

REVIEWS

The Tira de Tepechpan: Negotiating Place under Aztec and Spanish Rule. By Lori Diel. Austin: University Press of Texas, 2008. Pp. viii, 160. Map. Illustrations. Plates. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$65.00 cloth.

La Chronique X: Reconstitution et analyse d'une source perdue fondamentale sur la civilisation Aztèque, d'après l'Historia de las Indias de Nueva España de D. Durán (1581) et la Crónica Mexicana de F. A. Tezozomoc (ca. 1598). By Sylvie Peperstraete. Oxford, England: Archaeopress, 2007. Pp. 602. Illustrations. Glossary. Appendix. \$132.00 paper.

With these two books, Western inquiry into Nahua historiography approaches the complexity of the subject under investigation. Lori Diel explores the palimpsestual nature of the *Tira de Tepechpan*, pointing out the four painters and multiple annotators involved in its long history of production. Diel rejects the historiographic hegemony of Tenochcan sources, treating them as equally subject to bias as Texcocan, Chalcan, and other historical traditions. She correctly maintains that comparison of sources will not necessarily arrive at an accurate accounting of events and that even sources with demonstrable bias and errors contain useful historical data in the form of such bias and errors.

Diel's presentation of multiple hands at work on the document is bold, well supported and candid regarding doubts and data shortcomings. Her description of the physical state of the document is exacting and informative. The presentation of the relationship of the content of the *Tira* to other sources, not designed to be comprehensive, is compact and well presented. Included is an excellent set of photographic plates of the *Tira*. High density images on DVD would have been preferable, but the plates, when scanned, hold up to considerable magnification.

Diel's principal theme is that the *Tira* was long in use by local civil authorities to negotiate for status and position among the bewildering changes of the postconquest era. Although the precise motivations remain undiscoverable, and are related to Tepechpan's interactions with Texcoco and Tenochtitlan, the *Tira's* producers chose to pair Tepechpan's history in an upper tier with the history of more powerful Tenochtitlan, rather than Texcoco, in a lower tier. Diel proposes that Tepechpan's denial of Texcocan ties, as well as its claims of an earlier higher status for Tepechpan and its ruling line than for Tenochtitlan and its rulers, were crafted to improve its standing in colonial times. She delineates the deliberate inclusion of evidence of political, military, cultural and religious allegiance to the

dominant power of the time, whether Tenochtitlan or Spain, as well as the insistence on a continuous ruling line, as key strategies for negotiation encapsulated in the *Tira*.

Diel encounters Nahua historiography late in its development, under stress from outsiders who little valued indigenous considerations. She contrasts the result only with an idealized conception of Western historiography. It is in reality hardly more flawed than the various schools of Western historiography, including the one prevalent among Mexican anthropologists of the middle twentieth century, whose own various allegiances produced an image of the Aztecs consistent with the one-party state in which they worked. The full character of Nahua historiography remains to be discovered and readers should not leave with the impression of an exclusively flawed approach to history.

Sylvie Peperstraete's investigation of the *Crónica X* and its dependent sources is a remarkable product for an emerging scholar because of its results and the breadth, depth and maturity of judgment wielded to achieve them. Peperstraete takes up the backbreaking challenge of Robert Barlow's 1945 observation that the works of Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc and Diego Durán were drawn from a common source, with both Nahuatl text and illustrations. In a valuable appendix, she reconstructs as much of the original text as possible through an exacting comparison of the two later authors. Peperstraete emphasizes the significant orality recorded in the *Crónica X* as well as the extent of the missing illustrations, even allowing for those that survive in heavily Westernized form in Durán. She also reports on the relationship of parts of Chimalpahin's work to this group of sources as well as the additional sources employed by Durán.

Peperstraete produces a wide variety of insights into the nature of the *Crónica X* itself. It did not derive from an annalistic format but was instead driven by narrative sequences of events typical of other types of codices. It contained ritual scenes as well as lists of tribute owed to Tenochtitlan very likely in Moteuczoma Xocoyotl's time. These are incorporated into the texts of the *Crónica X* group in repetitive and often anachronistic fashion. Similarly, these sources rely heavily on "stereotypical account structures" for certain classes of events, rendering their details unreliable. The chronology of the *Crónica X* group is consequently defective and is organized by themes and narration of story lines within individual reigns.

Peperstraete directly confronts the pro-Tenochtitlan bias woven throughout these sources and the construction and acceptance of a Tenochcan historiographic hegemony by modern researchers. This persistent, pernicious modern illusion will be shattered for any critical reader by the end of her work. The *Crónica X* is merely another source, albeit the most comprehensive and detailed Tenochcan-engineered version of history that survives. The *Crónica X* sources exhibit a mapping of Tenochtitlan's history onto that of a Mesoamerican Sun, beginning with predawn migration, the Sun at zenith with Moteuczoma Ilhuicamina and progressing towards sunset through the Conquest period. Peperstraete proposes that the prominent role ascribed to Tlacaelel fits within this framework: he represents the ascending Sun when paired with his "twin" half brother Moteuczoma Ilhuicamina, in a scheme not unrelated to "hero twins" throughout Mesoamerica.

Peperstraete makes use of the situation of two colonial authors drawing from one source to examine how their differing backgrounds and agendas influenced their re-presentation of the *Crónica X* materials. In spite of limited data, she provides surprisingly good perspective on the lives and motivations of Durán and Tezozomoc. While Tezozomoc remained closer to the *Crónica X* in many ways, he wrote for Spaniards to glorify his ancestors and their empire. He minimizes elements that would have offended non-Christians, while affirming his own Christianity. With these objectives, he interferes with and changes the structure of the original to a lesser degree than Durán, who incorporates the indigenous history into a more formal Western historiographic tradition, connecting it to Western origin myths in the Bible, tracing the rise of a great indigenous empire with all its glories and problems, until its fall as an act of divine retribution.

These two books represent a promising trend in Mesoamerican studies and historiography. Major basic sources are getting long overdue critical examination, without an excessively heavy or ideologically driven hand and without premature advocacy for alternative “correct” histories. They make it clear that we have not come so far as we have thought, but that we will be able to go forward with more reliable results. I only hope and recommend that authors such as these, building on the monumental work of Charles Dibble and Marc Thouvenot, will turn their attention to the great but still poorly understood Nahua history—the *Códice Xolotl* and its dependent sources.

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NATION BUILDING & NATIONALISM

The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo. By Lauren Derby. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. Pp. xv, 412. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$94.95 cloth; \$25.95 paper.

Until recently, novelists, not historians, have written the most insightful, not to mention riveting, portraits of dictatorship. Many of the giants of Latin American literature—Miguel Angel Asturias, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Agustín Roa Bastos, just to name a few—have been seduced by the allure of the strongman. Why has it been so problematic for historians to discern what makes authoritarian regimes tick? By definition dictatorships foster closed, often asphyxiating societies; the climate of fear and surveillance obscures more than it reveals. This may help explain why when historians do write about strongmen, they are drawn to the tyranny; no doubt it is easier to count the bodies than plumb how fear and consent worked hand in glove to keep dictators in power.

That is changing. Lauren Derby has written a fascinating cultural history of the brutal, three-decade-long Trujillo regime, illustrating the complex and complicit relationship between the dictator and the Dominican pueblo. Drawing on the literature from symbolic anthropology and cultural studies, Derby transports her readers to Trujillo's theater