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Review/Reseña

Susan Schroeder, ed. *The Conquest All Over Again: Nahuas and Zapotecs Thinking, Writing, and Painting Spanish Colonialism*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010.

Nahua and Zapotec Colonial Experiences

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The book under review is a collection of nine essays by renowned ethnohistorians. The main title and the introduction by Susan Schroeder describe their contents as related to the conquest of Mexico, and as such, seem to be another of a considerable number of publications on the subject (Matthew and Oudijk, 2007; Oudijk and Restall, 2008; Asselbergs, 2008). In the introduction these nine contributions are explicitly identified with what has been called the “New Conquest History, which perceptively and boldly shifts attention from the familiar, singular Spanish version of what transpires during the taking of the Aztecs’ capital and complements, but challenges it with a new, vital literature produced by and for the natives themselves” (8). Given this clear position, it is somewhat surprising that after having read the book I have to conclude that only one of the nine chapters

counters “official” conquest historiography, and most do not deal with the conquest at all. Curiously enough, the essays do not fit under the banner of the subtitle either. It suggests that the texts deal with how Nahuas and Zapotecs viewed Spanish colonialism. However, although some of the authors discuss how Nahua chroniclers and scribes responded to new necessities of the colonial period, this is a far cry from their view on Spanish colonialism. So, in reviewing the individual chapters, we will learn what they do contain.

The book starts off with a fascinating text by Kevin Terraciano. He analyzes three Tlatelolco accounts of the conquest of Tenochtitlan in which they represent themselves as brave, heroic warriors in contrast to the cowardly Tenochca people. The texts discussed are the two versions of the *Anales de Tlatelolco* (BnF 22 and 22bis) and book twelve of Sahagún's *Códice Florentino*. While this chapter deals with the conquest, Terraciano does not set out to counterbalance the Spanish conquest story, but rather to show how the Tlatelolca used these events to boost their identity; a typical yet beautiful example of Mesoamerican micropatriotism. Actually, this aspect comes back over and over again in this book: the idea that the community is the center of everything and all efforts are directed towards making it more important, more beautiful, and more powerful. This is not something related to Spanish colonialism, but with prehispanic tendencies that continued and even grew stronger during and after the conquest.

Travis Kranz writes on three closely related pictorials from Tlaxcala and suggests an argumentative change in their contents related to specific claims before Spanish authorities. This chapter may be more in keeping with the subtitle of the book, although it concerns an indigenous response to new colonial realities rather than a Tlaxcalan view on it. The text discusses two versions of the famed “Lienzo de Tlaxcala” and a pictorial fragment kept by the Nettie Lee Benson Collection in Austin. It is well argued and clearly written, but much of it was already known from Kranz’ previous publication on similar subjects in *Sources and Methods for the Study of Postconquest Mesoamerican Ethnohistory* (2007). A similar argument could be made in regard to the contribution by Louise Burkhart about a Nahua play on the destruction of Jerusalem. This chapter shows Burkhart’s profound knowledge of Nahua colonial religious texts and the ability to explain it

to the readers, but good parts of the chapter are very similar to what she published on the same topic in volume four of the *Nahuatl Theater* series (2009: 20-30). The main point of the chapter is supposedly a parallel between the destruction of Jerusalem and that of Tenochtitlan, but it actually is a representation of the Nahuatl and Spanish accounts on Jerusalem and an explanation of why certain parts were taken out or added to the Nahuatl version. Again, Burkhart's argument is clear and solid and the subject of the article is important and fascinating in showing the importance of these works for our understanding of Nahua adaptations to colonial life.

The next three chapters are very similar as regards their format and contents, but very different as regards their conclusions. All three are strongly bio- and bibliographical in nature, but each has a different author as its focus. Susan Schroeder considers Chimalpahin, of course. Few scholars know this Nahua chronicler and his works better than Schroeder and her many detailed and exhaustive studies have raised him almost to the level of Bernardino de Sahagún. Notwithstanding the title of the chapter, "Chimalpahin Rewrites the Conquest," the contribution is not really about the conquest nor about rewriting. Rather, Schroeder explains how Chimalpahin associates Nahua history with historical events recorded in the Bible. She suggests that Chimalpahin Christianized his texts in order to ward off suspicions by Spanish friars. While this may be the case, it is not explained why contemporary authors like Tezozomoc or Zapata y Mendoza did not do so. It is important to note that Chimalpahin lived and worked in the church of San Antonio Abad and, therefore, must have been a very religious man. Rather than thinking of him as trying to ward off anything, maybe it would be more productive to consider him as somebody who did not have anything to ward off but was simply and authentically Christian.

Amber Brian's chapter gains in importance if it is contrasted to Schroeder's. She discusses Ixtlilxochitl and, without being aware of it, paints an apparent radically different historical context than Chimalpahin's, even though they were contemporaries. At no time is there any mention of the radical differences between the writings of both chroniclers. Did Ixtlilxochitl have any fear of being rounded up by zealous friars? He certainly did not resort to Chimalpahin's tactics of

loading his accounts with Christian morals. This would have been an interesting theme to discuss, but Brian does not take up the glove. Instead, this contribution is probably the most distant from the New Conquest History as it defines several of Ixtlilxochitl's texts as *relaciones de méritos* and consequently considers them misrepresentations. However, the point is—and this is the central issue of the New Conquest History—that the main sources of the “Spanish” conquest historiography, like the Cortés' and Díaz del Castillo's accounts, are also such *relaciones de méritos* but that this aspect has not prevented historians from using them. Ixtlilxochitl's texts should, therefore, be used in the reevaluation of history and should receive the same historical criticism as Spanish sources. There is no reason for pre-conceived doubts about the historicity of indigenous or mestizo sources like Ixtlilxochitl's.

The third biographical chapter is Camilla Townsend's on Juan Buenaventura Zapata y Mendoza. This author deserves more attention after Luis Reyes and Andrea Martínez's (1995) initial publication of his chronicles and I am glad that Townsend has done so. The text starts off with a long biographic section followed by a discussion on how Zapata y Mendoza got hold of his material. This is an important part of the chapter, as few people know this author at all. However, as in previous essays, the title suggests that the chapter will deal with something and yet this is not really the case. Now it is “Nahua identity” and there is very little discussion of this issue (156-157). Townsend tries to show that some sort of us (Nahuatl speakers) versus them (Spanish speakers) existed, but she gives very little evidence of this. Questions about the Spanish priests' knowledge of Nahuatl were actually part of the so-called *residencias* and normal practice in colonial New Spain. A reading of the next chapter, by Barry Sell, would have made clear the Spanish priests need to speak Nahuatl. An interesting point raised by Townsend concerns the use of the term *indios* in Nahuatl texts written by Zapata y Mendoza. This certainly is very particular to this chronicler, but, as is shown in the chapter, this use can be explained by Zapata y Mendoza's need for a category for ‘indigenous people’ and so he used the term *indios*, common in Spanish colonial texts. At the same time, however, Townsend's text makes clear that Zapata y Mendoza wrote to boost the identity of his community, another case of micropatriotism.

Barry Sell's chapter is a fascinating discussion of how instructional materials and *confesionarios* for Jesuit priests were formed, based on the study of samples of confessions found in private notes by Horacia Carochi, the renowned Jesuit priest and *nahuatlato*. It explains the difficulties Spanish-speaking priests encountered in learning the indigenous languages of New Spain, as well as the important role native speakers played in the preparation of materials for these priests. Sell shows so well that what is still often perceived as a Spanish "spiritual" conquest, is much more complex and normally due to the participation of indigenous people themselves. In this somewhat remote sense this chapter could be regarded as part of the New Conquest History as it questions the idea of an overwhelmingly Spanish effort to indoctrinate the indigenous population simply and passively with the Christian doctrine. However, it should be noted too that Sell's valuable contribution does not concern 'Nahuas and Zapotecs thinking, writing, and painting Spanish Colonialism,' since it is about the experiences of an Italian Jesuit trying to provide his Spanish students with materials so they can become fluent speakers of Nahuatl. This does not affect my appreciation for this text, but is important in regard to the collective work.

The eighth chapter justifies the "Zapotecs" in the subtitle of the book. It is a highly original contribution by David Tavárez whose work on Sierra Zapotec texts is well known among ethnohistorians, although the material with which he works is largely unpublished. Tavárez shows how the arrival and initial presence of Spaniards in this region is recorded in two distinct kinds of texts: calendar books and Primordial Titles. The former are not historical records at all, but rather related to the 260 days mantic cycle, which means the author has to determine the possible year to which the registered dates are referring. This leads to a secondary identification in which the registered events are identified with known historical events. The records in the Titles are even more vague and have the additional problem of layering historical events. From this complex analysis, Tavárez arrives at twelve different possible dates for seven distinct historical events. Although this may be unsatisfactory to some historians, it is actually a considerable step forward, keeping in mind the kind of sources at hand in this particular Oaxacan region.

Finally, there is a contribution by Robert Haskett, which deals with Primordial Titles and related materials from Cuernavaca. It is curious that this work rounds out the book as it actually is the only text that can be associated clearly to the New Conquest History. Not concerning the military conquest but rather the so-called “spiritual” conquest, in an excellent analysis of Nahuatl and Spanish texts, Haskett shows how people from the Cuernavaca region claimed credit for the adoption and introduction of the Christian faith without any Spanish help or participation. The ‘entry’ of the true faith is converted into a means to boast local identity in a continuation of prehispanic micropatriotism and religious dedication. Haskett's issue is not the lateness of his sources (17th and 18th centuries), nor the authenticity of the information contained in them, but rather how the Christianization of Nahuas—in present day Morelos—has been turned into an indigenous process. At the end of the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries Spanish priests were demoralized by the limited success of converting the population to true Christians, these converts regarded themselves as true Catholic believers even though modern ethnohistorians now consider this “Nahua Christianity.”

So what is the common denominator in these chapters? It is not the conquest nor the indigenous view of Spanish colonialism. Five chapters may fit under the title “Colonial Adaptations of Discourse in Indigenous Texts,” but this would leave out such precious contributions as Terraciano's, Sell's, and Tavárez's. Little else seems to tie these contributions together. It leaves the reader with the idea of having learned lots of valuable bits and pieces, but not a collective idea that challenges or confirms anything in present day ethnohistory. This is mainly a problem of editing. One has the feeling that the authors were invited to this book not based on what they could contribute to a discussion on a main issue, but based on something else that is not explained.

Similar editing problems can be detected throughout the book. Most important is the difference in citation styles used in the articles. This is highly unusual and, at least for me, a first ever. Terraciano, Burkhart, Brian, Sell, Tavárez, and Haskett have a bibliography at the end of their chapters, while the other three do not. Only Brian has author-date references in the text, while all others have the references in

the endnotes. However, whereas Terraciano, Sell, and Tavárez have author-date references in these notes, Kranz, Burkhart, Schroeder, Townsend, and Haskett have full bibliographic references. To make things worse, figures 2.1 and 2.2 show the same photo, while the bibliographic references to figures 2.3 to 2.8 is “*Antigüedades mexicanas*, private collection,” which, of course, should be (Chavero, 1892). Similarly, a photo of a fountain that may have been known by Zapata y Mendoza (fig. 6.8) is superfluous, if not silly. And apart from quite a few typos, Townsend's article contains a number of Nahuatl citations without translation. Just about all of Brian's English translations from the Spanish contain mistakes or are inaccurate.

Many of the problems pointed out above could and should have been resolved by thorough editing of the manuscript before going to press. But even before putting together a manuscript a certain objective should have been established, based on the group of scholars that should have been invited to participate. As it is, *The Conquest all Over Again* is a collection of good articles with no clear common objective.

Being associated with a trend baptized as the “New Conquest History,” recently I have been invited several times to talks, meetings, and publications on the conquest of Mesoamerica. I am not sure how to define this new trend, I can only say what we set out to do when we wrote and published *Indian Conquistadors* (2007) and *La conquista indígena de Mesoamérica* (2008). As the historiography on the conquest of Mesoamerica has been formed or was inspired by the accounts of those who only represent one part of the participants, in order to counterbalance this inequity it is necessary to put forth the writings of those who have been ignored and write a new history that involves all sides of the story. If this indeed defines the objectives of the New Conquest History, then the book under review here does not fit into this trend, even though the title and the intent may suggest otherwise (8). In fact, only one of the nine chapters counters the “official” conquest historiography, and most do not deal with the conquest at all. So maybe one should simply ignore the title and go for the subtitle, but there we also encounter problems.

After carefully reading the book, this reviewer is confused. While this in itself may be considered positive for an academic, in this particular case it is not necessarily so. As a reviewer I have to inform the

readers of the objective of a work, whether these objectives were reached, and whether the contributions hold up to high academic standards. The latter is the case. But in regard to the first two issues, I am not really sure what the objective of the book is. The subtitle suggests that it deals with how Nahuas and Zapotecs viewed Spanish colonialism. However, various authors in the book do not seem to agree with this, as they almost ignore the Spanish presence and deal with indigenous issues.

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