
Mallory E. Matsumoto, *Land, Politics, and Memory in Five Nija'ib' K'iche' Títulos: "The Title and Proof of Our Ancestors."* Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2017. Maps. Figures. Tables. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Xxii, 423 pp. Paper, \$45.00.

The genre we call *títulos*, at least as it relates to Maya communities in highland

Guatemala, pertains to documents composed during colonial times for which indigenous scribes, trained by Spanish clergy in how to use the Latin alphabet, quite literally put pen to paper, often prodigiously and to decisive effect, from the second quarter of the sixteenth century on. By recording native perspectives on a multiplicity of topics, but especially those that deal with land and resources, *títulos* shed light on myriad aspects of Maya culture and the colonial experience. Deftly conceived, doggedly researched, and adroitly argued, Mallory E. Matsumoto's treatise focuses on the contents of five Nija'ib' K'iche' *títulos*, though she draws upon other native documents too. Her primary goal is to show how *títulos* served as an elite means to negotiate power at the community level, drafted so as to maintain certain rights and privileges as much as to record for posterity. Matsumoto's assiduous investigations also afford insight into issues of identity, Spanish-Maya relations, and key events that took place during the conquest period and its immediate aftermath.

The *títulos* subjected to scrutiny are housed in the Robert Garrett Manuscripts Collection at Princeton University. There they ended up, following their removal in a "state of deterioration" (p. 21) from Guatemala, after passing through the hands of French connoisseurs Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg (1814-1874) and Alphonse L. Pinart (1852–1911) and the grasp of American collector William E. Gates (1863-1940). The book begins with a

comparative analysis of how fellow scholars have interrogated other extant *títulos*. These days literature reviews are predictably de rigueur and theoretically informed, but Matsumoto's is unabashedly empirical, refreshingly so. Her reach is comprehensive, her thrust incisive: the work of established and distinguished contributors (the likes of Robert M. Carmack and Munro S. Edmonson in English, J. Daniel Contreras and Adrián Recinos in Spanish) is given due credit alongside the more recent findings of a new cohort of researchers, among them Kerry M. Hull, Owen H. Jones, Nestór Quiroa, Frauke Sachse, and Garry Sparks, to single out but a handful of colleagues with similar proclivities as the author (and translator) herself. Edmonson's rather dismissive characterization of *títulos* as "mostly dull, anxious, humorless, and repetitive," imbued with "all the charm of legal briefs" (p. 6), does not wash with Matsumoto.

A rebuke of sorts follows in chapter 2, in which the content of all five Nija'ib' *títulos* are discussed and their importance for the writing of history highlighted, even if problems of dating them, and ascribing authorship, are present at every turn. The *Título de Quetzaltenango y Momostenango y conquistas de nuestros antepasados*, for instance, is thought by one ethnohistorian to have been "produced between 1550 and 1560" (p. 35) while another records "its date of completion" as May 5, 1704 and names "the responsible scribes" (p. 38). Given that the *título* in question furnishes a version of the Spanish conquest, "including the famous encounter between the K'iche' warrior Tekum Uman and [Pedro de] Alvarado" (p. 34), matters of veracity inevitably arise, not least because "conflicting portrayals and lack of Conquest-period accounts – particularly by the Spaniards – of Tekum and his bravery in opposing the Spaniards have led some to question his deeds and even his existence" (p. 362). In reconciling the Tekum Uman conundrum, we do well to bear in mind the Mesoamerican penchant for collapsing myth and history, believing them one and the same.

Methodological concerns dominate chapter 3, with Matsumoto particularly astute about the challenges of translation, asserting that "no translation is ever a completely faithful rendering of the source text, nor is it ever definitive" (p. 48). She thereby casts her lot with the disposition of renowned translator Gregory Rabassa as opposed to that of Dennis Tedlock, when tackling the *Popol Vuh*, or Judith Maxwell and Robert Hill in grappling with the *Memorial de Sololá* – or the

itches made by their publishers when marketing, and sub-titling, their labors. Linguistic considerations regarding the art of writing – “scribal practice” is Matsumoto’s term for the endeavor – comprise chapter 4 and end part 1 of her book, 72 pages of text in all. Part 2, some 230 pages of text, is by far the bulk: here the *títulos* are laid out in transcribed and translated form, complete with full transliterations and facsimile reproductions, examined and commented on with erudite flair, a treat to admire, read, and ponder.

Credit goes to the University Press of Colorado for taking on such an undertaking, which most of its competitors would surely have balked at, and for producing such a handsome and engaging volume. Matsumoto is to be congratulated on a sterling piece of research, one that enriches Mesoamerican studies immensely and that students of the field will relish.

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