NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF COLONIAL MEXICO FROM THE CONQUEST TO INDEPENDENCE

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REREADING THE CONQUEST: POWER, POLITICS, AND THE HISTORY OF EARLY COLONIAL MICHOACÁN, MEXICO, 1521–1565. By James Krippner-Martínez. (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001. Pp. 222. $35.00 cloth, $24.95 paper.)

TRANSCENDING CONQUEST: NAHUA VIEWS OF SPANISH COLONIAL MEXICO. By Stephanie Wood. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. Pp. 212. $34.95 cloth.)

AFRICANS IN COLONIAL MEXICO: ABSOLUTISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND AFRO-CREOLE CONSCIOUSNESS, 1570–1640. By Herman L. Bennett. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. Pp. 275. $39.95 cloth.)

LA NUEVA ESPAÑA Y EL MATLAZAHUATL, 1736–1739. By Américo Molina del Villar. (Tlalpan, México: CIESAS, 2001. Pp. 335.)

MEXICO: THE COLONIAL ERA. By Alan Knight. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 353. $65.00 cloth, $22.00 paper.)

THE EARLY HISTORY OF GREATER MEXICO. By Ida Altman, Sarah Cline, and Juan Javier Pescador. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003. Pp. 394. $45.33 paper.)

James Krippner-Martínez's book, *Rereading the Conquest*, is a brief collection of five essays, most of which offer a fresh reading of various writings from colonial Mexico about the political and spiritual conquest of Michoacán. The three essays collected in part one of the two-part work, entitled "The Politics of Conquest," address in turn the 1530 *Proceso contra Tziltzincha Tangaxoan*; the *1541 Relación de Michoacán*, and the writings of Vasco de Quiroga. The two essays collected in part two, entitled "Reflections," examine the 1788 *Crónica de Michoacán* and the public remembrance of "TataVasco" over time. A separate concluding chapter discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the author's interpretations.

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Regarding most of the extant secondary literature on these documents as limited if not wrong headed, Krippner-Martínez makes little use of it. Instead, lacking any sources composed by local indigenous authors, he seeks to depict something of the native viewpoint through utilizing documents composed by the Spaniards to tease out references, gaps, and contradictions in their texts that point out native actions and perspectives that contradict the Spanish point of view.

Chapter 1 considers the 1530 execution of the Cazonci, the indigenous ruler of Michoacán by Nuño de Guzmán, the head of the first *audiencia* of New Spain, from a reading of the trial record produced by the executioners. His primary findings are that the Tarascan leadership did not respond passively to the arrival of the Spaniards, and that Nuño de Guzmán did not execute the Cazonci merely for his own interests but also for those of a Spanish faction already resident in Michoacán who routinely faced various forms of Indian resistance.

Through his representatives, the Cazonci had been dealing with Cortés and the other conquerors of Tenochtitlán since shortly after its fall. He may well have viewed his close relationship with Cortés and his followers as a limited partnership among equals. When Spanish settlers eventually arrived in his province, the Cazonci would have felt justified to act towards them with the same autonomy he had enjoyed with Cortés' group, not appreciating that the settlers did not recognize any claim to autonomy nor that Nuño de Guzmán represented a rival authority to that of Cortés.

In a brief chapter (sixteen pages) on the *Relación de Michoacán* of 1541, Krippner-Martínez emphasizes that this document was written at the behest of Viceroy Mendoza and that, although it was based on indigenous testimonies, it was in response to questions posed by a Franciscan friar who translated their remarks into Spanish. The native witnesses came uniformly from the higher ranks of Tarascan society and were seeking to solidify an emerging alliance with the Franciscans. The Franciscans had initially arrived in Michoacán in 1526 only to face strong native resistance. But the execution of the Cazonci in 1530 forced the Tarascans to realize that further political resistance was futile. The question now became which established indigenous families would most benefit from the establishment of relationships with the friars. All parties who gave testimony appreciated that they could solidify their claims to long-term aristocratic standing by playing up their family's status in the preconquest era.

The final set of sixteenth-century documents examined is the writings of Vasco de Quiroga. Krippner-Martínez points out that Quiroga sought to reform, though not eliminate, the *encomienda*, condemned the enslavement of Indians, and praised Franciscan efforts to isolate and educate the children of the native elites. Quiroga thought that the

Indians were superior to the Spanish as individuals but that their civilizations were inferior. He argued that the Spanish claims to rule over the natives were illegitimate because the Indians had not become subject to the crown by just war. The author concludes this chapter with a consideration of Quiroga's rules for a utopian society.

The latter half of the book begins with a consideration of the Franciscan Pablo Beaumont's *Crónica de Michoacán*, a year-by-year detailing of his order's missionary successes in the region from 1526 through 1565. Unfinished because of the author's demise in 1788, the modern edition totals some 1,600 pages; Beaumont intended to cover Franciscan activity until 1639. Krippner-Martínez treats the account as representative of a late colonial creole viewpoint. But since the text did not circulate in its time, it is difficult to ascertain how it would have been regarded by contemporaries. The following chapter makes the unexceptional argument that Michoacán's adoration of Vasco de Quiroga postdates his demise and arose because it became intertwined with provincial identity and nationalist sentiment. The concluding chapter explains the theoretical underpinnings—primarily poststructuralism—of Krippner-Martínez's approach to the abovementioned subjects. But, in actuality, he wears theory only as a light garment, and his achievements in this collection derive primarily from his sensitive readings and his broad-based understanding of writings about Michoacán and colonial Mexico.

In *Transcending Conquest*, Stephanie Wood utilizes her expertise in Nahuatl-language study to illustrate the variety of indigenous views towards the Spaniards within central Mexico in the colonial era. She demonstrates the interpretive value of replacing the prevailing scholarly emphasis on the conquest's deleterious impact on the native societies, which has resulted from scholars' reliance on Spanish sources, with the fresh and diverse perspectives that emerge from studying the writings and images composed by the indigenous people themselves. The documents reveal that micropatriotism commonly prevailed among the numerous distinct ethnic groups and that any traces of pan-Indian identity are hard to find. They further show that when native societies embraced the foreign, they frequently did so by reinterpreting it to fit existing practices.

Whereas previous studies of colonial native-language sources have largely stressed written documents—the notable scholarship on indigenous maps marking the primary exception—Wood highlights what can be discerned from the graphic images that accompany or even dominate native documents. The first chapter considers pictorial images of Spaniards. Her examination of images of Spanish-indigenous warfare shows that both parties are rendered on the same scale, occupy equal space, and are presented as equally powerful. In depictions of

Spaniards and Indian allies, the Spaniards are treated as allies of the native warriors. Wood also considers native renditions of viceroys and other high civil officials, the clergy, *encomenderos*, and horses, the latter drawn in very lifelike form.

The subsequent chapter concentrates on the Ajusco narrative, an oral narrative of the community that was eventually written down in Nahuatl. The document was in turn translated into Spanish in 1710. This is one of the few documents that manifests a negative indigenous sentiment towards the Spanish conquest. It also includes two references to supposedly pre-Hispanic prophecies that forecast the arrival of the Spanish. Following this chapter is a consideration of the *Mapa de Cuauhtlantzinco*, which celebrates the community's early acceptance of Christianity and its alliance with Cortés' expedition. Its story centers around the actions of four local caciques, one of several ways in which it emulates the Tlaxcalan tradition. Another is the adoption of Spanish heraldry, with notable families petitioning for, or just devising, their own coats of arms. The Cuauhtlantzinco document depicts its citizens as being militant disciples of Christianity, with scenes of caciques, followed by armed Spaniards, confronting recalcitrant groups and communities. The overall document has a tone of rejoicing in the community's early alliance with the Spanish. Such early allies did gain a certain fame in their regions and might gain collective exemptions from taxes or labor service. However, it was typically the individual leaders of these peoples who petitioned for benefits for services performed by themselves or their ancestors.

The penultimate chapter examines the genre of *títulos primordiales (titles)*, now well known among ethnohistorians. Written by informally trained townspeople in numerous native communities in the colonial period, these local histories and statements of political autonomy and territorial proprietorship were not intended to be public documents, but rather were written for local consumption. They focused on bolstering the community's sense of autonomy and distinctiveness, while fortifying the claims of certain families to positions of authority within these independent polities. Though composed after 1650, when Spanish authorities were placing heighten demands on traditional native lands and autonomy, these titles asserted their people's autonomy against traditional regional rivals as well as the Spanish and reflect the micropatriotism that characterized the native perspective.

Titles downplay the impact and devastation of the Spanish conquest, instead portraying the time as one of the coming of the faith or of Cortés. They cite few, if any, battles. The military defeat, if treated at all, is seen as suffered only by the Mexica. The titles do not depict Cortés as a warrior or an unwelcome invader, but rather associate him with the coming of the new faith and the new regime, sometimes confusing him

with the first viceroy or archbishop. Titles are more likely to play up the historical role of locally prominent families, usually in directly assisting the Spanish, not for documenting any resistance. Cortés as the marques is described as a powerful royal administrator, who along with the viceroy and archbishop, helped to protect and strengthen the local indigenous community.

Christian themes are prominent among this genre of document, but much less so are individual friars and priests. The construction of a church is depicted as a central legitimizing feature of the people's autonomy, demarking them as good Christians and consequently deserving of their own land. Accounts of miracles and festivals punctuate these stories of the acceptance of Christianity. And acceptance it is, for these titles describe how they assumed the faith, rather than ever resisted it. If any resistance is related, it is among their traditional rivals. Invariably in such cases, the local society assists the Spaniards to suppress the recalcitrant people.

In her concluding chapter, Wood contrasts her findings against those scholars who have likewise addressed the impact of the Spanish on native societies, and demonstrates that these indigenous-language documents render their conclusions to be questionable. Wood's careful construction of this book and her care to not overstretch the evidence makes this volume a distinctive and valuable contribution to the growing body of literature based on the reading of the various forms of documents composed in Nahuatl.

Africans in Colonial Mexico by Herman Bennett marks a major advance in the still underdeveloped field of Afro-Mexican history by using Inquisition records to investigate Afro-Creole consciousness in the mature colonial period. The book argues two major points. The first is that both the crown and the church routinely infringed on a master's supposedly near-absolute control over his slaves by insisting that blacks, as people of the Old World and their descendants, were subject to the full gamut of ecclesiastical laws and institutions. The second is that race and slavery as evidenced in oppression was not the guiding principle of black slave identity; rather Bennett asserts that particular instances, memories, and events transcended the reality of slavery to sustain relationships between Afro-Mexicans.

The book focuses on the blacks of Mexico City and is organized into six substantive chapters: the formation of the slave society; blacks and Christian conjugality; Afro-Mexicans confronting the Inquisition; Christian matrimony and black self-fashioning; jurisdictional conflicts over marriage; and creole blacks and Christian narratives. Already by the mid-sixteenth century, people of African descent outnumbered Spaniards in Mexico. By the mid-seventeenth century they numbered some 152,000 people. Mexico City had a heavier proportion of creole blacks than *bozales* (slaves born in

Africa) and of free blacks (largely mulatto by origin) than slaves than was typically found in the countryside. Urban slaves likewise worked more often at skilled crafts, enjoyed more freedom at work, or were employed as personal servants and retainers, that is, as cultural capital.

Bennett notes that the slaves' right to marry restricted their master's authority over them. The marriage contract guaranteed the couple conjugal rights, restricting a master's freedom to sell either spouse beyond a certain distance. The wedding bestowed the status of paterfamilias on the new husbands and granted them dominion over any potential children. The author also analyzes marriage agreements to see who made up the marriage parties. Further, in the numerous examples included, Bennett finds that slaves associated with every variety of person of African descent in Mexico City.

By and large, the Spanish assigned the categories of ethnicity, color and level of assimilation on Afro-Mexicans and these were adopted by the black community itself. Nonetheless, the Afro-Mexicans still managed to maintain some ties with friends and relatives of African origin, and even initiated new categories of association. Perhaps the most prominent among these was their pattern of sustained relationships with fellow captives from shipboard on the Middle Passage.

The book does have some flaws. The dates limiting the scope of the study, 1570–1640, seem rather arbitrary. No transforming process or event marks either the beginning or the end date of the study. Finally, Bennett presents a great number of examples that strongly resemble each other, but includes hardly any tables or graphs. This book could have improved the presentation of its material through substituting more graphic summaries for some of its case studies.

América Molina del Villar states early in her book, *La Nueva España y el matlazahuatl, 1736–1739*, that unlike most studies of epidemics and their impact, which afford only a regional perspective, her work will provide a view of the epidemic's spread and impact throughout New Spain. And she delivers on that pledge. Originally written as a doctoral thesis, Molina del Villar's book still has much of the flavor of such works, but that said, this work is unsurpassed in this genre of history for its comprehensiveness. Not content to just trace the origins and spread of the outbreak of *matlazahuatl*, the author uses her data to lay out a fresh human geography of New Spain, describing the movement of trade and humans to discern interregional connections, and pointing out its detrimental impact on already weakened indigenous communities through their disproportionate rates of death and the increased outmigration of survivors to labor on haciendas or to drift through the countryside looking for part-time work.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first provides an overview of New Spain's economy and society from 1690 to 1750. The

second evaluates the historiography on *matlazahuatl*, while the third confronts the various interpretations about the origin of this epidemic. The next two chapters are dedicated to analyzing the impact of the disease on Mexico City and on other major cities of New Spain. Chapter 6 examines the epidemic's impact on agrarian processes in central Mexico over both the short and long term. The final chapter considers the abandonment of communities and out-migrations from them caused by the epidemic and its consequences. The book is graced with a good number of tables that illustrate the extensiveness of the author's research.

As was typical of epidemics in eighteenth-century New Spain, the outbreak of an epidemic was quickly followed by famine. In this case, the disease erupted in 1736 and spread into most regions in 1737, lingering longest in the heavily populated zones. But the famine was accompanied by an agricultural crisis in 1739–1740 that further increased the loss of human life to such an extent that this combination of disease and famine took more lives than any other demographic catastrophe in eighteenth-century New Spain with the sole exception of the agricultural disaster of 1785–1786.

Alan Knight's *Mexico, The Colonial Era*, is the second volume in a three-part history of Mexico. Part one, which was also published in 2002, covers the pre-Hispanic era through the Spanish conquest of 1519–1521. The third volume will treat Mexico since independence. The author emphasizes that *Mexico, The Colonial Era* is not a textbook, and indeed it contains none of the standard apparatus of this genre of writing. It is instead a wide-ranging synthesis of colonial Mexican history pitched to stimulate a scholarly dialogue. Its extensive footnotes, many with considerable additional commentary, further this intellectual conversation.

In this book, Knight presents an overtly materialist perspective on colonial Mexican history, while consciously excluding "cultural questions," whether traditional high culture or the "new cultural history," the latter because "it is contesting for acceptance in the 'marketplace of ideas'" (xvii). The author takes on important concepts throughout the work. A recurring theme is whether colonial Mexico was predominantly feudal or capitalist in character. Yet another is whether the Spanish crown or the colonial elites shaped major institutions and processes.

The book begins its coverage immediately after the conquest of the Aztec empire, for that topic concluded the initial volume. This makes for an awkward beginning, as Knight starts the work by covering the Spanish takeover, by military means or otherwise, of the remaining native provinces. The book is divided roughly into halves that cover the Habsburg era and the Bourbon. It ends with a chapter on Mexico's complex struggle for independence. Knight deserves an accolade for the considerable attention he devotes to the Mexican North and South, and also to acculturation and resistance among the indigenous peoples

throughout New Spain. Knight's discussions of native revolts are among the highpoints of the work.

The author's steady gaze on the Mexican countryside dominates much of the book. Knight views the colony's vast rural regions as the primary arena that determined its social and economic character. Mining and trade, though far from ignored, suffer by comparison. Hence the author expends considerable attention to the interplay between the Spanish hacienda and the indigenous village. Mexico's considerable urban population receives much less attention, as does the field of "new social history." Equally lacking is any discussion of either gender or family history. The reader learns far more about the transformation of native communities than he or she does about the composition of colonial Mexican cities or the multiple roles they played in the economy.

The book contains some dated perspectives. It repeatedly invokes royal policies as the primary instigators of social and economic change in the colony, ignoring the role of local groups and forces. Some examples include Knight's discussion of the demise of the *encomienda,* which disregards the role played by emerging colonial elites with no privileged claim to indigenous labor, and *congregación*, which was undertaken as a governmental policy, but whose impact was often mitigated by the natives' gradual migration back to their communities of origin.

Knight presents a masterful distillation of the considerable scholarly literature that argues that the Bourbon era economy was limited in its expansion, underwent no transformation in character, and resulted in a rapid immiseration of the common people in the several decades preceding the outbreak of the independence movement. (Rendering a similar coherent synthesis of Mexico under the Habsburgs continues to defy scholars, and not just because of the spottier historiography for that era.) Knight does not fully appreciate the greater cultivation of specialty crops for the market in the eighteenth century, however, completely ignoring the emergence of the *pulque* trade. He offers an excellent section on the increasingly bitter creole-*peninsular* rivalry, but acknowledges its limits and its lateness. Unfortunately, the book's concluding chapter, titled "The Insurgency," lacks the accomplishment of the rest of the work. It offers little more that a summary narrative of the coming of independence to Mexico.

As a scholar who has concentrated on modern Mexico throughout his career, Knight's display of erudition on the colonial period is nothing but daunting. His mastery of the historiography and the enduring arguments about this three-century-long era mark him as one of the leading lights, and distinctive voices, of our generation of Mexicanists.

The Early History of Greater Mexico by Ida Altman, Sarah Cline, and Juan Javier Pescador is a comprehensive, up-to-date textbook. The book divides the colonial era into three sections, each covering a century.

Each section is about 125 pages in length and contains six chapters. All the chapters end with a glossary, a set of study questions, and a select bibliography of primary and secondary sources published in English. An extensive bibliography of relevant books in Spanish is located in the book's back matter. The work includes a substantial number of black-and-white images, inserts from colonial documents, and tables.

The book's initial section is graced by chapters that amply address the Spanish conquest, the different genres of conquest narratives, and Mexico and the Columbian exchange. The authors portray early colonial Mexico as responding dynamically to the emergence of both internal and external markets. Cortés himself established sugar estates and mills, set up a shipyard and engaged in the South Sea trade, and undertook silk production, including importing mulberry trees and silkworms. The authors also devote roughly equal space to Indian towns and Spanish cities, particularly to changing social and cultural structures and norms.

The authors provide ample coverage to the northern fringe of New Spain, even those parts of it that are now within the United States. However, because of an oddity in their organization of the book, even the first stages of Spanish expansion into that region are not discussed until chapter 9, fully halfway through the book. The Mixton War of 1541–42 is not covered until even later, in chapter 12.

This book, unlike Knight's, stresses the increased pace of economic growth that characterized the eighteenth century. It emphasizes the greater economic differentiation and specialization that characterized New Spain in the Bourbon era. The authors point out that the increasing involvement of merchants in all sectors of the economy was a key to this expanded commercialization. They see market expansion as the primary explanation for the incorporation of two new *consulados* late in the century more so than any retreat from mercantile investment by Mexico City wholesalers. The last substantial chapter offers a straightforward narrative account of the Mexican independence movement.

Altman, Cline and Pescador have written the best textbook on colonial New Spain to date. It is unrivaled in its breadth of coverage and its insight. The authors commit substantial coverage to the role of the family and of women, to cite just two examples. The writing has an evenness of tone that one would not expect in a book composed by three authors. But one of the book's notable strengths, comprehensive coverage, makes the work sometimes weak in tracing change through time and making the colonial world appear as dynamic as it was. It also suffers from a shortage of case studies and examples that would help enliven the prose, a result, perhaps, of keeping the textbook within a manageable length.