

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

## Interdisciplinarity, Accessibility, and Working with Change in Colonial Mesoamerica

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This essay reviews the following works:

**History of the Chichimeca Nation: Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Seventeenth-Century Chronicle of Ancient Mexico.** Edited and translated by Amber Brian, Bradley Benton, Peter B. Villella, and Pablo Garcia Loaeza. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019. Pp. ix + 334. \$ 24.95 paper. ISBN: 978-0-8061-6399-4.

**The Codex Mexicanus: A Guide to Life in the Late Sixteenth-Century New Spain.** By Lori Boornazian Diel. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018. Pp. vii + 228. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-4773-1673-3.

**The Florentine Codex: An Encyclopedia of the Nahua World in Sixteenth-Century Mexico.** Edited by Jeanette Favrot Peterson and Kevin Terraciano. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019. Pp. vi + 256. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-4773-1840-9.

**Libros e imprenta en México en el siglo XVI.** By Mariana Garone Gravier. Mexico City: UNAM, 2021. Pp. 112. \$100 MXN paper. ISBN: 9786073046787.

**Trail of Footprints: A History of Indigenous Maps from Viceregal Mexico.** By Alex Hidalgo. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019. Pp. xv + 184. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 978-1-4773-1752-5.

**The Legacy of Rulership in Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *Historia de la nación chichimeca*.** By Leisa A. Kauffmann. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019. Pp. ix + 282. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-8263-6037-3.

**La caída de Tenochtitlán y la posconquista ambiental de la cuenca y ciudad de México.** By Sergio Miranda Pacheco. Mexico City: UNAM, 2021. Pp. 112. \$100 MXN, paper. ISBN: 9786073046732.

**Dialogue with Europe, Dialogue with the Past: Colonial Nahua and Quechua Elites in their Own Worlds.** Edited by Justyna Olko, John Sullivan, and Jan Szemiński. Denver: University of Colorado Press, 2017. Pp. vii + 363. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 978-1-60732-833-9.

**Dancing the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of Conquest.** By Paul A. Scolieri. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013. Pp. vii + 227. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-292-74492-9.

**Sovereign Joy: Afro-Mexican Kings and Queens, 1539–1640.** By Miguel A. Valerio. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp vii + 264. \$99.99 hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-316-51428-2.

When scholars consider the transition of Mesoamerica from Indigenous polities to European colonies, few spaces symbolize this change to the same degree as Tenochtitlan–Mexico City. The processes of colonization in Tenochtitlan–Mexico City are unique because at the moment that the Mexica (or Aztec) *huey tlatoani* (or emperor) Moctezuma II sent his spies and emissaries to gather information on the strange men who had landed on the coast, the city was one of the world’s largest urban centers. Just two years later, in 1521, Tenochtitlan lay in ruins, and the rebuilding of the city in the image of its Spanish conquerors, more and more frequently referred to as Mexico City, began shortly after. But not everything was replaced: even the new Catholic cathedral of Mexico City that the Spanish were forcing the Indigenous Nahuas to build was right beside and built out of the same stone blocks of the major temples in the center of the former ceremonial center of Tenochtitlan. The nobles and merchants of Tenochtitlan who had managed a sprawling empire for about one hundred years continued to be relied on by the Spanish who took control of their networks of exchange and knowledge for their own economic and political advantages. In many ways, this process of colonization required the Spanish to learn from the Mexica and other Nahuas who were the power brokers of most of Mesoamerica in 1519. The Spanish altered those structures over time to suit Spanish expectations, whether they were religious conversion or a different kind of (and more intensive and brutal) resource extraction. Yet the Nahuas responded to these changes by envisioning Spanish control in their own systems of knowledge and using Spanish traditions to their advantage, even though it was often in the framework of Spanish control.

In the past decades, major strides have been taken in understanding sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mesoamerican texts and histories. These steps represent a clear move toward the blurring of traditional disciplinary boundaries, forcing scholars to embrace one another’s disciplinary strengths. Initially, many of these changes came out of a movement now called the New Philology, an anthropological and historical style of investigation based on intensive analysis of mundane documents in Indigenous languages in the 1970s through early 2000s.<sup>1</sup> Major strides were also being made in archaeology, which saw important new finds in both the historic center of Mexico City and the lesser celebrated but equally important work on daily life.<sup>2</sup> Art historians, too, added important developments to conversations about Indigenous documents: pictorial codices began to be understood as intellectual and cultural genres rather than just obscure pictographs and maps.<sup>3</sup> Together, the three different intellectual movements led to and mutually encouraged recontextualizing and reframing the meaning of conquest to challenge the triumphalist narrative supported by using only Spanish sources, a movement now often referred to as New Conquest History.<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, even with this push to embrace

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the New Philology, see Matthew Restall, “A History of the New Philology and the New Philology in History” *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 113–134. Though often attributed to James Lockhart, the importance of the work that came before or occurred contemporaneously with Lockhart’s work, such as that done by Miguel León-Portilla, Angel K. Garibay, Frances Berdan, Susan Kellogg, Frances Karttunen, Louise Burkhart, Charles Gibson, Arthur J. O. Anderson, Charles Dibble, John F. Schwaller, and many others, also requires celebration.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the work done by scholars such as Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *The Great Temple of the Aztecs* (New York City: Thames and Hudson, 1988) and *Life and Death in the Templo Mayor*, trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Boulder, CO: University of Boulder Press, 1995), and Michael E. Smith, *The Aztecs* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), among many others.

<sup>3</sup> For instance: Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Stories in Red and Black: The Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew Restall, “The New Conquest History,” *History Compass* 10, no. 2 (2012): 151–160.

interdisciplinarity, the fundamental debate about the early colonial period centers on the transition from an Indigenous empire to European colony. Most specifically, scholarship focuses on the degree to which precolonial traditions, structures, and ideas became postconquest or colonial ones.

Scholars who focus on the transition between the precolonial and colonial periods once argued either that there was very little fundamental change or that there was a complete restructuring of society. With our new tools and perspectives, we have turned to focus on how much changed, in what ways, and to what degree Indigenous people (as well as Africans and later Asians) shaped the attempted imposition of European traditions and norms. This has gone hand in hand with studies of how Europeans attempted to use Indigenous knowledge to their own advantages. One of the more recent and notable monographs that is emblematic of the two trends is Barbara Mundy's *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City*, published in 2015.<sup>5</sup> Mundy weaves threads of continuity through a backdrop of considerable change to articulate an understanding of both rupture and continuity. Mundy also shows how her interdisciplinary training in art history, history, linguistics, literary analysis, and anthropology can come together and show that Mexico City in the sixteenth century was both an Indigenous city because it was still primarily populated and managed by Indigenous people, most of whom were Nahuas, but also a city going through momentous change as it was being rebuilt in the style of its conquerors. Since 2015, many scholars, either influenced by or as a part of the same historiographical trend, have come to similar conclusions, and I review a sampling of those works here.

It is important to start this essay by looking at a collection of fourteen essays written by some of the leaders of the field of Nahuatl language and Nahua visual culture edited by the art historian Jeanette Favrot Peterson and the historian Kevin Terraciano titled *The Florentine Codex: An Encyclopedia of the Nahua World in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*. This welcome collection of essays focuses on one of the most famous sixteenth-century documents, the *Florentine Codex*, an encyclopedia based on a collection of interviews young Nahua students trained by Franciscan friars did with local elders before being compiled into a single edited collection by the famous Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún. Generally, traditional analysis of the codex has separated the texts and images, or treated them as complementary at best, but Terraciano and Peterson emphasize that the key to this sixteenth-century ethnohistorical manuscript is to embrace the pictorial, material, and narrative elements together. This framework came out of a 2015 conference at which the collaborators agreed that the *Florentine Codex* must be looked at as three separate but unified “texts”: the Nahuatl written in Latin script, the paintings, and the much later—and added at the wish of Spanish authorities—Spanish translations and summaries. The editors of the work note that there has been no comprehensive study of this widely used and analyzed source that takes into consideration all three of these “texts,” and the essays in this collection speak to the power of this framework. For instance, Terraciano's chapter “Reading between the Lines of Book 12” at first invokes a New Philology–inspired style of analysis of just the Nahuatl and Spanish that sees notable differences between how the two texts reported events.<sup>6</sup> But in the second half of the chapter, Terraciano adds an exciting

<sup>5</sup> Barbara E. Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, The Life of Mexico City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015). For a larger discussion on Mundy's work and the limits of change in colonial Mesoamerica, see Peter B. Villella, “Measuring the Extent and Limits of Colonial Change in Mesoamerica,” *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 3 (2017): 469–476. For an even more recent conversation on Indigenous agency and the role of historians in re-creating the Indigenous perspectives surrounding the early colonial period, see Justyna Olko, “Indigenous Agency, Historians' Agendas, and Imagination in History Writing,” *Latin American Research Review* 56, no. 2 (2021): 500–511.

<sup>6</sup> I am referring specifically to James Lockhart's analysis of book 12 of the *Florentine Codex* in James Lockhart, ed. and trans., *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994),

twist by taking a prolonged look at how the images support the Nahuatl text far more than the Spanish text and “succeeded in telling their [the Nahuas] side of the story.” By using the Nahuatl and images as a framework, Terraciano sees separate projects going on in parallel, related but not exactly the same. In Terraciano’s opinion, this emphasizes an opportunity to understand the codex as primarily an Indigenous source that displayed Indigenous agency on paper right under the eyes of friars and other Spaniards, and yet still managed to avoid their reproach.

Traditionally, the debate over how European versus Indigenous this multivolume project really was has swung between both extremes. This collection clearly stakes its ground in a much more controversial argument, namely that the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún, who is normally credited with being the primary force and framer of the production of the codex, must be seen more as a “cultural translator” who helped produce the project, not as the primary conduit for information. The essays in the collection argue that Sahagún did format the work in a Western style that organized the topics and presentation of the work through a hierarchy informed by European traditions, but the ideas that filled the collection must be considered primarily Indigenous. Although the idea that the work must be read as a primary source produced by Indigenous people is not new, this collection is clearly the most substantial contribution to the theory that the work is primarily an Indigenous production within the European genre of the encyclopedia. I am not completely convinced (as I favor the historian Matthew Restall’s argument in his 2018 work *When Cortés Met Montezuma* that calls the codex a “quasi-Indigenous” source), but the collection’s analysis of the imagery is the most convincing contribution to the argument.<sup>7</sup>

In the same volume, the historian Lisa Sousa’s chapter “Flowers and Speech in Discourses on Deviance in Book 10” shows how by comparing the three texts, we can see a clear effort by Nahuas to incorporate only certain elements of Christianity into their recordings of moral discourses. Sousa emphasizes that, although Sahagún faithfully translated the Nahuatl into Spanish, he failed to capture what the Nahua artists had symbolically included in the images. In this way, Sahagún, one of the most educated Europeans in the Nahuatl language and culture, had failed to read both Indigenous texts. And importantly, the misreading (or possibly the complete ignorance of the images) meant that information avoided the friars’ censorship when the Nahuatl text and images are read together. Sousa gives an example: when the devil is represented in one painting, with his body pointed in one direction and his face in the opposite direction, we cannot understand all the context if we read only the Nahuatl or only the Spanish. Yet because of our knowledge of Nahua pictorial conventions, we know this positioning of the devil in the painting represents an obscuring of gender divides, sexual excess, and immorality. The Nahua painter used European conceptions and ideas but often adapted them to capture Nahua ideas related to morality.

Although each chapter is worthy of attention, I especially urge readers to look at the chapters and parts of chapters that pay special attention to the images and how they interact with the written texts. Peterson and Terraciano accurately note that the *Florentine Codex* is a document that occupies a prominent position between the precolonial world and the realities of being Spanish subjects, which offers scholars the opportunity to engage in numerous lines of analysis. Most important, maybe, is the fact that we have evidence of intellectual traditions that adopted one another’s structures and expressions in a

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which shows how the Spanish does not match the original Nahuatl but rather summarizes it while missing important details.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés: The True Story of the Meeting That Changed History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 41. For a more in-depth discussion of *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, see Vilella, *Measuring the Extent and Limits of Colonial Change in Mesoamerica*.

conflicting, complementing, and contradicting way. In many respects, these negotiations metaphorically represent the first century of Spanish colonialism in the area. It is impossible for any reader or scholar of the period not to be excited about how much more work can be derived from the codex in the coming years and by future generations. If the primary intention of the work was to breathe new life into conversations about how to read and understand the *Florentine Codex*, and to recenter it in discussions of Indigenous traditions and how they were being reframed during the early colonial period, the work is an absolute success.

The art historian Lori Boornazian Diel's most recent monograph, *The Codex Mexicanus: A Guide to Life in Late Sixteenth-Century New Spain*, shows us another way Nahuas adopted European conventions in their own cultural expressions. Diel offers an exciting new analysis of the early colonial codex housed in Bibliothèque nationale de France normally called the *Codex Mexicanus*. Diel argues that pictographic forms found in the codex are Indigenous conceptions framed within what they understood as a European medieval almanac tradition, to be an example of a guide on how to live life called "Reportorios de los tiempos." The codex was produced almost in the opposite way to Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*: in the *Codex Mexicanus*, Indigenous scribes and painters adapted their traditions into what they saw as a useful European one. Most excitingly, Diel's work is the first comprehensive study of the *Codex Mexicanus* as a single coherent document that comes to a surprising conclusion: this long-known document has been misunderstood as it was parsed up and used as evidence for a variety of subjects, but it should be understood as a guide for a Nahua audience. It was meant to help a newly colonized people navigate life in their colonial reality. Diel also shows that Nahua scribes who came together in the 1580s, sixty years after the Conquest of Mexico, still found pictographs to be a useful and important way to communicate ideas to their community, even though writing in the Latin alphabet had become an option. The book also shows that Nahuas were more than willing to use the structure and presentation of European ideas if deemed useful within their own cultural needs: in this case, they created a European-style guide to help Nahuas assert their historical and present place in the scope of the world all while preserving Indigenous traditions.

It was not just early colonial painters and scribes who were managing these contrasting ideas between Europe and the Americas; the Indigenous elites were learning to interact with the European world while still primarily living in their Indigenous communities. One collection that engages with these ideas and spans three different genres (academic study, primary source reader, and comparative history) is a collection edited by three scholars whose works are rooted in ethnohistory, anthropology, and linguistics: Justyna Olko, John Sullivan, and Jan Szemiński. *Dialogue with Europe: Colonial Nahua and Quechua Elites in Their Own Words* starts with a sixty-one-page introductory study by Olko and Szemiński on the continuity and change of the two major Indigenous civilizations that the Spanish colonized in the sixteenth century: the Nahuatl speakers (Nahuas) of Mesoamerica and the Quechua speakers of Peru (who primarily wrote in Spanish). Although comparing the colonial experience in Spain's two most important colonies is hardly new, the approach Olko and Szemiński articulate is different in its focus on important Indigenous perspectives by elites in Nahuatl and Spanish.

After the introduction, each part offers a primary document in both its original language and an English translation, followed by a short commentary and analysis that speaks to the project's wider concerns. Putting the scholarly analysis after the translation with associated original language shows how the scholars are working toward what is often referred to as "decolonizing" the archive. This style of organization promotes Indigenous voices to be heard by the readers before the voices of the associated scholars. Together the work offers a very convincing and inspiring new perspective on how Indigenous elites from two different societies navigated colonial life. Especially

noteworthy is the argument that the long-accepted title cacique (Indigenous noble) had nowhere near the universally analogous status that it has often been assumed to denote across Spanish colonial spaces. In fact, it was Indigenous people who shaped much of their distinct realities even though they were given seemingly the same title and role in the Spanish Empire.

Comparing the two traditional centers of Spanish colonial power in the Americas, the editors of this work offer us two very compelling contributions. First and foremost, they demonstrate that there must be more comparative work done on the Indigenous elite of the two areas because of how much it can tell us about how Indigenous people shaped their own realities in different Spanish colonies. And second, this form of analysis with notable primary sources is a style that will satisfy established academics, graduate students, undergrads, and maybe even the public at large. This is because the editors so clearly guide the reader to useful observations in the introduction, before placing Indigenous voices before their own analysis of each individual document. Reading the words of Indigenous people, with relevant contextualization, brings to life a world that supports and expands on the work traditionally done on translations and monographs.

In 2019, scholars of colonial Mexico welcomed two exciting publications related to work on translation, colonial texts, and their subtexts, related to the seventeenth-century mestizo Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *The History of the Chichimeca Nation* (or *Historia de la nación chichimeca*). Ixtlilxochitl's book traces the history of central Mexico from the perspective of Texcoco, the second most important city and the most important ally of Tenochtitlan in the Valley of Mexico, from the ancient origin story to the Conquest of Mexico. Ixtlilxochitl's work is renowned for his emphasis on the history of the city of Texcoco as well as his reliance on Indigenous produced sources, ranging from texts recorded in Nahuatl to pictographic and other visual forms. *The History of the Chichimeca Nation* was written in Spanish and is generally thought to have been meant to display some of the complexities of the Indigenous Mesoamerican world to a European audience. Ixtlilxochitl himself has recently received extra attention for the histories he wrote, the sources he used, and the biases he held for the Acolhua people (whose equivalent to a capital city was Texcoco). Essentially, *The History of the Chichimeca Nation* has been understood to be evidence of a separate and equally proud intellectual tradition of Texcocan chronicling that was, until relatively recently, overshadowed by narrative that focused on the Mexica (Aztecs) or Spaniards. In this way, Ixtlilxochitl's work disrupts the Aztecs-versus-European source debate by emphasizing the plurality of Indigenous voices, polities, and their histories.

The first of the two new works related to *The History of the Chichimeca Nation* is a complete translation of the seventeenth-century Spanish-language text by two literary scholars, Amber Brian and Pablo García Loaeza, and two historians, Bradley Benton and Peter B. Villella. This collaborative and interdisciplinary work includes a notable introduction about the author, the structure of the work itself, and the state of the field. It offers important contexts that would be appreciated by both undergraduate students and scholars of colonial Latin America. Importantly, this is the first full translation of the text from the original manuscript in any language. The original work was rediscovered in the 1980s by Wayne Ruwet in the archival holdings of the British and Foreign Bible Society, after more than 150 years of relying on sometimes erroneous copies. The work is structured in five parts, starting with cosmology and myth history (the beginning of the ages to the thirteenth century), which is followed by the Tepaneca wars that saw Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan rise to prominence (fourteenth and fifteenth century); the reign of Nezahualcoyotl (1420s–1472); and then the reign of his son Nezahualpilli (1472–151); it ends with a record of the Spanish arrival and the siege of Tenochtitlan. However, the attraction of this work is that it provides a full translation from Spanish to English. The translation work is excellent, unsurprising because this was a

collaboration by four highly regarded scholars of the colonial period who fully understand the context and meaning of the document. This work should be celebrated as the definitive translation that will be on every scholar's bookshelf for a generation or longer. Equally important, the text is very accessible in English and a welcome teaching aid for both introductory classes as well as in graduate studies.

The second publication on Ixtlilxochitl's work is the literary scholar Leisa A. Kauffmann's *The Legacy of Rulership in Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Historia de la nación chichimeca*. Kauffman's work mirrors some of the same arguments made in the collection on the *Florentine Codex* discussed earlier. Kauffmann argues that past scholarship, which has seen Ixtlilxochitl's writings as primarily in the European style, has missed the subtexts and the aesthetics of his writing that are based in Nahua traditional forms. Instead of a European-styled history about Texcoco, Kauffman argues that Ixtlilxochitl's *Historia de la nación chichimeca* must be understood as existing in both the European and the Mesoamerican cultural landscapes, and we have just been missing some of the Indigenous signs. Kauffman engages in both European and Nahua historiographical characteristics by comparing Ixtlilxochitl's work with that of a contemporary Spaniard based in Mexico, Fray Juan de Torquemada. Kauffman notes that Torquemada's work is a great example of the humanist tradition that came out of the Renaissance, relating his framework to European historians. But Ixtlilxochitl's work was clearly a hybrid of Nahua and European traditions that situates and demands a place for Mesoamerican historians, like Quetzalcoatl, in the framework of a biblical global history.

Kauffman also notes that Ixtlilxochitl's obsession with collecting and preserving documents speaks to how he was influenced by Nahua traditions. Nahua nobles were educated and taught to hold onto paintings and writings that would secure the family's rights to their inheritances from the precolonial period. By outlining his family's heritage and his community's history, Ixtlilxochitl was taking on the role and responsibilities of a Nahua noble. Ixtlilxochitl wrote about the history of Texcoco and its rulers, and he defended his own family's hereditary lands, which were complementary agendas that, in his mind, achieved the same goals.

Ixtlilxochitl was mostly Spanish by blood even though he relied on his Nahua family lands for his wealth, yet it was his connections to the Indigenous nobility, and notably his command of Nahuatl, that became valued by the Spanish Crown. The Spanish Crown appreciated, and perhaps relied on, Ixtlilxochitl's important connections with the Spanish and creole elite. With his feet in both worlds, albeit more firmly in the Spanish one, Ixtlilxochitl was viewed as an ideal candidate to take on the role of a mediator between two cultures. Kauffman argues that we should understand Ixtlilxochitl's writing as intended for a bilingual audience, and this, in addition to his political connections, is the reason Ixtlilxochitl held the role of *juez gobernador* (municipal governor). *Juez gobernador* was a role specifically for those who were responsible for negotiating and understanding the two separate political and legal spheres that were constantly clashing, the *república de indios* and the *república de españoles*.

Ixtlilxochitl's work may be in Spanish and framed in European conceptions of the world and universe, but Nahua and early mestizo voices and ideas can still be heard in the subtext of Ixtlilxochitl's writings for those willing to look for it. Kauffman is thus challenging a widely accepted belief that Ixtlilxochitl's primary aim in the production of his work, and in particular the *Historia de la nación chichimeca*, was to sanitize Alcohuan history and culture to be more acceptable to European sensibilities. She argues that was not his aim at all. The negative aspect of Kauffman's work is that she goes into such deep theoretical conversations related to literary studies that it can lead to some confusion for readers outside of the field, and certainly to those who are unfamiliar with Ixtlilxochitl. In this way, she is almost exclusively writing to a specific academic audience in a way that the rest of the works represented in this essay do not.

In 2021, on the five hundredth anniversary of the completion of the sacking of Tenochtitlan, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) published a series of fifteen short historical works complicating the Conquest of Mexico called *Colección México 500*. The works discuss varied historical themes, beginning as far back as the Mexica conquest of the Tepaneca and ending as recently as a discussion of our perceptions of the Conquest today. The works are extremely accessible and could have been an edited collection, but the decision to make the work available in shorter and more affordable formats was the right one. I have chosen to focus on two pieces—numbers 13 and 14 in the collection—for their fit and contrast with the other works in this review. First, and most relevant to the works related to scribes, is the historian Mariana Garone Gravier's work on the printing press in Mexico City during the sixteenth century, *Libros e imprenta en México en el siglo XVI*. Garone Gravier starts her work by emphasizing the importance that the printing press—or rather, typesetting, engraving, ink, and paper—played in the wars and conquest of the first decades of the colonial period. The printing press was a powerful tool for domination and conversion that was obviously understood by Europeans as they rushed to bring the first printing press to New Spain, which arrived less than two decades after the Conquest of Mexico. The printing press had the ability to amplify and multiply the exact same text that was central to European power, whether it be religious, educational, or legal. In her analysis, Garone Gravier weaves together a set of questions related to how the printing press transformed writing and publication, how books circulated, how books were made, who printed them, and who read them. Ultimately, she argues, we need to remember that the printing press was also relatively new to Europe when we consider its use in the Americas. Europeans were still learning to create cross-Atlantic networks of exchange, and importantly, much of what we know about the first century of Spanish colonialism is related to documents that were produced by the printing press. Maybe most importantly, Garone Gravier suggests, the printing press became an important tool for recording, preserving, and dispersing Indigenous languages such as Molina's dictionary of Spanish to Nahuatl, and Nahuatl to Spanish, that is still widely consulted by scholars today.

*La caída de Tenochtitlán y la posconquista ambiental*, the work on postconquest environmental change by the environmental historian Sergio Miranda Pacheco, surveys the environmental history of Tenochtitlan and Mexico City from its precolonial origins to today in an admirably succinct yet detailed way. Miranda Pacheco's decision to take on this project in relation to the five hundredth anniversary of the Conquest of Mexico emphasizes a connection to his work that focuses more on modern water issues. He argues that an uncountable number of problems and conflicts in Mexico City today are the result of the historical conditions of the city's natural environment. By looking specifically at water and issues related to the draining of Lake Texcoco, Miranda Pacheco tells us that, in the context of thinking about colonization and its impact on the environment, we must look past just the colonial period and well into the modern period, if not to today. Although Miranda Pacheco is not a specialist on the colonial period, he artfully combines recent works related to the environmental history of Lake Texcoco in the colonial period—by Vera Candiani, Barbara Mundy, Manuel Perló Cohen, and Matthew Vitz—and places them in conversation with his own work on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Miranda Pacheco references Vera S. Candiani, *Dreaming of Dry Land: Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Mundy, *The Death of Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico*; Manuel Perló Cohen, *El paradigma porfiriano: Historia del desagüe del Valle de México* (Mexico City: Porrúa and Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, UNAM, 1999); and Matthew Vitz, *City on a Lake: Urban Political Ecology and the Growth of Mexico City* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), among others, including his own work, Sergio Miranda Pacheco, *Tacubaya: De suburbio veraniego a ciudad* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007) and “El Frankenstein urbano: Ecológicos, urbanistas e ingenieros frente a la crisis hidrológica de la ciudad de México a mitad del siglo XX,” *Historia Ambiental, Latinoamericana y Caribeña* 10, no. 2 (2020): 162–202.



In addition, both Miranda Pacheco's and Garone Gravier's books, as with the other authors in the *Colección México 500*, play an important role that academic texts too often do not: they offer a sophisticated analysis of a complex topics in a way that is clearly written and thus easily consumable by the nonacademic public. Both scholars have published in a more academic context on the same themes, but their push toward communicating academic ideas and the advances they have brought to our understanding of the past to the public is very welcome.<sup>9</sup>

Further afield, approximately four hundred kilometers south of Mexico City, and temporally different from the other studies, focusing on the "long seventeenth-century" (1570–1730), yet still integrated into the same concerns, is the historian Alex Hidalgo's *Trail of Footprints*. Hidalgo contends that mapmaking in Oaxaca created a new form of knowledge transmission among a diverse set of Indigenous groups—including Nahuas, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs—who mediated by Spanish legal traditions. Hidalgo notes that the Spanish legal system still favored Spaniards but did bend in numerous ways to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into its unplanned but growing colonial bureaucratic operation. Mapmaking allowed a variety of social actors from Indigenous, mixed-race, and Spanish communities a venue in which to negotiate and fight over who owned, could use, and extract from varying tracks of land. Hidalgo frames his study from 1570 to 1730 to reassess Indigenous mapmakers whose work has historiographically been seen as having suffered a major rupture in the late sixteenth century. Instead, Hidalgo finds a constant repurposing and rebranding of the mapmaking world that allowed mapmakers to be flexible in adapting and adopting Western traditions, and also in being able to refuse or ignore those traditions. Hidalgo finds, at least in the case of Oaxaca, that the tradition changed fundamentally but was employed and deployed in differing contexts depending on the situation. In many ways, Hidalgo's work is reminiscent of both Diel's and Kauffman's work discussed earlier in its insistence that Indigenous people used European cultural tools for Indigenous purposes.

Importantly, Hidalgo underscores three distinct layers to understand how to read the maps. First, the cartographic signs, which often used Indigenous pictorial conventions but with European cultural images, such as cubes with crosses, to identify churches. Second, the alphabetic texts, which play a dual role as glosses to translate cultural confusions but also are a source of legitimizing Indigenous knowledge in the colonial structures of the Spanish legal system. It is notable that sometimes the glosses were in an Indigenous language, which shows some effort to exert a certain amount of authority over space and representation by Indigenous people in the Spanish legal framework. Finally, Hidalgo spends time tracing the materiality of the maps to emphasize how Indigenous production and concepts of natural science blended with European influences to represent the world visually and spatially.

Hidalgo finishes his analysis with an exceptional epilogue titled "Afterlife." The epilogue reaffirms Hidalgo's arguments by outlining a narrative about Lorenzo Boturini, an eighteenth-century Milanese aristocrat, linguist, and collector and a great devotee of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Boturini was also fascinated with searching for and accessing maps while in Mexico because of his interest in Indigenous-produced documents. Hidalgo argues that, while searching for maps, Boturini became especially astute at connecting with and integrating into the networks related to the mapmaking trade. Hidalgo comes to the conclusion that it was the only viable possibility when considering the question of how an Italian, with no consistent source of income, was able to compile such an extensive

<sup>9</sup> The above-mentioned works of Pacheco, but also Marina Garone Gravier, *Historia de la tipografía colonial para lenguas indígenas* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología and Universidad Veracruzana, 2014) and *Historia de la imprenta y la tipografía colonial en Puebla de los Ángeles (1632–1821)* (Mexico City: UNAM and IIB, 2015).

collection of hundreds of Mesoamerican and early colonial records. Unfortunately for Boturini, his legal troubles (and opposition from the creole population of New Spain) meant that he would lose access to all he had collected, but, Hidalgo notes, the lack of trust and the contentious nature of this episode illustrates the nature of conflicts over mapmaking and land petitions even into the eighteenth century.

The performance studies scholar Paul A. Scolieri notes that the early Spanish chroniclers were obsessed with writing and recording information about dance and song in Indigenous societies of the Americas in his 2013 work, *Dancing in the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of Conquest*. This obsession with recording details about dances was due to the chroniclers being surprised and afraid of the tradition when observing Indigenous celebrations and events. These celebrations and performances were core concerns of Spanish dominance and religion because of the belief that they continued to celebrate non-Catholic traditions. Scolieri notes that if we consider the documentation, interpretations, and prohibitions of Indigenous dance created by Europeans, we have a type of archive that has mostly been ignored: that of dance. Importantly, this archive teaches us a lot about the unconscious representations of the Europeans but also about a number of realities of the Aztec dancers.

Scolieri maps the descriptions of dancing, beginning with the earliest references by Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and other early Spanish chroniclers such as Bartolomé de las Casas. Scolieri discusses these references in the context of the Taíno term *areíto*, or “song-dance,” and compares the recorded descriptions to show how *areíto* was seen as a political tool to preserve laws, a form of recording and memorializing history, and seeing into the future. More importantly for this essay, Scolieri spends two chapters on the early friars Motolinía, a Franciscan missionary, and Sahagún, the organizer of the *Florentine Codex*, in New Spain. Scolieri argues that Motolinía’s description of Aztec dance emphasized how it symbolized an opportunity to integrate Nahuas into a Christian world. But Motolinía’s much-copied and much-quoted work was altered by those who followed him to emphasize the opposite; their pagan origins and the possibility that Indigenous people’s dancing was a form of preserving heretical beliefs. In the case of Sahagún, Scolieri emphasizes the famous slaughter of Nahuas by Spaniards during the Toxcatl festival of 1520 to argue that the dancers were used in different accounts—whether secular Spanish, friars, or Indigenous—as an ideal form through which to remember the violence of that slaughter. Finally, Scolieri finishes his work by noting that dance in New Spain was tightly controlled by the colonial authorities and the Catholic Church, which emphasizes that the practice was seen as an important tool of colonial control.

Three main threads are clear when looking at recent scholarship on early colonial Mexico. First, interdisciplinarity is providing new readings of documents we have long known about. In fact, this has become the expected and mandatory center of all new studies. Second, we can now also see clearly that there is a great diversity of Indigenous perspectives, communications, and expressions, and in many ways, Indigenous people dominated elements of everyday life. Indigenous people did this all while also surviving and preserving parts of their cultural heritage even as it was being eliminated under the tightening screws of colonial domination and subjugation. Third, we can clearly see Indigenous people, Spaniards, and the first generations of mestizos adapting themselves and adopting and transforming one another’s cultural forms and ideas while maintaining and adjusting their own in an ongoing process of contact-induced change and continuity.

It must be admitted that these lessons from Mesoamerica are perhaps only partially applicable in other colonial spaces. Both the diversity and the quantity of available documentation produced by Indigenous people from Mesoamerica are unmatched, whether the three texts of the *Florentine Codex*, maps from Oaxaca, the petitions of Indigenous nobility, or the writings of a mestizo intellectual. Importantly, the lessons that have resulted from the nine studies presented here show that Mesoamerica has a unique

position in the colonial history of the Americas. The variety of documents has reinforced interdisciplinarity and ensured that we now have conversations with one another across disciplines today. The innovative ways in which the history of Mesoamerica is being read allow us to understand the first century of colonization in New Spain by listening to Indigenous voices in a way that other geographic areas cannot replicate with the same techniques.

But we are not only working with Indigenous-language sources and thus, in some ways, are in the same position as other colonialists. For instance, and as demonstrated by Miranda Pacheco, Garone Gravier, Kauffman, and Scoleri, there is still so much we can learn about the environment, culture, and psychology of historical actors and spaces by reading European-produced sources. We must continue to work with both Indigenous produced sources and the more traditional ones produced in Europe. One recent example that mixes both Indigenous and European sources, and borrows and builds on a diasporic framework to great success, is the literary scholar Miguel A. Valerio's 2022 *Sovereign Joy: Afro-Mexican Kings and Queens, 1539–1640*. Valerio paints a convincing picture of a lively and active Afro-Mexican community that would celebrate its culture in public spaces. He does this by doing a close reading of Spanish sources in conjunction with evidence from a Nahuatl scholar and chronicler, Domingo Chimalpahin, and places it all in a theoretical framework borrowed and adapted from writers of the Black Atlantic. Valerio successfully shows how Black confraternities held similar festive practices during the first hundred years of Spanish colonialism to those in South America, which he convincingly argues must have had earlier origins in the Kingdom of Kongo. Valerio argues that his work is not a history; instead, he has written a literary and cultural analysis meant to shrink the space between the disciplines. I disagree with Valerio: his work is a successful combination of literary and cultural analysis and history. Valerio manages both while avoiding the pitfall of Kauffman's work: though theoretical, the work is easily accessible to nonspecialists in the field. In many ways, Valerio's work replicates a similar trend to that of Mundy's mentioned at the beginning of this essay: the more approaches we consider in our studies, the better our results will be. It is clear that Tenochtitlan–Mexico City is a special space, and we should continue to push our boundaries while remaining open to trends in other studies of colonialism and the Global South.

It is true that there is still tension in scholarship on where exactly on the spectrum of cultural change versus cultural continuity we should place ourselves. Yet the overall framing of our work that now seems to be consistent across the field is this: Everything changed, but Indigenous people, the majority of the population by a significant margin during this period, used precolonial traditions to frame their understandings of the significantly altered world they lived in. These precolonial traditions of preserving knowledge, whether through maps or their own pictographic systems, easily lent themselves to be adapted into European systems of writing, the preservation of local history, and the political realities of the Spanish courts that wanted "evidence." Nahuatl and other Indigenous people of Mesoamerica were quick adopters of the Latin alphabet and adapted to Spanish-style court systems to attempt to get their way while protecting their land, history, and heritage as best they could. On the one hand, we can acknowledge this great change and that the Spaniards took over the structures of extraction and taxation that the Mexica had created and pushed those structures toward European preferences. It should not be surprising that this greatly affected how day-to-day life as well as economies and social workings operated. However, in adapting those traditions, and adopting and altering European-informed traditions, we must continue to acknowledge that they did so in a fundamentally violent space. All the works I am reviewing acknowledge this fundamental change and the associated violence. They also delve further into Indigenous intellectuals and specialists and the traditions that made up the backbone of a society. These Indigenous intellectuals and specialists were holding on to

their history and culture while also facing the foreboding realities that their traditions were dying out or being so fundamentally altered that their meaning, orientation, and significance that they might one day seem incomprehensible.

Finally, we see another trend in scholarship on the topic that embraces accessibility to the wider public, or as a teaching tool, while maintaining innovative techniques and breaking new ground. It has long been common in the field to publish primary source material with the corresponding original language, as well as for art historians and historians to include images of the documents they are studying, but the field continues to push the boundaries on making sources available to the wider public. And more recently, it is hard not to note the accessibility of the language of most of the scholarship being produced in the field. It should be no surprise, then, that the 2020 Cundill History Prize, which celebrates innovation, rigor, and accessibility, was awarded to Camilla Townsend's *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs*, which studies the same temporal and geographic area as the works reviewed here.<sup>10</sup> Not only are the works reviewed here readable, but they are engaging and are painting a vibrant Indigenous urban space to a degree that might have seemed impossible even two decades ago. It is impossible to flip through the pages of Hidalgo, Diel, and Peterson and Terraciano's work without being captivated by the images, or to read about the words of Indigenous nobles like Ixtlilxochitl, to compare the voices of Quechua and Nahua elites, to imagine how friars and Spaniards watched the Aztec dances, or to hear how the printing press revolutionized knowledge dispersal just as the Spaniards were exploring their first attempts to drain Lake Texcoco without wanting to know even more. When we add to this the recent archaeological work that has uncovered what seem like uncountable new ruins, such as the ritual offerings at the Templo Mayor, major structures like the giant skull rack (*tzompantli*), and the temple of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, the Mexico City of today is becoming more and more visibly and more intellectually connected to its Aztec and colonial past.

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<sup>10</sup> For more, see Camilla Townsend, *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2019); Olko, "Indigenous Agency, Historians' Agendas, and Imagination in History Writing," 503–504.

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