

IN MEMORIAM

Jorge Basadre (1903-1980)

Basadre was the last of the generation of Peruvians who founded history as a professional science in Peru. Along with Raúl Porras Barrenechea, Jorge Guillermo Leguía, Rubén Vargas Ugarte and others, he helped lay the basic building blocks upon which most of Peruvian history has been, and will be based. He was also one of the few remaining figures of the generation of the twenties which has so decisively shaped cultural and political events in Peru: José Carlos Mariátegui, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre and Luis Alberto Sánchez. He knew them all well, and his portraits of Mariátegui and Haya are among the best that have been written.

Born and raised in Chilean-occupied Tacna, he always assumed the defense of his home town as a special cause. He studied at San Marcos University, where he received his doctorate in History in 1928, and a doctorate in Law in 1936. He taught the history of republican Peru at San Marcos off and on between 1928-1954. Among the several interruptions in his teaching, he studied Library Science and other related disciplines in the United States and Europe, 1931-1935. He was appointed director of the National Library after the fire of 1943, and until 1948 attempted more or less successfully to reorganize it. He twice served as Minister of Education: under José Luis Bustamante y Rivero, 1945-46; and under Manuel Prado, 1956-58. In his later years he spent most of his time writing, and taught only sporadically.

His first works, *La Multitud, la ciudad y el campo* (1929), *La Iniciación de la República* (1929-30), *Perú: problema y posibilidad* (1931), were general interpretative essays which reflected the impact of the social sciences and the new ideological currents of Marxism and *indigenismo* in Peru. He then set out on the more arduous task of composing his monumental *Historia de la República, 1822-1933*, which first began appearing in 1939. The sixth, and final, edition, considerably revised and augmented, appeared in 1968-1970. As a capstone to this 17-volume work, he published his basic source-book, *Introducción a las bases documentales para la historia de la República del Perú* (2 volumes, 1971). Finally, he returned to the writing of more interpretative, single-theme histories, such as *El Azar en la historia y sus límites* (1973), and his last work, *Elecciones y centralismo en el Perú* (1980). He also authored several works on law.

His earlier histories, although too general in scope and frequently lacking in empirical data, not unlike the *Seven Interpretive Essays* of Mariátegui, are still valuable for their penetrating insights. The main value of the *Historia de la República*, probably Basadre's principal contribution, is that it provides just such a systematic, chronological treatment of post-independence history. At the same time, this work has been criticized because many of the volumes seem to be little more than an encyclopedia of events, lacking in analysis or synthesis.

Finally, he never wrote — or had time to write — a single, short comprehensive history of republican Perú.

Still, Basadre's works will meet the test of time. He assumed the difficult task of writing the recent history of an underdeveloped country, frequently torn by social and political antagonism. As a youth he taught in the Popular Universities founded by Haya de la Torre and suffered persecution by Leguía.

Yet he eschewed extremist interpretations, refusing to become identified with either Marxism or *Aprismo*, adopting instead a liberal-progressive view of society. He sought to write in a clear and objective style, and generally succeeded. In 1979 the military government honored him with the Order of the Sun, the highest civilian tribute in Peru. A quiet and unassuming man, he dutifully received his prize and then returned to what he enjoyed best: reading and writing history.

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