

# INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND RELIGION BEFORE AND SINCE THE CONQUEST

*Anna L. Peterson*  
*University of Florida*

- LEGENDS OF THE PLUMED SERPENT: BIOGRAPHY OF A MEXICAN GOD.* By Neil Baldwin. (New York: Public Affairs, 1998. Pp. 205. \$37.50 cloth.)
- THE MYTH OF QUETZALCOATL.* By Enrique Florescano, translated by Lysa Hochroth. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. Pp. 287. \$45.00 cloth.)
- TIME AND SACRIFICE IN THE AZTEC COSMOS.* By Kay Almere Read. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998. Pp. 308. \$39.95 cloth.)
- INKA BODIES AND THE BODY OF CHRIST: CORPUS CHRISTI IN COLONIAL CUZCO, PERU.* By Carolyn Dean. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999. Pp. 288. \$59.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)
- INDIGENOUS SOUTH AMERICANS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT: AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.* By David J. Wilson. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999. Pp. 480. \$60.00 cloth, \$27.50 paper.)
- NATIVE TRADITIONS IN THE POSTCONQUEST WORLD.* Edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone and Tom Cummins. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998. Pp. 480. \$30.00 cloth.)
- INDIAN SLAVERY, LABOR, EVANGELIZATION, AND CAPTIVITY IN THE AMERICAS: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY.* By Russell M. Magnaghi. (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 1998. Pp. 559. \$110.00 cloth.)

## *Myth and Culture in Mesoamerica*

Quetzalcoatl seems to embody the syncretic nature of pre-Columbian and post-Columbian Amerindian cultures. The plumed serpent encompasses a variety of Mesoamerican indigenous traditions and European elements in a constantly shifting composite that has served at different times and places as a symbol of identity for various native groups, creoles, and mestizos. Drawing on this multivalence, Neil Baldwin uses Quetzalcoatl as the center of his exploration of Mexican culture and history in *Legends of the Plumed Serpent: Biography of a Mexican God*. The book, as Baldwin readily admits, emerged from a traveler's fascination rather than from lengthy training in Mesoamerican myth. After deciding to write about Mexico, Baldwin sought "a char-

acteristic of Mexican life or even an archetype within the culture that I might be able to capture, that would have the staying power to become the center of my book" (p. 6). Eventually he settled on Quetzalcoatl, "the only symbol with so much staying power that it can be found permeating nearly every formative culture of Mexico" (p. 10).

Baldwin's discussion of precolonial Quetzalcoatl legends is generally competent, although specialists will note a few dubious claims, such as his description of human sacrifice as "penance" (p. 34) and his insistence on "the Aztecs' absolute conviction" that Cortés represented the return of Quetzalcoatl (p. 53). A larger problem emerges from his use of the plumed serpent as a metasymbol that sets the pattern for all that follows. Identifying Quetzalcoatl as the primary archetype of Mesoamerican culture diminishes the significance of other myths and symbols. It also means collapsing different elements, including other feathered serpents, into a unified image of Quetzalcoatl and perhaps seeing Quetzalcoatl in too many different times and places. The other risk is perceiving too much in Quetzalcoatl itself. No single image can capture a whole culture, and Baldwin may ask Quetzalcoatl to bear too much weight.

This weakness in *Legends of the Plumed Serpent* becomes especially apparent when Baldwin arrives at the conquest. The main problem is the increasing stretch required to accomplish both his goals: writing a biography of Quetzalcoatl and also constructing a thumbnail sketch of Mexican cultural history. The effort to unite these two projects through the use of Quetzalcoatl as a defining archetype, already tenuous in the preconquest era, becomes increasingly problematic for the colonial period. Throughout his discussion of the Spanish arrival, Christian missions, and other political and cultural processes during colonization, Baldwin strives to keep Quetzalcoatl front and center, as for example "the primary touchstone" for debates over creole identity (p. 124). But he often fails to find a direct relevance for his title character, and entire chapters go by with few or no references to the plumed serpent, particularly during the revolutionary and independence periods. Some of the connections Baldwin makes are thin to the point of breaking, such as his citation of Octavio Paz's identification of Francisco Zapata and other Mexican nationalist heroes as "only translations of Quetzalcóatl . . . in fact, unconscious translations" (p. 143). To be fair, it is not clear who is stretching more here, Paz or Baldwin.

Baldwin encounters twentieth-century interpreters with evident relief. He contends that Mexicans like Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco and foreigners such as D. H. Lawrence shared his view of Quetzalcoatl as a uniquely potent metaphor for Mexican culture. (Yet for other interpreters, such as Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal, Quetzalcoatl embodies subjugated indigenous and mestizo America.) Despite a few gaps and weaknesses in his treatment of earlier periods, Baldwin generally succeeds, as Tony Hillerman's jacket blurb contends, in "collect[ing] what the archae-

ologists have learned and [making] it accessible for us amateurs." Specialists on Mesoamerica will not find *Legends of the Plumed Serpent* particularly innovative, but it makes a better than usual coffee-table volume—oversized, lavishly illustrated, and beautifully produced—one that can introduce tourists and armchair travelers to Mexican history and culture and perhaps inspire them to further study.

Both the strengths and the weaknesses of Baldwin's book become evident in comparing it with Enrique Florescano's *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, a more scholarly book with much less appeal for nonspecialists despite Lysa Hochroth's clear and readable translation. Florescano does not ask Quetzalcoatl to bear as great a symbolic burden as does Baldwin, and Florescano's occasional tendency to essentialize Quetzalcoatl or Mesoamerican culture is usually balanced by attention to the great diversity of traditions and images of Quetzalcoatl. These traditions, he argues, began spreading throughout Mesoamerica with the decline of the great cities of Teotihuacan and Tula. Even cultures far from Nahua (Aztec-Mexica) centers possessed images of and myths about the plumed serpent.<sup>1</sup> Quetzalcoatl's two main incarnations are as a Toltec culture hero and, in later Nahua and Mixtec myths, as "the divine messiah who brings to the earthly world the benefits of civilization" (p. 37). The first version, Quetzalcoatl as "god, priest, and cultural hero of Tula," is frequently confused with the presumed historical figure known as Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, who "performed feats as a warrior, governed Tula at the height of its splendor, lost the throne, and finally abandoned his kingdom, fleeing east with some of his followers" (p. 37).

The diversity of images of Quetzalcoatl is matched in *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* by a plethora of interpretations. According to Florescano, some scholars "see in the accounts about Quetzalcoatl a constellation of myths without any relation to true historical occurrences," while a larger group believes that the myths document "the historical experience of a royal personage who founded the kingdom of Tula, introduced important religious reforms, and created a civilized political community that was a model of government influencing many different areas of Mesoamerica" (p. 59). Florescano aims at a different approach, according to which the figure of Quetzalcoatl "was forged over a prolonged period of time and under the influence of distinct cultural traditions." Florescano asserts that the complex mythology about Quetzalcoatl brings together originally distinct traditions about the Plumed Serpent, Venus and the Divine Twins, the creator and wind god Ehecatl, and the historical figure Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl.

Amidst these different strands, Florescano perceives "a basic unity in

1. Nahua refers to "all related Nahuatl-speaking peoples who inhabited Central Mexico in the post-Classic period (1200–1521 C.E.) just preceding Spanish rule" (Read, p. 4; see also Baldwin, p. xi). Nahuatl designates the language spoken in Tenochtitlan and surrounding areas, which had become by the conquest a lingua franca in a large part of Mesoamerica.

the mythical thought" of different Mesoamerican cultures: "Long ago, these peoples invented a canon to explain their origins and conserve and transmit their memory. This model integrated the original foundation of the cosmos with the birth of the sun, which breathed life and order to the different parts of the created world, and, finally, with the origin and development of the ethnic groups that founded memorable cities and nations" (p. 111). Florescano also finds this mythical paradigm in the Mayan text *Popol Vuh*, which he discusses at length (pp. 91–110). Like Quetzalcoatl, the hero twins in the *Popol Vuh* are "cultural heroes who fulfill the role of transmitting the basic necessities to humanity" and who concretize a divine-human agreement according to which "creation is an act of the gods, and the mission of humans on earth is to conserve the basic principles of this divine creation and honor the founding gods through sacrifice" (p. 110).

Existing cultural symbols and myths were both appropriated and transformed as invading groups conquered ancient Mesoamerican cultures, beginning in the seventh century. In the ongoing process of political domination and cultural syncretism, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl became the founding leader of Nahua society, a symbol of royal power and blood sacrifice. The power of this symbolism reflects the fact, Florescano argues, that even when historical events transform existing myths and symbols like the plumed serpent, these long-standing cultural icons do not disappear. As the Mexica conquered other peoples politically, they also incorporated these peoples' gods, thus bringing together various strands of the Quetzalcoatl myth in order to legitimize their own project of empire-building (p. 167). Although Florescano does not make the point explicit in *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, this process of domination and cultural syncretism parallels the aftermath of the Spanish-Christian conquest beginning in the sixteenth century.

Florescano draws on his interpretation of Quetzalcoatl to elaborate a general theory of myth. He argues that indigenous Mesoamerican narratives link the beginnings of agriculture to "the origin of the cosmos, the birth of human beings, and the beginning of civilized life." This leads him to conclude that "the basic mythical theme is also the symbolic expression of the most important agricultural process" (p. 193), not only in Mesoamerica but in other agricultural cultures as well. In his last chapter, Florescano discusses Quetzalcoatl as a parallel to mythological figures from Europe and elsewhere, united as "Children of the Mother Goddess." In most versions, the Mother Goddess is separated from her lover (or brother or son), who dies in the summer and is buried deep in the earth. But thanks to the determined efforts of the wife or mother, he is reborn in the spring (p. 203). When revived, the hero brings food to the surface of the earth, making possible human life and civilization (credit goes not to the Mother Goddess but to her husband or son.) Various agricultural myths repeat this pattern in order to "ratify the customs supporting the life of peoples, conserving the memory of their traditions, and acquiring for them prestige and authority" (p. 239). These

parallels lead Florescano to conclude that “faced with the common mystery of death and the periodic resurrection of life in nature, human beings from different regions and cultures produce similar symbols” (p. 6).

This quest for mythical parallels can misread or ignore elements that do not accord with preselected archetypes. Florescano follows a track set by Mircea Eliade and other historians of religion, who have created overarching theories of myth and symbol based on parallels among key images, as exemplified by Florescano’s “mother goddess.” This approach to myth and religion, at least in Eliade’s version, sets ordinary or “profane” history in stark opposition to the eternal and unchanging sacred. In *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, Kay Read argues that this vision of history as the opposite of the sacred grossly misinterprets Mexica culture. For the Mexica, the changes, destructions, and creations of history were the source of life itself.

Read begins by describing two images on a plaque from fifteenth-century Tenochtitlan: the ritual binding of fifty-two reeds and a fire drill sparking a sacrificial fire. Although the plaque provides little information for nonspecialists, Read proposes that it illuminates “a somewhat messy and highly complex system of interlocking images, interrelated significations, and polyvalent metaphors. These metaphors founded Mexica conceptions of time and sacrifice, a system which to many may seem more terrifying than beautiful” (pp. 1–2). Finding Mexica culture a little of both, Read draws on a wide variety of oral, written, and especially visual sources to describe a complex yet coherent and distinctive worldview. The images on the plaque crystallize two fundamental themes pervading *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*. First, the reeds symbolize the ceremony of the “Binding of the Years,” a ritual occurring at the end of a fifty-two-year solar cycle. On the plaque, the reeds underline the centrality of temporal transformation in the Mexica worldview. The Mexica believed that all things moved with the powers of life and thus all things constantly changed. The second image of the fire drill igniting a sacrificial flame points to the centrality of sacrificial transformation, the need shared by gods, humans, and other beings to eat other entities in order not to die before their time.

It is especially difficult to understand this worldview today because the Spanish conquerors systematically sought to eliminate written, oral, visual, and ritual dimensions of indigenous Mesoamerican worldviews. Due to the intense Spanish interference in postconquest indigenous texts, Read argues, the best primary resources for pre-Colombian religions are plaques and other archaeological remains, which were least touched by the Spanish (p. 17). Yet Read does not entirely ignore written and oral traditions. For example, she discusses in some detail the story of the Birth of the Fifth Sun, which portrays the creation of the cosmos not as an *ex nihilo* act over in a few moments but rather as “the result of a sequence of concrete, destructive events in which one thing changes to create another, each new thing heir to the previous” (p. 58).

This vision of change raises the issue of human sacrifice. Read stresses in *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* that the various forms of Mexica sacrifice were rooted in a realistic vision of biological life: “No organism can exist without eating, none will exist forever, and when an organism dies, it remains rot and change into that which nourishes other organisms. Destruction does indeed create, even now” (p. 59). In Mexica culture, the practice of sacrifice reflected a desire to order and partially control the processes of death and change in order to preserve the processes of birth and life. As Read explains, “Because death gave life, the Mexica moral community was predicated on creating appropriate life-giving destructions” (p. 182). These creative destructions took various forms, including the best-known but varied ritual of human sacrifice as well as more frequent offerings such as cakes, nonhuman animals, and especially limited ritual bleeding of oneself or another (pp. 128–29). Thus the “sacrificial logic” of Mexica culture was rooted not only in spectacular rare ceremonies but in everyday practices, images, and conceptions. In Read’s view, Mexica sacrificial realities rested in an immanent daily order so mundane and so intimate that members of Mexica society learned from childhood on that sacrificial transformation was true and necessary. The inculcation of this worldview instilled a practice of “non-reflection on those realities” (p. 178), meaning that no one questioned the practice of sacrifice or the philosophical legitimation of it.

This conclusion may be the only significant point on which Read’s argument could be more nuanced. In her effort to show how sacrificial logic pervaded all aspects of Mexica culture, she links consensus to unanimity. But the fact that an idea or practice is inculcated from childhood on and is widely accepted need not preclude cultural reflection or criticism of that practice. This point is especially evident in recent scholarship on the limits of Christian missionizing in the colonial era. No culture achieves unanimity, even about relatively trivial practices, and therefore why would the Mexica be able to maintain unanimity about human sacrifice? Readers do not have to believe that every single member of Mexica society felt the same about sacrifice to be persuaded that sacrificial logic was embedded in everyday life. Read’s overstatement probably stems from the need to counter the common claim that only massive coercion could explain the institution of human sacrifice. She argues persuasively that while some coercion probably occurred, coercion alone cannot explain why individuals took part in sacrificial rituals. Some participants were willing, based on their embeddedness in and commitment to the sacrificial logic of Mexica culture (p. 188).

This logic shaped not only ritual but also conceptions of time and history. The Mexica believed that history was continuous, that everything in the universe changed constantly. There was no way to prevent the passage of time, to avoid change, to find a realm beyond history. For the Mexica, Read contends, history was not opposed to the sacred. Rather, history was all there was, and consequently the profane “equaled” the sacred (p. 157).

Mexica culture sought to give “order to the inevitable fact of transformation and [allow] people to comprehend it, to enter into it, and even to control it a bit” (p. 95). This goal drove the complex calendrical calculations of Mexica and other Mesoamerican cultures. The continual flow of history makes human existence ultimately insignificant, but historical conjunctions offered a chance to make human life significant (p. 120). Sacrifice was crucial to efforts to order and direct the flow of history and its transformations.

In *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, strange and frightening images of bloodthirsty Aztecs give way to a coherent society in which certain forms of violence made perfect theological and ethical sense. This argument does not imply that Read approves of sacrifice: “Understanding different and diverse orientations to world ‘normalities’ does not necessarily make them all equally right everywhere. We need not view human sacrifice as acceptable human behavior in our own culture to be able to understand how it might be both acceptable and normal in another” (p. 31). Further, the Mexica condemned certain kinds of violence. Theirs was not a lawless or amoral society (p. 168). The particular types of violence that the Mexica accepted and rejected might shed light on our own culture. As Read observes, “Our initial horror at the practice of human sacrifice may even help if understanding its normality in the Mexica world causes us to question the violence in our own and to ponder how that violence came to be either condoned or considered a normal and familiar part of experience” (p. 32).

### *Indigenous Americans as Agents and Adapters*

Read highlights the value of visual resources in achieving a fuller understanding of native cultures in the Americas. In *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ: Corpus Christi in Colonial Cuzco, Peru*, art historian Carolyn Dean also makes heavy use of visual art and artifacts as tools for “reading culture.” Dean focuses on the festival of Corpus Christi in an effort to understand the various ways that native Andeans, particularly Inka elites, constructed new selves in the colonial setting. She describes the Andeans as active agents (“subject but not abject”) who managed despite the limitations they faced to challenge and alter Hispanic culture through a variety of means, including Christian rituals such as Corpus Christi. This approach situates Dean squarely amidst growing scholarly interest among Latin Americanists and others in uncovering the complexities, ambiguities, and conflicts in colonial histories, which earlier accounts often portrayed as relatively smooth and uncontested processes of conquest and assimilation.

Dean chose to focus on the Catholic festival of Corpus Christi, which celebrates the body of Christ transubstantiated in the eucharistic host, because of its “semiophagous character,” meaning that “it was a feast that dined on signs of difference, gaining sustenance for its triumph from the Andean subaltern” (p. 1). Without denying the power of Spanish Catholics and the

losses and suffering of their Andean subjects, Dean explores the ways in which indigenous persons employed Corpus Christi to criticize, defy, or reinterpret the culture of the colonizers. For example, she describes colonialists' fear that Andeans "were secretly worshiping *wak'as* (sacred places and things) on Corpus Christi" (p. 52). Although the Spanish tried to crush such "idolatrous practices," they always fell short in "their ability to understand and to control the thoughts and faith of the colonized." This failure posed a significant problem for the colonizers: "while behavior could be observed, its meaning was opaque. Intentions and beliefs—hearts and minds—were beyond evaluation" (p. 52). Precisely because intentionality is so often hidden or ambiguous in religious rituals and practices, religion has been a primary site of indigenous and anti-colonial resistance. An unfortunate gap in Dean's analysis is a failure to reflect both on the distinctively religious nature of the colonial institution of Corpus Christi and on the distinctive character of religious resistance to colonization and postcolonial domination more generally.

Despite this lack, Dean shows effectively that the Spaniards' desire to convert Andeans to Christianity inevitably opened up possibilities for resistance. Any triumph the colonizers achieved was ambivalent, and their efforts to proclaim victories over indigenous ideas and practices were often premature or overly optimistic. Suspecting as much, Spanish authorities tried to gloss over the threat of indigenous noncompliance in various ways. For example, Dean notes, the Spanish "chose to understand (and consequently dismiss) the discontent of the colonized as the irrational misbehavior of drunken Indians" (p. 58). This interpretation missed the potential for violence and outright resistance that lurked in "battle dances" (p. 60).

The ambiguity of Corpus Christi derived more from the way that it embodied indigenous resistance to Spanish domination, however. The feast also contained possibilities for Inka elites to legitimize their own relatively privileged social positions. As Dean emphasizes, colonial Andean society was far from homogeneous, and "the simple binaries produced by the colonizer failed to contain the heterogeneity of Cuzqueño society" (p. 177). Despite Spanish attempts to blur ethnic distinctions, "Colonial-period Andeans did not see the world as composed of *indios* in opposition to *españoles*." Inka nobles continued to understand themselves as such and used Corpus Christi to reinforce their elite position relative to other Andeans. In a "studied hybridity" (p. 122), Inka elites drew on Spanish and indigenous traditions, as evident in their costumes for the Corpus Christi festival, in efforts "to fashion their own bodies as empowered sites of cultural confluence" (p. 123). Their vestments combined Hispanic and Andean aspects in ways that managed simultaneously to accommodate European notions about elite adornment, to reemphasize the nobility of the Inka past, and to differentiate between European and Andean culture in order to position the *caciques* as privileged mediators. To describe the distinctive identity that Andean elites



constructed for themselves in colonial culture, Dean prefers the term *composite*. Unlike terms such as *syncretic*, *mestizo*, *hybrid*, or *pastiche*, she argues, the concept of a composite describes a process of cultural combination and change and also speaks to “an order and an organization that prioritize its parts and give meaning to the whole within cultural and historical bounds” (p. 169). As a composite, Corpus Christi contains diverse elements that did not absorb or erase each other.

In and through colonial institutions such as Corpus Christi, Dean emphasizes, Inka elites also succeeded “in equating Peru’s indigenous past with the Inkaic past, aided as they were by the Spanish will or need to homogenize the colonized” (p. 180). Inka domination made it more difficult for other Andean ethnic groups to gain power and relative autonomy within colonial society. Early in the conquest, Spaniards used non-Inka groups as allies in their effort to dominate the Andean region, but once colonial rule was established, non-Inkans lost status largely due to the Inkas’ skillful appropriation of new institutions and practices such as Corpus Christi. Dean finds evidence of Inka success in the twentieth-century revival of the Inti Raymi festival, a June solstice celebration associated with Corpus Christi, which took place around the same time of year. For colonial Spaniards, “Identifying Inti Raymi—or, for that matter, any Inka celebration—in Corpus Christi constituted a performative metaphor for the triumph of Christianity over native religion, and of Christians over ‘pagan’ Andeans” (p. 32). The modern revival of the Inti Raymi festival, however, interprets the ceremony in very different terms. Early-twentieth-century Peruvian intellectuals and *indigenistas* viewed Inti Raymi as a symbol not of Spanish triumph but of Inka resistance because the indigenous feast “‘survived’ beneath the stifling mantle of Corpus Christi” (p. 203).

Dean’s discussion of the way the revived Inti Raymi festival follows but does not replace Corpus Christi (as the colonial Corpus Christi attempted to do with Inti Raymi) points to the way that precolonial, colonial, and modern elements coexist in Peru today, complementing and contradicting each other (p. 214). In the midst of this complexity, Dean explains, Peruvians continue to construct distinctive identities and to imagine different possible futures, just as colonial Andeans did. “Subalterns,” then or now, are not simply shaped by the tools of the dominant culture. They use those tools themselves, in creative although inevitably limited ways (p. 166). These theoretical discussions make *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ* a valuable contribution to colonial Latin America history but also to cultural studies and other fields concerned with the dynamics of resistance and domination. Happily, Dean manages to make this contribution while mostly avoiding the tendencies common to subaltern and postcolonial studies to overinterpret historical data in light of contemporary theoretical frameworks and to employ jargon-ridden and obscure language. At her best, Dean challenges main-

stream historians and contributes to the diversity and analytic strength of alternative approaches to colonial Latin America and to colonial, postcolonial, and subaltern studies more broadly.

Dean's work falls squarely within the "relatively new and dynamic turn in research on colonial Latin America" that Elizabeth Hill Boone describes in the introduction to *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World* (p. 5). This approach takes "the perspective of the native peoples as they moved within and responded to the cultural and intellectual climate of the post-conquest period" and focuses on indigenous culture and everyday activities rather than "large-scale, formal, colonial institutions" (p. 6). This perspective is what unites the diverse contributions to the collection edited by Boone and Tom Cummins. *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World* explores the emergence of colonial social, political, economic, and cultural forms in Aztec Mexico and Inka Peru, two regions where "the indigenous/Spanish interface" was most concentrated (p. 3). Like Dean and Read, contributors to the volume take visual texts seriously, and many chapters are heavily illustrated.

Two essays following the introduction provide an overview of the mutual interactions between colonizer and colonized, laying the groundwork for subsequent discussions of more specific aspects of Aztec and Inka culture. In "The Many Faces of Medieval Colonization," historian Angeliki Laiou takes "a backward glance" at medieval Europe, arguing that "the developments of the sixteenth century are in many ways dependent upon institutions and ideologies that were deeply ingrained in the practices and minds of the colonizers" (p. 13). The most important of these institutions and ideologies were economic and religious. The Crusades, in particular, shaped European Christian attitudes toward "foreign people" more generally by establishing an image of "the Other" as intrinsically evil and thus in need of either conversion or elimination (p. 15). The emergence of this model, a major factor in the colonization of Latin America, underlines Laiou's claim that while economic factors were important, the cultures and ideologies of conquering and conquered groups often proved definitive in shaping colonial experiences. In contrast to Laiou's emphasis on the diversity of colonial experiences, James Lockhart, in "Three Experiences of Culture Contact: Nahua, Maya, and Quechua," finds that "cultural developments in the postcontact period are much the same wherever we look" (p. 48). This conviction that scholars can identify universal variables in experiences of colonization sets Lockhart apart from Laiou and most other contributors.

The heterogeneity of indigenous society, a theme central to Dean's *Inka Bodies*, also comes to the fore in the Boone and Cummins volume. In "Litigation over the Rights of 'Natural Lords' in Early Colonial Courts in the Andes," John Murra describes conflicts surrounding the role of Inka elites in Cuzco. Internal divisions were based not only on socioeconomic status but also on gender, as Irene Silverblatt underlines in "Family Values

in Seventeenth-Century Peru." She attempts "to make sense of family values by placing them in the broader arena of colonialism's cultural charge: the task of refashioning the humanity of colonized women and men" (p. 63). Silverblatt argues that "contests over the definition of humanness were at the heart of the colonial endeavor," and central to these contests were arguments about the family and individual roles within it. Silverblatt focuses on the Christian family and the Spanish "ethics of honor" as anchors for the kind of society that colonizers, without full success but at great cost, sought to impose on Andeans.

Another common theme in *Native Traditions* is what Boone terms "the fundamentality of texts" (p. 9). Texts, broadly understood, served not only the colonizers but also the colonized as tools for constructing and maintaining their distinctive identities. In "Let Me See! Reading Is for Them: Colonial Andean Images and Objects 'como es costumbre tener los caciques Señores,'" Tom Cummins examines objects and images that served as *portadas* or entrances to colonial culture. Andeans continued indigenous representational practices while adapting and adopting some European images and values, in texts that included Guamán Poma's *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, colonial coats of arms, textiles, and pottery. Boone's contribution entitled "Pictorial Documents and Visual Thinking in Postconquest Mexico" continues the focus on syncretic or hybrid colonial images and texts. She compares pre- and postconquest Nahuatl manuscript painting, highlighting areas of continuity as well as the emergence of new genres and themes. Boone emphasizes the force of indigenous agency but also the fact that Spanish tolerance made possible some of the continuity in native paintings. Another type of document important to both colonizers and colonized were Nahuatl *títulos primordiales*, indigenous-language municipal histories describing communities' territorial boundaries and landholdings. As Stephanie Wood points out in "The Social vs. Legal Context of Nahuatl *Títulos*," they served native leaders in their efforts for individual power and collective survival and today offer "testimony . . . to the process of identity and power negotiation in the colonial context" (p. 228).

A dominant theme of *Native Traditions* as a whole is the complex and ambiguous ways that both conquerors and natives drew on diverse traditions to construct distinctive identities in the colonial setting. This theme comes forth in Susan Gillespie's "The Aztec Triple Alliance: A Postconquest Tradition," which explores the theory that the three cities of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan, not a single government, ruled the precolonial Aztec Empire. She argues that while the formal "triple alliance" portrayed by some scholars probably did not exist, the notion of a triadic organization has foundations in native historical traditions. In short, the triple alliance is not so much a postconquest invention as a transformation of an earlier tradition. Although the conquest disrupted indigenous culture, postconquest traditions retained important aspects of earlier traditions and forms. Frank

Salomon makes a parallel argument in "Collquiri's Dam: The Colonial Re-Voicing of an Appeal to the Archaic." He is interested in the ways that Andean people "worked to renew the fund of memory about precolonial times" (p. 265). The work of recollection was and is performed, he argues, by different groups and in different "theaters." Salomon contrasts two theaters from the early seventeenth century to the present: struggles over irrigation and efforts to defend water rights through litigation. In both cases, contemporary conflicts are framed in terms of myths, rituals, and practices from colonial and precolonial times.

Salomon hints at but does not make explicit the central role of religion in colonial encounters. This theme comes to the fore in "Time, Space, and Ritual Action: The Inka and Christian Calendars in Early Colonial Peru," by Sabine MacCormack. Focusing on Guaman Poma, MacCormack shows how Spanish colonization disrupted and tried to replace the Inka religious calendar and the ritual practices it ordered. Nonetheless, many Inka and Andean rituals persisted into the colonial period, albeit with new meanings (p. 318). Similar themes emerge in succeeding essays. María Rostworowski argues in "Pachacamac and El Señor de los Milagros" that the indigenous god Pachacamac is connected to the cult of El Señor de los Milagros, which developed in colonial Lima and persists in Peru and among Peruvian-Americans to this day. Pachacamac represents "an instance of the transformation of a pre-existing native religious center and its ritual practices into a Christian cultic practice directed toward a sacred image produced in the New World rather than toward an image brought from Europe" (p. 345). In other words, Pachacamac constitutes a prime example of syncretism, the coming together of indigenous and European forms to produce novel ideas and practices, in this case the transformation of the Andean deity Pachacamac into the Christ of Pachacamilla and, after a miracle, eventually into El Señor de los Milagros. Rostworowski emphasizes the agency of indigenous and African Peruvians in this blending process. Both colonized and colonizers have contributed to the ultimate syncretic result. Pachacamac continued to change form and meaning throughout the colonial period, as have other New World syncretic images, such as the Virgins of Guadalupe and Copacabana (and Quetzalcoatl). Rostworowski points out that with these syncretic figures, the triumph of Christianity was established over the pre-Hispanic deities, but "the ancient gods did not lose their hold on the people" (p. 356). Religious syncretism thus represents a prime example of the persistence of indigenous forms and the agency of native people despite the power relations of colonialism.

Louise Burkhart's contribution to *Native Traditions*, "Pious Performances: Christian Pageantry and Native Identity in Early Colonial Mexico," explores "how the general praxis orientation of Nahuatl religion informed the Nahuas' ways of becoming and being Christian as well as informing the

ways in which their Christianity was described and interpreted by the friars who presided over their religious life" (p. 362). Burkhart emphasizes the syncretic nature of the faith adopted by the Nahuas, who did not become Christian "in anything like the sense implied by conventional understandings of religious conversion." What they did was "represent themselves as Christians, whatever they understood Christianity to be." Further, "by selectively responding to the devotional options presented them by the friars, [the Nahuas] exerted considerable control over the creation of their church" (p. 362). Like the black and indigenous Peruvians who created the cult of the Christ of Pachacamilla, Nahua Christians brought indigenous elements to bear on the emerging New World Christianity. These indigenous aspects enabled the friars to continue defining Nahua Christians as "them" in contrast to the European "us." But these aspects also helped the Nahua to articulate their own distinctive identity and to exert considerable control over their religious and cultural practices, sometimes including active resistance to clerical intervention (p. 375). Burkhart concludes, "Through their pious words and pious performances, the Nahuas actively represented themselves as Christians while retaining many of the moods, movements, and media that had constituted their traditional religiosity" (p. 378).

Language, like religion, was a tool of both dominator and dominated. In "A Nation Surrounded," Bruce Mannheim observes that the Europeans were not the first to build an empire in the Americas. The Inkas, like the Aztecs, dominated a wide variety of ethnic groups. Yet unlike the Spaniards, the Inkas did not try to impose linguistic and religious uniformity on their subjects. Their empire was "a mosaic in which speakers of distinct and often unrelated languages lived cheek to jowl" (p. 384). Only after the Spanish conquest was Quechua standardized and, along with Aymara, made into the dominant language of indigenous Andeans. Colonization reduced but did not eliminate indigenous heterogeneity, and Andean cultural forms, especially textiles, continue to show the incompleteness of "blending" between European and native cultures but also among different indigenous groups.

Frances Karttunen's "Indigenous Writing as a Vehicle of Postconquest Continuity and Change in Mesoamerica" reiterates several major themes of *Native Traditions* as a whole. She examines the ways that both colonizers and colonized used colonial institutions, especially writing, as their own devices, albeit in circumstances that were painfully constrained for the colonized. Karttunen concentrates on the persistence of some pre-Columbian themes and forms of native writing into the colonial and postcolonial periods. Like other cultural forms, native writing in the postcontact era sometimes broke with the preexisting indigenous culture but also continued and sometimes even enhanced native traditions and forms, in and through a "covert folk tradition" threading through the "overt professional tradition" (p. 434). Kart-

tunen emphasizes, however, that scholars should not identify “the folk tradition” as an unchanging remnant of archaic indigenous culture. Both overt and covert forms changed continually through the colonial and postcolonial periods. This change continues today in current Maya and Nahua writing and performance, which Karttunen discusses briefly.

Contributors to *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World* repeatedly emphasize the creativity and persistence of native peoples in the colonial period, their capacity to use and transform European traditions while preserving their own. Tom Cummins highlights these issues in his “Synthetic Comments” at the end of the volume, but he also describes the conquest as “a catastrophe,” “the beginning of the violent end” of indigenous cultures in the Americas (p. 450). This point is important because as the pendulum of scholarly work on the indigenous Americas swings away from visions of passive natives waiting to be discovered and toward affirmation of native resilience and resistance, the danger exists that the capacity of the colonized to retain some degree of agency might overshadow their overwhelming losses. In reflecting on native agency, Cummins points out that many contributors emphasize the centrality of texts, including visual images and rituals, as means for preserving and interpreting indigenous traditions. Colonizers attempt to substitute and replace their forms for indigenous ones, but this effort is never complete, as the Christ of Pachacamilla, the festival of Corpus Christi, and numerous other examples make clear. This incompleteness extends to contemporary scholarly efforts to understand the postconquest world. Cummins cites the “growing variety of approaches and aims in Latin American colonial studies” that make the field both richer and more controversial as it develops (p. 459). In the end, this variety is necessary to understand the complexity and ambiguities of the post-Columbian world, for “there cannot be an essentialist or master text that governs the study of colonial Latin America as a universal explanatory model” (p. 453).

Or can there? David Wilson believes that a single model can explicate not only colonial but also precolonial and postcolonial indigenous cultures. In *Indigenous South Americans of the Past and Present: An Ecological Perspective*, Wilson begins to construct a “grand unifying theory for anthropology” (p. xv). He also expresses an empirical aim: to provide “an updated, continentwide treatment of indigenous South American cultures that includes consistent reference to the sociocultural and archaeological information we now have at hand for the groups that have inhabited the different geographic areas of the continent” (p. 7). Combining several different models, Wilson proposes a “systems-hierarchical evolutionary paradigm” as the most capable of interpreting and ordering vast amounts of information, in contrast to the fragmentation and specialization of much current ethnography.

Wilson draws especially on the work of Julian Steward, coauthor of *Native Peoples of South America* (1959), the last wide-ranging handbook of contemporary as well as ancient South American native cultures. Wilson aims

to update Steward's work with contemporary ethnographic information as well as a revised theoretical approach, building on ecological anthropology and the work of Marvin Harris. Wilson rejects Harris's single-variable model, however, in favor of looking "at all the component variables of the system, forgetting none and invoking all" to explain why a culture is the way it is (p. 217). Wilson also argues that the different variables are related in a "circular way," so that mental "superstructure" and material infrastructure mutually shape each other, in contrast to Harris's one-way model (pp. 430–31).

Wilson's efforts to nuance ecological anthropology may not satisfy the many anthropologists who suspect any materialist explanation of reductive determinism or the even larger number who reject all grand unifying theories. Students and teachers who do not reject his assumptions out of hand, however, will find that Wilson provides a great deal of information about historical, environmental, cultural, and material aspects of diverse cultures past and present. Early chapters offer overviews of various South American environments and the relations between subsistence and socio-cultural development, along with information about ecological zones, crops, and historical developments. Subsequent chapters are organized by type of society (or level of "sociopolitical integration") and region, beginning with past and present "band societies" and ending with states.

A guiding theme in *Indigenous South Americans of the Past and Present* is that "relatively limited and noncomplex material cultures" are often "anything but limited and noncomplex when it comes to the less tangible but equally critical behavioral and ideological features of their adaptations" (p. 147). Wilson links this view to his emphasis on adaptation: all features of a culture represent ecological and evolutionary adaptations, in different senses, to particular ecological and geographic conditions. Ecological conditions lead groups to develop forms of material culture that correspond with the productive potential of their particular habitat. For example, Wilson cites Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff's work on the Desana as one of the best examples of a traditional society with an "adaptive system" that explicitly recognizes "the limitations, or constraints, on human population numbers" and articulates an "ecologically driven ideology" that is an intimate part of everyday life (p. 231). Desana cosmology works to ensure that "energy is maintained and returned to the local environment by keeping population numbers strictly confined to sustainable numbers over the longer term" (p. 240). This example reinforces Wilson's arguments that sociopolitical levels cannot "evolve" to levels of integration "higher" than the local ecosystem will support and that complex cosmologies, ideologies, and moral codes can develop alongside relatively simple modes of production and organization.

In his discussion of indigenous states, Wilson puts his theoretical paradigm to work by attempting to explain why the highest level of sociopolitical complexity developed in the central Andes and nowhere else in South America. He critiques several other efforts to answer this question for failing

to emphasize the links among sociopolitical organization, means of subsistence or production, and ecological factors. Wilson argues in contrast, "No state, however large and complex it may be, is freed of a concern about the environment and the subsistence system that support it" (p. 428). He points out that even the mighty Inkas suffered anxiety about rainfall and expressed this worry in a variety of mythic and artistic representations.

After applying his theory to a wide range of past and present indigenous societies, Wilson's last chapter moves "Toward a Scientific Paradigm in South Americanist Studies." Wilson indeed hopes for a "science" of indigenous cultures, in which hypotheses are elaborated, tested, and revised in relation to available data. He argues that this approach, which he applies to "all of the societies that traditionally have been the focus of anthropological research," can transcend dichotomies such as material versus mental cultures or internal versus external causes. It can also take into account "higher-order variables" such as religion and symbols, which other cultural ecologists ignore (pp. 434–35), and thus avoid the materialist pitfall of demoting "mental culture" to an epiphenomenal footnote. Culturalists, however, may be inclined to categorize Wilson as only slightly subtler than Harris. The suspicion that Wilson advocates a reductive approach to culture may be heightened by his discussion of adaptation in ecological and evolutionary terms. But Wilson applies evolution only in general terms, in relation to "the sex drive and its effect on population." He argues mainly that humans are biologically inclined to reproduce and that cultural factors such as ideology develop in order to restrain the damaging effects of overpopulation.

Thus Wilson is not much of a genetic determinist, but he may still be too materialist for many scholars. For those who are not unalterably opposed to grand unifying theories in general or materialist ones in particular, *Indigenous South Americans of the Past and Present* is both readable and teachable. It is well organized, often engagingly written, and includes a helpful glossary of terms as well as many illustrations and tables and an extensive bibliography.

### *An Annotated Bibliography*

Another recent volume includes no theory but makes a substantial contribution to pluralism in the study of indigenous culture and religion in the Americas. Russell Magnaghi's annotated bibliography, *Indian Slavery, Labor, Evangelization, and Captivity in the Americas*, encompasses 557 pages of small type consisting of 5 pages of introduction followed by 3,639 entries for books and articles, most described in one or two sentences. It also contains detailed subject and author indices. Most sources are in English or Spanish, with others in Portuguese, Italian, and French. The unifying theme is "the variety of ways in which the Indians of the Americas have been dominated



since their first encounters with the Europeans after 1492" (p. 1). The forms of domination included the most obvious, such as slavery, the *encomienda*, and capture in war as well as somewhat more subtle practices such as trade, missions, and diplomacy. Magnaghi also covers forms of resistance to these different institutions, including recent pan-indigenous movements as well as earlier events such as slave uprisings.

The bibliography is mostly organized by period and country or region (for the Andes, the Caribbean, and subregions within the United States). There are also relatively short sections for general sources, the European origins of colonization, and "theory and legal aspects." While a significant proportion of the listings are for the United States and Canada, Latin Americanists will discover much of value. Perhaps even more important, they will not have to struggle to find it. The sections are logically organized and clearly marked. This reference work will be helpful for both specialists and undergraduates seeking a few quick references. Some of the longer sections, such as that on the colonial Caribbean covering over 20 pages and nearly 150 entries, might have benefited from more specific subheadings.

The annotations are short and to the point, for example, "a study of the *mita* in the mining center of Potosí" (p. 116). Magnaghi does not repeat material in the title of a book or article but uses the annotations to fill in details that are not obvious. Thus he sometimes indicates that a work only "mentions" a topic such as Indian captivity or the slave trade, providing help for scholars sifting through the potentially overwhelming lists. Sometimes the descriptions are invaluable, as when the title gives little or no information, or when a document is rare and accessible to most scholars only through interlibrary loans, for which they need all the bibliographic information in advance. Because space precludes listing more than brief and nonevaluative descriptions and an occasional *insightful* or *important*, users of the bibliography will have to do a lot of preliminary reading to determine the quality and relevance of a given item. The volume will be very helpful, however, for locating sources not in an individual user's library stacks and pointing out references hidden in broader or apparently unrelated topics. Given the growing scholarly interest in indigenous traditions, colonial domination, and diverse forms of resistance, the bibliography will be invaluable to specialists and students in a range of fields.

The books reviewed here reflect the broad range of themes and theories that preoccupy contemporary scholars of indigenous cultures in the Americas. They vary in focus—from the solitary figure of Quetzalcoatl to all native South Americans—and also in approach, where the most striking difference is found between Wilson's book on the one hand and Dean's and the Boone and Cummins volume on the other. Even the books that propose encompassing theories, as Wilson's does, face inevitable limits—and even those that acknowledge their limits embody clear arguments for particular

ways of interpreting culture and history. The differences among the books do not make any of them necessarily less helpful. The moral of the different stories might ultimately be the value of methodological and theoretical pluralism in trying to piece together the diverse, complex, and never transparent experiences of indigenous cultures in America.