

Book Reviews

Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica.

Edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. ix + 349 pp., figures, maps, tables. \$45.00 cloth.)

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Reading my way, chapter by chapter, case by case, through this assertive revisionist assembly, I was reminded of the epigraph that Karen Spalding (1984) chose to open her now classic study *Huarochirí*, a deft examination of, as she indicates in her subtitle, "An Andean Society Under Inca and Spanish Rule." Spalding turns to a poem by Bertolt Brecht, "Questions from a Worker Who Reads History," rendered in crisp English translation by H. R. Hays. Some lines of Brecht run:

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?

Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Philip of Spain wept as his fleet
Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?

Each page a victory.
At whose expense the victory ball?

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The editors of, and contributors to, *Indian Conquistadors* pose Brecht's questions specifically in relation to conquest scenarios in Mesoamerica, mounting an argument for reconfiguring, if not demolishing, established thinking entirely. What emerges from the exercise is as much advocacy scholarship as historiographical reflection, the end result being a call to position an array of indigenous players, not just a cast of notable Spaniards, at the heart of conquest narratives. Knights in shining armor are relegated to the wings, center stage inhabited by those whom the late Eric Wolf (1982) famously called "the people without history." The conquistador of Procol Harum's emblematic song (Lovell 2007) is nowhere to be seen. Human agency is enacted from the bottom up.

While Susan Schroeder's musings on what she calls "the genre of conquest studies" (5) open the volume, Michel R. Oudijk and Matthew Restall's discussion of Mesoamerican conquistadors in the sixteenth century serves a more grounded introductory purpose. Inspired by a reading of "recently emerged sources" (56), Oudijk and Restall identify not only a diverse set of protagonists but also "four categories of analysis" in the form of (1) "'friendly Indian' numbers" and (2) "indigenous allies" who complemented (3) "nonmilitary participation" by spies, interpreters, porters, and cooks and (4) continuities "of precolonial practices and patterns" in matters pertaining to trade and political affiliation. "There is another story to be told," they declare, "one that we will eventually be able to tell in considerable detail" (57).

Florine G. L. Asselbergs is the first to oblige, focusing on "three pictorials from Mexico and Guatemala that narrate indigenous conquest stories under the Spanish banner" (65). Two sources that Asselbergs looks at relate to the exploits of native combatants from Tlaxcala, the city-state in central Mexico whose backing of Cortés and his associates proved so decisive in the overall scheme of Spanish intrusion. While the *Lienzo de Analco* concentrates on Tlaxcalteca involvement in the conquest of Villa Alta in Oaxaca, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* documents more widespread participation: one version of this well-known source, now part of the holdings of Glasgow University, "leads the viewer through battles in places as far as modern-day Nicaragua" (67). The third source that Asselbergs examines is the lesser-known *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, which depicts "the alliance between the Spaniards and the Quauhquecholteca in 1520" before describing "the 1527–30 conquering campaign to Guatemala" under the leadership of Jorge de Alvarado (69). As with their Tlaxcalteca counterparts, some Quauhquecholteca chose to remain in Guatemala after military service was rendered, thus constituting "examples of a series of satellite colonies founded by central Mexican conquistadors all over Mesoamerica" (71). Decisions made to side

with Spaniards during the first throes of conquest often carried implications well beyond the time and place of initial collusion.

Next to deliver is Laura E. Matthew. “Whose conquest?” she asks boldly. Matthew answers by contemplating “the extent of Nahua, Zapoteca, and Mixteca participation in the conquest of Central America,” going so far as to wonder “whether they viewed it, contemporaneously or in retrospect, as a Spanish conquest at all.” She situates Nahua and other non-Maya “at the forefront of events rather than treating them as a background chorus” (103). One remarkable source from the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, the documents constituting Justicia 291, furnishes Matthew with a range of alternative voices, indicating that “these indigenous conquistadors had rather different goals, methods, and experiences of conquest than those attributed by later Spanish chroniclers” (104). Following Matthew’s revelations, the role that native women played in shaping the course and outcome of conquest is addressed by Robinson A. Herrera, especially the situations of female nobility engaged in “intimate unions” as “concubines and wives” (127) in sixteenth-century Guatemala.

Ida Altman shifts the spatial focus north to Nueva Galicia for her account of “conquest, coercion, and collaboration” in these troublesome parts, also the scene of Bret Blosser’s investigation of *flechero* (native archers or bowmen) services as co-opted militia on the Colotlán frontier. Altman notes that “large armies of so-called indios amigos recruited in central Mexico and Michoacán” were deployed to fight “two wars of conquest” a little more than a decade apart. Conscripts for the first campaign, voluntary as well as forced, were subjected to the “heavy-handed tactics” of Nuño de Guzmán, whose rapacious exploitation of Nueva Galicia triggered an uprising known as the Mixton War (1540–42). The Spaniard charged with crushing the rebellion, which effectively gave rise to the second campaign, was Antonio de Mendoza, “who exercised much greater diplomacy in dealing with his Indian allies.” Altman states that “in both campaigns it is possible to discern certain objectives and actions of the indios amigos that were at least partly distinct from those of Spaniards” (147). Blosser observes that, from the late sixteenth century on, the “political leverage afforded by the Indian population’s notable military capacity” (305) allowed them the opportunity “to secure ample tracts of land, defend communal territory from invasion by Spanish colonists, and, at least on one occasion, influence the removal and appointment of Spanish officials” (309). Mostly because of the gauged moderation of his claims, Blosser’s chapter to my mind is the pick of the collection.

In “Forgotten Allies,” John F. Chuchiak IV highlights the pivotal involvement of “native Mesoamerican auxiliaries and indios conquista-

dores" (177) in the protracted conquest of Yucatan during the second quarter of the sixteenth century. He chastises four eminent scholars of colonial Yucatan, Cristina García Bernal, Nancy Farriss, Grant Jones, and Robert Patch, for their failure "to devote more than a few sentences in passing" to the issue. "I can say in all honesty," Captain Francisco de Bracamonte testified in 1572, "that without [those forgotten allies] we would never have conquered the land" (215). Chuchiak builds on testimony like Bracamonte's not only to set the record straight but also to point out that "abuses committed against [native auxiliaries] led to changing Crown policies concerning the *encomienda* system, indigenous labor, and personal services" (177).

How Chuchiak in Yucatan and Blosser on the Colotlán frontier approach the vicissitudes of conquest applies also to how Yanna Yannakasis portrays the actions and achievements of "indios conquistadores" (227) in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca. Akin to Asselbergs's handling of sources, Stephanie Wood interrogates the *Mapa de Cuauhtlanzinco*, "a series of paintings in watercolor with short texts in Nahuatl" that pays homage to "four local caciques who aided or even took the lead in local battles of conquest" (255). The virtues of Cuauhtlanzinco, a small community in the parish of Cholula close to Tlaxcala, are extolled in a source that "shines its brightest light on its local leaders" by "minimizing the role of the Spaniards and, in fact, largely suppressing the presence of any possible, competing Tlaxcalteca on the local scene" (256). Wood's contribution is nicely illustrated by twenty-five figures, a visual extravaganza even in black and grey.

It is left to editors Matthew and Oudijk to sum up the proceedings, which they do by reiterating that "the conquest of Mesoamerica could and did happen because of the continuation of prehispanic patterns and the overwhelming presence and participation of indigenous peoples themselves." They contend that native accounts deal not with "traitors, of complaints, or of people feeling sorry for themselves," but rather with "people believing in the process in which they have been involved," even if the drama ends in "disillusionment" and "great suffering" (318–19). Only at this juncture does one sense a lingering realization that, though they fought on the winning side in many a battle, native peoples did *not* emerge victorious in the Great War of Conquest, one that continues to be waged in parts of Mesoamerica where colonial, not postcolonial, conditions remain the bane of indigenous existence.

Matthew, Oudijk, and company surely acknowledge that Brecht's question is decidedly rhetorical. The victory ball is staged still, throughout Mesoamerica, at considerable native expense. An important addition to an already distinguished list of titles, *Indian Conquistadors* shows the University of Oklahoma Press to be at the forefront of innovative publications in

the field of ethnohistory. The omission of an index, however, a vital part of any scholarly edifice, strikes this reviewer as most curious. Perhaps the oversight can be rectified should this substantive collaboration appear in a future paperback edition.

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Pastoral Quechua: The History of Christian Translation in Colonial Peru, 1550–1650. By Alan Durston. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. xiii + 395 pp., acknowledgments, introduction, maps, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$42.00 paper.)

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The use of Quechua as a language of evangelization in the Andean highlands never reached the level of the use of Nahuatl in Mesoamerica. At the same time, the Quechua that finally was incorporated into various devotional pieces manifests a consistency that is at odds with the diversity of translation in Mesoamerica. Alan Durston analyzes the development and use of what he calls “pastoral Quechua” in this intriguing and well written book.

Durston’s book begins with an introduction and background that outlines the general contours of his argument. Thereafter, it is divided into two large parts, one dealing with the history of the development of pastoral Quechua, the other focusing on the dozen or so texts that are still extant. In the introduction and background, Durston discusses the context of early modern Europe and the use of the vernacular. While sacred and liturgical texts could not be translated, most other didactic works could. Durston takes into account other pieces in Quechua, at the same time that he studies the archival record concerning language issues in colonial Peru. In the first