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Magnus Mörner (1924–2012)

One of the great historians of Latin America, Professor Emeritus Magnus Mörner, passed away on April 12, 2012, at the age of 88. Born in 1924 in Mellösa, Sweden, he was the son of the author Birger Mörner and Gertrud née Anstrin.

As a boy, Magnus was an avid stamp collector, and when he found stamps from a new country, he read about it in an encyclopedia. He found the history of Paraguay particularly interesting and wanted to know more. In that way his childhood interest in philately contributed to his lifelong passion for Latin America.

After finishing high school, Magnus studied at Stockholm University College. There was no doubt that he wanted to become a historian and that he wished to dedicate himself to Latin America. In 1947, Magnus received a scholarship that enabled him to travel to Argentina. The voyage there by boat was most boring, lasting for almost a month. However, his actual stay in South America made him even more convinced that he was on the right track. He wanted to study the seventeenth-century Jesuit missions in the province of Paraguay.

Just before leaving for Argentina, Magnus met his future wife, Aare R. Puhk (1926–2008). She was a polyglot, born in Estonia, who also studied at Stockholm University College. Shortly after Magnus's return to Sweden, they married, and with time three children were born. Throughout their life together, Aare and Magnus were a closely knit team and a loving couple, even though Magnus's career meant that they had to spend long periods away from each other.

Aare and Magnus made a new journey to South America in 1950–51 to do research in Argentinean, Paraguayan, and Brazilian archives. The material collected there was complemented by documents in Spanish and Italian repositories, including the historical archives of the Society of Jesus. Though 60 years has passed since its publication, Magnus's doctoral dissertation, *The Political and Economic Activities of the Jesuits in the La Plata Region* (1953), remains essential reading within the field. Like all his scholarly writings it is characterized by wide reading, careful archival studies, sound methodology, and thorough source criticism.

In the early 1950s, Magnus became the director of the newly founded Library and Institute of Iberoamerican Studies at the Stockholm School of Economics, which, however, had very limited funds. The choice of a Latin American topic for his dissertation was certainly not a strategic one; it was difficult for him to

make an academic career in Sweden. He had to go abroad. In the early 1960s, Magnus was a visiting professor at UCLA, Cornell, Columbia, and El Colegio de México, and later, for three years, he was professor of history at the City University of New York and at Queens College.

During this period, his research was focused on the Spanish Crown's segregation policy. According to this guiding principle, Indians should live apart from other population groups, including Spaniards. Magnus studied the legislation on the matter but above all its implementation in different locations. To a large extent the policy remained an ideal. The project brought him to archives in many European and Latin American countries, and its main result was a very solid monograph, *La Corona española y los foráneos en los pueblos de indios de América* (1970, 2nd ed. 1999), which he considered his single most important work. As a by-product of the project, he published what would become his most famous book, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (1967), which later was translated into Spanish, French, and Swedish.

From 1969 onwards, Magnus was the director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at Stockholm University, while also spending periods as a guest professor in the United States and Spain. In 1976, Magnus left Sweden to become the Mellon Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh. After six years there, he returned to his native country to hold the chair in modern history at the University of Gothenburg, where he remained until his retirement in 1990. In the 1970s and 1980s, Magnus wrote much about Latin American social and agrarian history, with particular emphasis on the Andean countries. An important work from this period is *The Andean Past: Land, Societies, and Conflicts* (1985). He also published many texts on slavery and migration, including the monograph *Adventurers and Proletarians: The Story of Migrants in Latin America* (1985). His comparative studies of the Indians in Spanish America and the native Sami population in Sweden are less well known.

After his retirement, Magnus and Aare moved to the small town of Mariefred, about an hour's drive from Stockholm, where he lived until his death. During the 1990s and 2000s he continued his research on Latin American issues, the last monograph being *Historia de Ocumare de la Costa en Venezuela entre 1870 y 1960* (2004). However, other geographical areas increasingly attracted his attention. He wrote on Spanish-Swedish relations through the ages and published several works on early modern Swedish history, including articles and books on the Mörner family. His last scholarly book was published in 2007, but after Aare's death in the following year, he did not have the energy to write much. Altogether Magnus wrote more than 500 titles. Most of these

works are in English, Spanish, and Swedish, but there are also translations into French, German, Finnish, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese.

Throughout the years, I have met many people who have told me good stories about meetings with Magnus. He was a person that others took note of, a man somewhat larger than life. However, he also noted other people and was very helpful, particularly to young scholars. I met Magnus for the first time 15 years ago, when I was a young doctoral student. At that time, Magnus Mörner was like a myth to me. During my school years, I had found his Swedish introduction to Latin American history in the city library of my home town, and that book influenced the course of my academic life.

I must confess that when I contacted him the first time, I was extremely formal. His letter of reply, however, began with the words “Dear amigo,” and since that time we were, indeed, very good friends. For me, he was a constant source of inspiration, and I will miss our conversations and his characteristic laughter. He was a man who lived a long, happy, and interesting life, and who contributed very much to the historiography of Hispanic America.

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