

Book Reviews

Strange Lands and Different Peoples: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Guatemala. By W. George Lovell and Christopher Lutz, with Wendy Kramer and William R. Swezey. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. xvii + 339 pp., preface, black-and-white figures, maps, tables, glossary, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.)

Peggy Goede Montalván, *University of Bonn*

Much has been written on the conquest of Mexico, but the history of Guatemala, on the other hand, has not been examined so thoroughly. The present study focuses on Maya resistance to the Spanish invasion of Guatemala and the first decades of colonial rule (from 1524 to 1624). The four authors come from different fields, namely, archaeology, geography, and history, which provide a set of interrelated studies.

The book is divided into four chronologically arranged parts and subdivided into fourteen chapters followed by a conclusion. It begins with a short preface instead of a real introduction, describing the personal processes that led to the book and giving hints of what to expect in the following chapters.

In an enthralling, almost storytelling way, the initial part provides a chronological reconstruction of the Spanish invasion of Guatemala by the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado. The associated chapters critically analyze the written accounts on that subject, giving room to comments from renowned scholars. This first part enlightens the enormous and often neglected role of indigenous allies, especially the Kaqchikel Maya. The authors compare this group's fate with the fates of their enemies, the K'iche

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and other Maya groups who resisted the Spaniards from the start. As a result of Alvarado's mistreatment, his former allies, the Kaqchikel, eventually rebelled, a subject that brings the first part of the book to a close. These initial chapters contain vivid descriptions peppered with quotations from Spanish chronicles and letters but also from indigenous accounts.

The second part of the book examines issues of settlement and colonization at the local level. It revolves around questions of economy and social life in the colony, with a focus on segregation policies.

The third part is about labor and tribute, exposing the benefits and burdens of indigenous subjugation. It begins with an emphasis on the *encomienda*, a system that entitled Spaniards to land and the people living on it. The authors build their conclusions on the analyses of *probanzas* (petitions to the crown), lawsuits, and tribute lists. Large parts of these chapters concentrate on the history of the region of Huehuetenango and its exploitation. A vivid perspective is given by analyzing a lawsuit revolving around the claim to this *encomienda*. This third part also includes several examples of tribute assessments for *encomenderos*.

The fourth and last part finishes with the dynamics of Maya survival up to the nineteenth century. The Spanish invasion brought a tremendous decline of the indigenous population, caused by wars, subjugation, and massive exploitation but mainly by introduced diseases. This final part also describes the eras of the colonial rulers Alonso López de Cerrato and Diego García de Valverde. It finishes by describing the slow recovery of the native population by the mid-seventeenth century.

Finally, a short conclusion sums up the book, stating that today's Guatemala emerged from a fusion of Prehispanic Maya and European cultures.

The appendix contains many tables giving insight into *encomienda* data, tribute obligations, and population estimates. An extensive glossary explains briefly the main terms used throughout the chapters.

Based on deep archival work, *Strange Lands and Different Peoples* manages to illuminate the diverse dynamics in Guatemala, which began with the clash of two cultures and then climaxed during the colonial era. The authors emphasize the indigenous actors instead of focusing on the Spanish invaders as is traditionally done. The chapters are written in a very fluent style, which makes the book easy to read. It provides a vast overview of the conquest of the Maya in Guatemala and of the colonial era and thus serves perfectly as an introduction, especially for students, to that research field.

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