truth, Bustamante's [work] presented to Alamán the occasion to treat tentatively the points his book [would] embrace (Alamán, 1942, 1: ix-xxxviii, at xxx).[11]

As Juan Bautista Alamán's biographical essay suggests, we have Bustamante's history and the Mexican-American War to thank in part for his father's work on Mexican independence. It is clear from references in both the *DHM* and the *HdeM* that Lucas Alamán intended to produce a general history of the country. But he was precipitated into a history of the insurgency before he had finished the *DHM* by the advent of the war and its ultimately tragic outcome for Mexico, which caused him to reflect on the errors and myth-making of Bustamante's *Cuadro histórico*. What the *HdeM* might have looked like had the war with the U.S. not occurred we can only guess at. It would certainly have been heavily critical of Mexico's rejection of the benevolent elements in the Spanish colonial regime and would have condemned Father Hidalgo's uprising and its violent, destructive aftermath, but might not have been quite so pessimistic in tone.

In 1849, the year after Bustamante's death and the year in which the first volume of the *HdeM* was published, Alamán also authored anonymously the *Noticias biográficas del Lic. D. Carlos María de Bustamante y juicio crítico de sus obras, escritas por un*

10 For an analysis of Alamán's library, which contained nearly 2000 works, made only four months after his death in 1853, see Van Young (2021: 667-670).

11 "Apuntes para la Biografía del Exmo. Sr. D. Lucas Alamán, Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Relaciones Exteriores...". This is the same biographical essay, under the same title, published in 1854 by José M. Lara, Mexico City, 1854. José Valadés apparently relied heavily on the biography by Alamán's son for his own 1938 biography of the statesman.

amigo de don Carlos y más amigo de la verdad (1849). It is important to note that the two men were friends, or at least were on friendly terms. Their politics overlapped at certain points, and they lent books to each other at a time when books were expensive and their lending suggested trust in the borrower's integrity. Furthermore, as a trained lawyer Bustamante offered a spirited legal defense of Alamán before the Mexican Supreme Court at the very end of 1834 in the matter of the ex-minister's role in the death of Vicente Guerrero. So, when Alamán referred to himself as a friend of Carlos María de Bustamante he was not being ironic. Nonetheless, in this essay he used Bustamante's *Cuadro histórico de la revolución Mexicana, iniciada el 15 de septiembre de 1810 por el C. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, cura del pueblo de Dolores en el obispado de Michoacán* (1961) as a punching bag, correcting what he saw as swarms of errors in the older man's work, impugning the work's value implicitly by pointing to Bustamante's carelessness and even duplicity as a historian in general, and hinting at some of his own differences of interpretation with Bustamante regarding the independence movement.

A glance at the abundant footnotes of the *HdeM* reveals that Alamán corrected Bustamante or took issue with him on innumerable occasions while still mining the *Cuadro histórico* for data on the 1810 insurgency; what his criteria were for deciding what was accurate and what was inaccurate he does not tell us. For example, Alamán accused Bustamante of passing superficially over the Querétaro conspiracy of 1810, and of the willful omission of some aspects of this famous episode (Alamán, 1942, 2: 242-243). In other places he asserted that Bustamante had neglected many key facts, "a forgetfulness inexcusable in a historian" (Alamán, 1942, 1: 32, note 7); had a sketchy relationship with reality (Alamán, 1942, 1: 253, note 6); and always presented events "in a light opposite to what they really were" (Alamán, 1942, 2: 256, note 18). In discounting Bustamante's version of an event during the insurgency, Alamán quoted the Roman poet Horace: "*Risum teneatis amici* [Can you help laughing, friends?]" (Alamán, 1942, 2: 96, note 23). Commenting that even in the second edition of the *Cuadro histórico* Bustamante clung stubbornly to errors refuted by concrete documentation, Alamán wrote that "such unwillingness [to self-correct], incompatible with [arriving at] the truth of history, makes Bustamante's [history] little loyal [to reality]" (Alamán, 1942).[12] He continued:

> This is, nonetheless, the only history we have of the revolution that ended in independence; this is what foreigners read and quote in their works; [it is] what Mexicans believe and what romantics make still more fabulous with the fabulous lies with which they decorate it; and this proves the necessity of going to the original documents to find out the truth of the facts [...] It is true that with the same materials, the same costs, and some greater care in editing, Lic. Bustamante could have produced the most important service to national history, leaving in the *Cuadro histórico* and subsequent works well attested facts, presented with fidelity and impartiality, even if they were not favorable to the persons to whose benefit he hid them [...] (CEHM 22-1830).

Alamán acknowledged, however, that the older man "has contributed much to awaken the fondness for the study of national history... [and]... [i]t would be very much desired that Bustamante have imitators, who, working with the constancy he did, know how to avoid his mistakes".[13] Other scholars

12 Alamán included in all five volumes of the *HdeM* a section at the end of the volume entitled "Adiciones y Reformas" in which he discussed points of controversy in his work or corrected errors brought to his attention by correspondents (e.g., 1: 392-409), although these sections tended to get shorter and crankier in tone as the work progressed. Wrote Alamán in volume one: "El nuevo exámen de algunos puntos contenidos en este tomo, hecho con motivo de recojer datos y noticias sobre otros, y las conversaciones tenidas acerca de ellos con sugetos capaces de ilustrar estas materias, ha hecho necesario rectificar ó dar mayor extension a algunas de las especies vertidas en él, que es el objeto de estas adiciones" (392-393).

13 Draft of *Noticias biográficas...*, CEHMC 22-1830; CEHMC 23-1977 is a draft in Alamán's hand of the biographical part of the essay.

of the time were no less critical of Bustamante, and no less ambivalent about the value of his work. For example, the American historian of Spain and its empire, William H. Prescott, in a private letter to Ángel Calderón de la Barca in 1840 offered his evaluation of the prolific Mexican historian: "I have long distrusted [Bustamante], though Mexican letters are under obligations to his editorial activities. But between ourselves he is a sorry ranting bigot, with more tongue than brains, I suspect" (Jaksic, 2007: 229).[14]

As Lucas Alamán acknowledged in his critical biographical essay on Bustamante, despite its many shortcomings as a work of history the older man's *Cuadro histórico* was widely read, laying the foundations of much subsequent writing by Mexican historians about independence. The *Cuadro* may actually have been more influential than Alamán's magisterial *HdeM* since it set the lines for the patriotic narrative of the independence struggle, providing a gallery of heroic (and villainous) portraits of the protagonists, and molding nineteenth-century opinion among general readers. An ardent nationalist and republican, Bustamante (along with Padre Mier) condemned the Spanish colonial regime root and branch as an unjust usurpation of the legitimate Indigenous states whose heritage the insurgency had vindicated, and from whose ruins independent Mexico was to rise, phoenix-like. He extolled and mourned the Indigenous tradition, going so far as to suggest that the massacre of peninsular and Mexican-born Spaniards at the Alhóndiga of Guanajuato in the fall of 1810 was a sort of just vengeance for the atrocities committed against the native inhabitants of Anáhuac during the conquest and after. He wrote:

> [I] imagined that I saw among those cadavers and [still] twitching limbs the spirits of Cortés, of Alvarado, and of Pizarro staggering with terror looking at them, and of weeping America throwing herself on them, saying with a terrible voice "Of what are you so horrified seeing these victims? Have you forgotten the cruel massacres you carried out three centuries ago in Tabasco, in Cholula, in the great temple of Mexico City, in Cuernavaca? [...] Do you perhaps not know that in the scales of the great [Creator of All Things] all these crimes were weighed and that He reserved His vengeance for my crushed and enslaved sons, after three centuries?

And to make the point even more emphatically, Bustamante added a stanza of poetry:

> In this way their unjust crimes Will be punished, one by one, Blood with blood, and tears, in the end, with tears (Bustamante, 1961, 1: 39).[15]

This Aztec irredentist-*revanchisme* was a product of Bustamante's romantic nationalism, whereas Alamán (and interestingly, his staunch political opponent Lorenzo de Zavala) adhered more to the empiricist school of Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), although we do not know if he read the German historian. But while Alamán continually proclaimed his own absolute objectivity in writing the *HdeM*, the work was clearly tilted in the direction of the author's own conservative political views. In particular he faulted Bustamante for glorifying the insurgent leaders into icons in a national mythology, a mythology Alamán meant to debunk with his own writing.

Alamán and Edmund Burke

Since the book does not appear in his library, we must infer that Lucas Alamán read

14 Prescott, Boston, to Calderón de la Barca, Mexico City, 25 June 1840. José Fernando Ramírez of Durango (1804-1871) attorney, politician, historian, and bibliophile commented in a letter to Alamán that Bustamante was "frivolous, inexact, and more than shading the truth, he was a liar," especially criticizing him for the "useless work" he did in editing Sahagun's *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* (the Florentine Codex); in the same letter Ramírez added: "I am happy for you to tell me you are thinking of continuing with your *Disertaciones*, and would not object that before finishing these you would bring to light your history of the revolution, because who else will fill such a gap?"; Ramírez, Durango, to Alamán, Mexico City, December 22, 1848, CEHMC 18-1458.

15 On Bustamante's life, see Castelán (1997) and Brading (1991: 634-646).

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) from the quotations and epigraphs he took for his own *Historia de Méjico* from the Irish MP's work; but this seems a very safe inference. After the fall of the first Anastasio Bustamante government (1830-1832) and Alamán's own internal exile (1833-1834) there was a major point of inflection in his political thinking away from a moderate, centralist liberalism to the more recognizable strong centralist conservatism and later monarchism with which we now identify him. In his condemnation of the political and economic violence of the Mexican independence movement, and his often desperate pronouncements about the chaotic times that followed, Alamán came to view revolution in general and the political experimentation that often accompanied it as social evils. This did not apply in his mind, of course, to the *jalapista* uprising against the government of Vicente Guerrero in which he played a large organizational role, and that brought him to power at the beginning of 1830; but that is a story for another time.[16] Whether he developed his own increasingly conservative ideas on his own, took important elements of inspiration from Burke, or found that Burke articulated well some of the ideas he already had is hard to tell, but the last possibility is the most likely. However the Mexican encountered the Irishman's thinking about politics and society, the resonance between the two is striking. This is important rather than just an interesting coincidence because it places Alamán yet more firmly in an Atlantic political tradition and draws his repeated references to the radical liberals of his time (figures such as Lorenzo de Zavala and Valentín Gómez Farías) as "Jacobins" even closer to critiques of the French Revolution.

The Dublin-born Burke wrote on philosophical themes –for example, the treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1779)–, which made his reputation as a young man of twenty-seven years old; but also on history, law, the American colonies, contemporary British affairs, parliamentary reform and politics, and economics. He served in the British Parliament's House of Commons for several different constituencies from 1766 until three years before his death in 1797, although he was seldom in the government. Burke was a life-long Whig, what we might consider today the more liberal political position of the two major factions, rather than a Tory, which his conservatism might lead one to believe.[17] His *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, written largely in response to a sensationally pro-revolutionary sermon preached by the Reverend Richard Price in November 1789, has become a touchstone of conservative political thinking in the Anglophone world. Burke's polemical work was literally conservative in the sense that he championed the *conservation* of ancient French principles of governance rather than their sweeping away to clear the ground for the construction of a new French state *ex nihilo.* Burke was much more pragmatic, flexible, and open to social and political change, however, than some other conservative writers of the age, such as the Savoyard Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), an ardent throne-and-altar thinker who may also have been influenced by his reading of Burke but was much more extreme and dogmatic in his views. Aside from espousing the traditional Whig position of restraining royal power in favor of Parliament, Burke supported several progressive causes that even some of his Whig colleagues rejected. Among these were the removal of civil disadvantages that had been placed on Catholics in Protestant Britain, the abolition of African slavery in the

16 For an account of this uprising, led by Vice-President Anastasio Bustamante, see Van Young (2021:465-482).

17 The British-American writer Christopher Hitchens (2004) wrote that Burke "upheld the more liberal principles of the Whig faction". Hitchens quotes Karl Marx, who in a footnote to volume one of *Das Kapital* wrote that Burke was "...a sycophant who in the pay of the English oligarchy played the romantic *laudator temporis acti* [praiser of times past] against the French Revolution...[and] was an out-and-out vulgar bourgeois;" and Thomas Jefferson in a 1791 letter remarking "the rottenness of his mind." Burke was often accused of being mercenary, not least by Thomas Paine. There is a large literature on Burke's life and ideas; a recent biography is Jesse Norman (2013).

British realms, and a peaceful solution to the tensions with the American colonies rather than the aggressive posture adopted–counter-productively, as it turned out–by the Tory government (1770-1782) of Lord North. One of the most famous incidents of his parliamentary career was his leadership in the years-long impeachment proceedings in the House of Commons for embezzlement and abuse of power against Warren Hastings (1732-1818), the former de facto governor-general of Bengal, in eastern India, whose major city, Calcutta (now Kolkata), was the capital of the British Raj. Within the general framework of British and East India Company policy toward India, Burke's position represented those who sought a more humane treatment of Indians as subjects of the British crown, with certain rights to have their political sovereignty acknowledged. Burke remains a controversial figure, often condemned as a reactionary for his devotion to monarchy, his defense of the British aristocracy, and his deep skepticism toward political innovation, but just as roundly praised for the profundity of his political thought and his advocacy of the rights and liberties of oppressed social groups.

Edmund Burke's principle concrete condemnation of the French Revolution anticipated very closely the stance assumed by Lucas Alamán toward the Mexican independence movement three decades later: it had destroyed so much of French society that the costs were greater than any benefit it may have produced. In a speech in the House of Commons of early 1790, Burke asserted that since the summer of 1789:

> [...] much work was done in France. The French had shown themselves the ablest architects of ruin that had hitherto existed in the world. In a very short space of time they had completely pulled down to the ground, their monarchy; their church; their nobility; their law; their revenue; their army; their navy; their commerce; their arts; and their manufactures (Burke, 2001: 66).[18]

18 Quoted in Jonathan Clarke's "Introduction" in Burke, *Reflections*.

Compare the melancholy verdict of Alamán, cited near the beginning of this essay, assessing in the wake of the Mexican-American War the effects of independence in Spanish America in general and Mexico in particular:

> [...] it would seem that we have reason to recognize with the great Bolívar that Independence has been purchased at the cost of everything Spanish America possesses [...] These dreadful outcomes have given reason to discuss if Independence has been a good or an evil (Alamán, 1942, 5: 556ff).

But beyond the social and economic destruction the Revolution had wrought in France, Burke thought that a fundamental political mistake, even a criminal mistake, had been made by the men of revolutionary France: in essence a denial of history, and of the implicit contract between the living generation, generations past, and those that would come after it. He believed that states existed in time, not just the political moment–that the inherent weight and value of history, the sanctification by experience, and the implicit inter-generational contract argued conclusively in favor of

> [...] any settled scheme of government against any untried project, that a nation has long existed and flourished under it. It is a better presumption even of the *choice* of a nation, far better than any sudden and temporary arrangement by actual election. Because a nation is not an idea only of local extent, and individual momentary aggregation, but it is an idea of continuity, which extends in time as well as in numbers, and in space. And this is a choice not of one day, or one set of people, not a tumultuary and giddy choice; it is a deliberate election of ages and of generations; it is a Constitution made by what is ten thousand times better than choice, it is made by the peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, dispositions, and moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people, which disclose themselves only in a long space of time (Burke, 2001: 55).[19]

19 Quoted in Clark's "Introduction".

An emphatic theme in Burke's thought (echoed many times by Alamán) was the danger of abstract thinking in the spirit of innovation. He viewed the French constitutionalism that emerged early in the Revolution as a dangerous and unwarranted leap into the unknown, and the Revolution itself not as a venture into a new world, but a step backward into irrationality, violence, and barbarism reminiscent of the sixteenth-century wars of religion. In the words of J.C.D. Clark, the most recent editor of the *Reflections*,

> Burke's book, then, re-emphasised practice, experience, and wisdom against revolutionary theory... To be against theory is not to be without a theory, however, and Burke's *Reflections* can be shown to embody distinct principles of government (Burke, 2001: 86).

Burke favored a "mixed and tempered government" in a state both stable and with maximum liberties for its citizens, with a strong central executive well hedged-in by laws, learning from past experience but open to innovation. But innovation must be restrained by a sufficient respect for history and established institutions:

> A spirit of innovation [wrote Burke] is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined [i.e., narrow] views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors...We procure reverence to our civil institutions on the principle upon which nature teaches us to revere individual men; on account of their age; and on account of those from whom they are descended. All your sophists cannot produce any thing better adapted to preserve a rational and manly freedom than the course that we [English] have pursued, who have chosen our nature rather than our speculations, our breasts rather than our inventions, for the great conservatories and magazines of our rights and privileges (Burke, 2001: 184-185).

In describing somewhat Delphically the obligation owed by the living to the dead, Burke wrote:

> The state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern [...] [I]t becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place (Hitchens: 2004).

If this statement sounds as though Edmund Burke viewed his model of society (the model being Britain) as being a sort of *corpus mysticum* that evolved organically over time rather than in fits and starts of fevered innovation, that is the case. He also believed in the socially cohesive properties of religious practice and in the sanctity of private property. The legislative power (the British House of Commons in his case) should be composed of representatives rather than delegates of a restricted electorship, not a wide popular democracy, and the people so selected should be social stakeholders: men of property, education, and personal integrity; in other words, *hombres de bien.* All these ideas he shared with Alamán.

Alamán and Mexican Independence

In his *Historia de Méjico* Lucas Alamán constructed a historical narrative of Mexico's decline to near state-failure beginning with the repudiation of the Spanish heritage by misguided insurgent chieftains who had led a class war of the poor and brown against the white and propertied. From this fundamental mistake, he reasoned, combined with the lack of a political culture and historical experience to support republican institutions, followed the country's internal anarchy and weakness of the post-1821 period. Analyzing the years following the failed first Mexican empire, he condemned the political expe-

rimentation with radical foreign ideas that he found ill-suited to Mexican realities. By "experimentation" he had in mind the federalist Constitution of 1824, which he thought full of "brilliant theories" but little practical wisdom, and other flights of political innovation, the "hasty alterations, of which it is very doubtful that they were undertaken with sound judgment" (Alamán, 1942, 1: 4). He found particularly noxious the tampering with traditional religious practice and institutions by Mexican liberals, although much worse was yet to come (or so he would have viewed it) in the Constitution of 1857. In all this the influence on his thinking, or at least the parallelism with it, of Edmund Burke's writing was strong and explicit.

In his participation in the monarchist conspiracy of late 1845 and early 1846, and in his articles (many of which he wrote, but even when not the author he at least sponsored and certainly agreed with them) in his newspaper *El Universal* (1848-1855), Alamán made clear in the last half of the 1840s, approaching the final years of his life, his predilection for the return of monarchy to Mexico.[20] But this was a late-life change in his political thinking, an intensification of an inclination already present in his mind but long muted in favor of the strongly centralist, oligarchical form of government within whose framework he thought he could work, and that after the Iturbide episode would encounter less social and political resistance than the installation of a monarchy. The shift in his views grew from deep disillusionment with the situation to which he believed republican institutions, and the factionalism and anarchy they engendered, had brought the country in the quarter-century after 1821. It has been plausibly suggested that this explicit monarchism had receded into a more "traditional conservatism" after 1848 or so when Alamán founded a conservative political party (Palti, 1998). Although he would come to be one of the principal architects of the very centralist and authoritarian regime of Santa Anna beginning in 1853, by the time he published the last volume of the *Historia* in 1852 he was ready to repudiate monarchism. Responding to an assertion in José María Tornel's *Breve reseña histórica* (1852) that he had held monarchist opinions from his youth, Alamán wrote:

> General Tornel, in the cited *Reseña histórica* [*sic*], supposes in the author of this work [i.e., Alamán] monarchical opinions acquired during his youth in his travels in Europe. It was precisely to the contrary: the people with whom he dealt most immediately in these travels formed in him the opposite opinions, and, at the time discussed, the opinions he professed were the same as those of General [Mier] y Terán: a central republic, with a certain amplitude of faculties in the provinces, divided in smaller territories in order to achieve local welfare without the inconveniences produced by the sovereignties of the states (Alamán, 1942, 5: 507, note 2).[21]

Alamán was a situational monarchist, not an essential monarchist; that is, at one point he espoused a monarchist program but generally did not. Nor was he inconstant in his opinions, or a political opportunist; his ideas changed with circumstances but his basic principles did not. His thinking quite clearly never implied a rejection of Mexican independence from Spain. So in seeking to understand what Lucas Alamán thought about Mexican independence it is necessary to acknowledge that while he had much positive to say about the colonial regime (on which more below), and has thus always been seen as its foremost apologist, he never actually advocated its restoration because he believed that the independence of Mexico was an inevitable development spoiled to a large extent by the manner of its achievement. His thinking of the late 1840s on the appropriateness of monarchy for the country should therefore be seen as a separate but inter-related issue from his views on independence and how it was brought about.

20 On the articles of the late 1840s, see Palti (1998).

21 (Tornel y Mendivil, 1852). Manuel de Mier y Terán (1789-1832) was a prominent military man, politician and close friend of Alamán.

At the time of the *HdeM*'s publication there was little if any criticism of the first hundred pages in volume one, in which Alamán gave his largely positive account of the colonial regime, pages that have since furnished the basis for unending criticism of him as an apologist for the colonial order and all its brutalities and inequities. The general silence of contemporaries about these sections may have been due to the outraged focus of most readers on the iconoclasm he aimed at almost all the independence heroes. The exception to this was Father José María Morelos, whom he clearly admired for his integrity and military abilities even as he condemned the insurgent priest for his politics.[22] Alamán is well known to have praised the colonial regime for what he believed was the orderly society it shaped. This is hardly surprising since the order/anarchy dyad was a constant theme in his work as both politician and writer. It is difficult to imagine statements more Burkean than these:

> By these means [i.e., the political/bureaucratic machinery], some more stable and ordinary, others temporary and circumstantial, all the immense continent of America, today a chaos of confusion, disorder, and poverty, at that time moved with uniformity, without violence, it may be said [even] without effort, and all moved in a progressive order toward continual and substantial improvements [...] This system of government had not been the work of a unitary conception, nor did it proceed from the speculative theories of legislators who pretend [that] as incontestable oracles of truth they wish to subject the human race to imaginary principles [...] It was the outcome of the knowledge and experience of three centuries.

And at another point:

> We have seen [in the colonial regime] a government established and successively improved by the wisdom and experience of three centuries; consolidated through the habit of long obedience; supported by the love of its subjects, and suddenly shaken by unforeseeable causes [the American and French Revolutions] [...] Similar to that ancient oak of which Virgil speaks (*Aeneid*, book 2, verse 626), attacked stubbornly by woodsmen determined to bring it down, although its trunk is almost cut [through], it still resists the repeated blows of the axe; it shakes its high crown majestically, and conquered at last, as it falls brings down with it the same [men] who destroyed it (Alamán, 1942, 1:60-61, 221-222).

He did offer some critical opinions about the colonial order, but these were not simply fig leaves to lend credibility to his positive assessment of it. The Inquisition he found extremely noxious, and the colonial educational system backward.[23] He also implicitly acknowledged critical flaws in the colonial system: the lack of workable representative institutions, the weakness of entrepreneurial spirit, and the dependency of New Spain's commerce within the monopolistic arrangements imposed by the metropolis, hardly unimportant issues.

Although some of his positive assessment of the colonial order stands up to scrutiny, in the light of historical scholarship we know that much of his defense of it was pure rubbish. For example, Alamán had a relatively low opinion of Mexico's Indigenous people, still the majority of the population in 1810 (he devoted remarkably little attention to them in the HdeM), so their sufferings under the exploitation of the colonial system are not really mentioned at all in his work.

22 Fairly typical was the passing remark about the first volume of the *HdeM* by Mariano Arista in an 1849 letter to Mariano Riva Palacio. The book had "overflowed the measure of insult" in its unworshipful attitude toward the heroic figures of the independence struggle; Arista expressed astonishment that "there can be a Mexican so unnatural as to undertake to cast doubt on the deeds to which the movement of the venerable priest of Dolores gave rise;" Mariano Arista, Mexico City, to Mariano Riva Palacio, Toluca, no date, 1849, BLAC-Mariano Riva Palacio Papers 3032.

23 As a young man of twenty, Alamán had his own run-in with the Inquisition in 1812 for reading works on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*; this finally come to nothing, probably due to the intervention of his elder half-brother, the Churchman Juan Bautista Arechederreta (1771-1835). He also invested a good deal of effort as a public figure and government minister after 1821 to reform university curricula and implant the Lancasterian System of primary education in Mexico.

But that is hardly the point here. Alamán was building a case to show that independence as an end, or at least a final outcome, was fatally stained and compromised by the struggle to achieve it.

Despite his defense of the colonial regime, and even his nostalgia for it, in more than one place in the *HdeM* Alamán made it very clear that he thought the independence of New Spain from Old Spain natural and inevitable. In the first volume he wrote that it was

> […] an inclination as natural and noble in nations as in individuals, which, once the idea to obtain it has awakened, develops with irresistible force, more so when a promising future presents itself [with] a vision of great and incalculable benefits. To further this object, at that time [i.e., in 1808-1810] no better opportunity appeared to obtain [independence] easily than the state of the metropolis. Not only was there no new injury [for New Spain] to complain of, no arbitrary act that might justify a legal resistance, but the just cause for complaint, the extraction of capital through the Consolidación de Vales Reales, been removed (Alamán, 1942, 1: 125, 5: 78).

And in the final volume he restated this view:

> Independence had come to be inevitable for Mexico and for the entire American continent [i.e., Latin America]. Born of the events of 1808 in Spain, the absurd plan followed in the revolution commenced [in Mexico] in 1810 and the atrocities that stained it, could block the development [of independence], but not extinguish the desire to achieve it […] (Alamán, 1942, 1: 125, 5: 78).

The crisis in Spain itself, therefore, initiated by Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula and his usurpation of the Spanish crown, was in Alamán's telling the trigger, or really a pretext, for the insurgency. In the end he espoused very robustly the view that it was Agustín de Iturbide who consummated Mexican independence. Yet in emphasizing the external factor of the imperial crisis of 1808-1810 rather than social, political, and economic forces within the colony itself, Alamán never quite resolved the question of how independence would have come about if not for the Hidalgo rebellion, misguided or not.

Independence as such was not the problem for Alamán; it was the nature of the insurgency begun by Father Miguel Hidalgo. This had wrought such destruction on New Spain that its emergence as independent Mexico was crippled from the beginning, not least because it left behind it a legitimacy vacuum in political life into which flowed the corrosive juices of factionalism and political opportunism. Alamán was essentially pushing this view publicly even before the appearance of the *HdeM* beginning in 1849. In response to the controversy surrounding the question of whether September 16 should be celebrated as Independence Day, or September 27 instead, the day in 1821 on which Iturbide and his forces entered Mexico City (and incidentally Iturbide's birthday), *El Universal* published what the late Michael Costeloe described as a "vitriolic condemnation of Hidalgo and the early stages of the insurgency," characterizing Father Hidalgo and his fellow insurgents as "bandits and murderers" (Costeloe, 2001: 43-75). This actually provoked a proposal by liberal congressmen Guillermo Prieto and Ponciano Arriaga to raise legal charges against the newspaper. By the time he came to write of the early stage of the insurgency in volume one of the *Historia*, Alamán characterized it as a gross perversion of the natural and healthy drive for independence,

> […] a monstrous mixture of religion with murder and pillage: a cry of death and desolation which, my having heard it thousands of times in the first days of my youth, still sounds in my ears with a fearful echo! […] In a people in which, unfortunately, religion was almost reduced to merely exterior practice […] [and] when the dominant vice of the mass of the population was the propensity to rob, it is not strange that there should be found so easily

> followers of a revolution [...] [that] raise[d] up the plebs against everything they had feared or respected until then [...] So it is that in all the villages the priest Hidalgo found such a strong predisposition, which only needed his presence to drag behind him all the masses. But the means he employed to win this popularity destroyed the foundations of the social edifice, suffocated every principle of morality and justice, and have been the origin of all the evils the nation laments, which all flow from that poisoned fountain. Hidalgo's growing army presented the aspect of [migrating] barbarian tribes...rather than an army on the march [...] [and was made up of] a throng of generals, the uneducated, cowards, and incompetents, a mass without form, without knowledge, incapable of any strategic movement and quick to flee at the first shots [...] [This could only have led to an] absolute anarchy [or] absolute despotism [...] (Alamán, 1942, 1: 244).

This image of a "bandit rabble," entirely given over to destruction and rapine, was opposed diametrically to the version of Bustamante and other "partial" historians who portrayed it as "the effort of a generous people fighting to conquer their independence and liberty" (Alamán, 1942*,* 2: 122).

One of Lucas Alamán's most powerful motives in treating the early stages of the insurgency this way (he was much kinder to Morelos, as I have mentioned) was political –in the broadest sense– the substantial destruction of the growing mythology of Mexican independence by re-equilibrating the history of the last several centuries in favor of the colonial period: in other words, diminishing the first by elevating the second. Writing in the last volume of the *HdeM*, published in 1852, the year before his death, Alamán fulminated against what he viewed as the lie at the heart of the national celebrations of September 16 as Independence Day:

> But this is explained taking into account that the laws, material objects presented to the view of the people, speeches pronounced on solemn occasions, partial or careless historians, [and] the press have all contributed stubbornly to cause and sustain the deceit. And from this it has arisen that the great national holiday not only has as its object the celebration of a falsehood, but is every year a repeated act of ingratitude, attributing the glory of having gained independence to those who do not deserve it, to wrest it from him [i.e., Iturbide] to whom it is justly owed, repeating against the memory of Iturbide the offense that was done to his person (Alamán, 1942, 5: 483-484).

He also sought to devilify the colonial regime as portrayed by such writers as Father Mier and Bustamante, the two piers undergirding what Alamán viewed as the highly negative mythifications of the colonial system. He could hardly justify the Spanish conquest of the Mesoamerican native peoples on any grounds but a sort of vaguely Zen-like invocation of the inevitable processes of history–the grinding of Fortuna's wheel, as it were. But he asserted that everything worthwhile in the Mexico of his day followed from its origins in the conquest (Alamán, 1942, 1: 3), thus neatly marginalizing the Indigenous population and emphasizing the Spanishness of Mexico.

Lucas Alamán insisted repeatedly that the authority of his history of the insurgency as offered in the *Historia*, and therefore the trust that readers might place in it, rested not only upon the self-evident truth of the facts he presented, and the depth and authenticity of his research, but upon his objectivity as a historian. Philosophically he professed to believe that the historian's obligation was to present to his readers unvarnished facts, and facts alone. Without using the term he approached the position of historical relativism, as I mentioned before, although he did not quite realize it himself since his presentation of "facts" was infused with his political inclinations. There was no place in the writing of history, he asserted, for interpretive shading, the invention of facts, the expression of prejudice, or the introduction of anachronism:

> There is no more common error [in writing history] than to pretend to evaluate the events of past centuries by the ideas of today... [Events and actions] can only be judged by the received opinions of the century in which the events occurred (Alamán, 1942, 2: 19).

In the prologue to volume five of the *HdeM* he expanded on this theme in asserting that in all the criticisms of the book no doubt had ever been cast on its veracity and objectivity. He wrote that contemporary republican historians had fabricated a "machine for the manufacture of deceits" (*máquina de engaños*), as for example in their marginalization of Iturbide as the true progenitor of Mexican independence (Alamán, 1942, 5: 9). For Alamán "the truth is the only guide that conducts me":

> I have not presented [the major actors of independence] as colossi, as another writer of our day has done, because I have not encountered [in them] anything more than men of ordinary stature, nor have I attributed to great and profound thoughts [those] events explained naturally by other contemporary events, and that not only do not present anything heroic, but rather originated from causes little noble (Alamán, 1942, 5: 10).

Immediately following this passage he invoked the letter and spirit of Edmund Burke's avowal of his own objectivity and balanced judgement in the Irish parliamentarian's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which he footnoted in its English edition. And toward the close of the last volume Alamán wrote:

> Straying from the severity of history, fantasy always prevails over healthy criticism and enthusiasm over the rigor of the truth. I have managed to present [the truth] as it results from the examination of the facts, so that readers may exercise their judgment with impartiality [...] (Alamán, 1942, 5: 505).

Conclusions

In closing, readers will indulge my quotation of a long passage from a late letter of Alamán's to the Duque de Terranova y Monteleone, the Neapolitan nobleman who employed him for almost thirty years. It is a nice summary of much of the *Historia de Méjico,* showing what the author thought he was doing in his work, and describing the "revolution" in public opinion he thought it had brought about in Mexico:

> You ask me what effect on public opinion the publication of my history of Mexico and dissertations have had. It has been to change completely the concept held by force of revolutionary declamations concerning the conquest, Spanish domination, and the way in which independence was achieved. It was thought that the conquest had been a virtual robbery, [and] that the Spanish domination was a continued oppression [...] Independence was attributed to a glorious movement directed by Hidalgo and his companions although without immediate success. This gave rise to a thousand declamations, particularly in the speeches made in public places during national holidays. All this has changed entirely. It was only necessary to see some of the orations of this year in which the conquest is portrayed as the means with which civilization and religion were established in this country. D. Fernando Cortés [is now seen as] an extraordinary man whom Providence destined to achieve these objects, and the Spanish domination as a moderate and beneficent government that prepared the country for independence by organizing it in every aspect. This last point about independence faces some contradiction, or rather still produces some irritation, but it will be well established with the publication of the fifth and last volume on which I am [now] working (Alamán, 1942, 5: 600-605).

It is difficult to avoid the impression that the brilliant statesman and historian was fooling himself even in his own time. Certainly Alamán was better at describing and analyzing the past than at predicting the

future. Agustín de Iturbide remains a controversial figure even today, despite Alamán's championing him as the true consummator of Mexican independence; it is no *grito* of his reenacted from the balcony of Los Pinos on the night of 15 September every year. Father Hidalgo and José María Morelos remain intensely venerated national icons. The present presidential administration of Mexico has demanded apologies from the Spanish monarchy and the papacy for the military and cultural violence of the Conquest led by Hernán Cortés rather than offering thanks for the imposition of Spanish rule. Readers will judge for themselves whether Alamán's evaluation of the impact of his work, brilliant as that work is, has proven correct over the past 170 years.

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Received: June 23, 2021.
Forwarded: August 2, 2021.
Accepted: August 5, 2021.

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