

Presidential Address: A Rainbow of Spanish Illusions: Research Frontiers in Colonial Guatemala

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Abstract. Compared still to what we know about Mexico and Peru, the historiography of colonial Guatemala, despite notable advances, continues to lag behind, registering minimally in the Latin American scholarly imagination. The field is surveyed by examining some of the issues that have intrigued the author over the course of his career. Personal reflections are offered of research activities that engage indigenous resistance to Spanish intrusion, demographic collapse in the wake of conquest, the link between disease outbreaks and Maya demise, and the role played by Pedro de Alvarado (1485–1541) in attaining imperial objectives. Scrutiny of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, a sixteenth-century source the contents of which have been incisively reappraised, affords fuller appreciation of strategic Indian involvement in the act of subjugation. Alvarado, a key protagonist in the conquest of Mexico, also harbored ambitions to muscle in on the conquest of Peru, a little-known episode that awaits further investigation. The conqueror's own life, like Central America itself, may indeed have been a rainbow of Spanish illusions, pots of gold dreamed of, lost and found at native expense.

Keywords. conquest, resistance, Guatemala, Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, Pedro de Alvarado

I had little choice but to rove.
—Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning* (1964)

When word reached me in April 2014 that I'd been elected to serve as president of the American Society for Ethnohistory (ASE), my thirty-fifth year of teaching at Queen's University was drawing to a close. I joke with

my graduate students and junior members of faculty, not entirely in jest, that I'm living proof there's hope for every aspiring academic. Why? Because, in September 1979, I was hired by the Department of Geography on a one-year, nonrenewable position, ABD, "all but dissertation"—and yet I am *still* at Queen's, four decades on! No longer ABD, phew, and in the interim having had the satisfaction of rising through the ranks. But that's how my career began and, against the odds, inexorably turned out: a temporary appointment became an enduring affiliation.

In the remarks that follow, I take my cue from modern geography's most original thinker, assiduous practitioner, and gifted writer, Carl O. Sauer (1889–1975). In a presidential address he called "The Education of a Geographer," delivered to the Association of American Geographers more than sixty years ago, Sauer (1956: 287) engages the honor bestowed on him by mentioning, at the outset, his early environment, before reflecting on how his research interests evolved and shaped his scholarly trajectory. He invokes the word *predilection*. I lean toward such accounting with a genuine sense of connection: my doctoral supervisor, John F. Bergmann (1928–83), was himself supervised by a doctoral charge of Sauer's, Henry J. Bruman (1913–2005). That makes me, in the genealogical array of things geographical, a great-grandson of the great Carl Sauer.¹ Being part of that Berkeley School lineage means much to me, and has made me the geographer I am. How did it all begin, and thereafter unfold? What affinity lies between my chosen field of study, historical geography, and the domain we call ethnohistory, the distinctive endeavor of our Society?

Starting Out

I was born and raised in Glasgow, a stone's throw from the River Clyde, the waters of the Atlantic not that far downstream. The shipyards that had once made the city the second of standing in the British Empire, after London, were in parlous decline. Crisis and deprivation prevailed, nowhere more apparent than where we lived, in the district locals call (forever tongue-in-cheek) "Sunny" Govan. Were it not for the impetus of my mother, Sarah, never would I have imagined that, beyond the confines of our working-class lot, life could be lived any differently. The second last of ten offspring, my mother had been the dux (top pupil) of her primary school. Her secondary education, however, was cut short when she had to leave school to take a job, and thus contribute to family income. After she married, still in her teens, and had children of her own, I was the one she encouraged to strive for what she had been denied: learning how to learn and, by so doing, to create options that might lead elsewhere, beyond home soil in Scotland.

The prodding of Miss Marks—that surname of hers, remembering some of the lessons she taught, might well have ended not in “k” and “s” but an “x”—and the lobbying of Mrs. Paul convinced my mother, when I was age eleven, to have me sit an entrance exam. Passing it saw me leave Drumoyne Primary to attend Allan Glen’s, a high school on the other side of town a notch or two above our local equivalent. There Mr. Dewar, head geography teacher, fueled my love of the subject, priming me for university, no one in our family ever before having taken O-levels let alone Highers. Mr. Ellis was the lecturer whose classes opened up Latin American horizons, a refreshing alternative to studying overseas British possessions, former or otherwise. That was standard curricular fare when I was an undergraduate at the University of Glasgow (1969–73). Hearing or reading about other parts of the world fired my imagination. Latin America, the earliest rumblings of which came from tales told by my father, Douglas, a former merchant seaman, resonated in particular.

Also resonating then was progressive rock music. I listened to, and heard play live, some wonderful bands, but for me it was Procol Harum who stood out—and stand out still. Renowned for the sixties anthem “A Whiter Shade of Pale,” the very first track on the group’s eponymous first album was not their hit single but a song called “Conquistador.” When, in 1972, Procol Harum released a version of the song with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, my classes with Mr. Ellis on the historical geography of Latin America allowed me to discern in the lyrics of “Conquistador” something that called for reflection. Here was a tale not of triumphant victory but vanquished ideals, lofty goals having come to naught. The words of Keith Reid poignantly run:

Conquistador, your stallion stands
 in need of company
 and like some angel’s haloed brow
 you reek of purity.
 I see your armour-plated breast
 has long since lost its sheen
 and in your death-mask face
 there are no signs which can be seen.

Conquistador, a vulture sits
 upon your silver shield
 and in your rusty scabbard now
 the sand has taken seed.
 And though your jewel-encrusted blade
 has not been plundered still

the sea has washed across your face
and taken of its fill.

Conquistador, there is no time,
I must pay my respects,
and though I came to jeer at you
I leave now with regrets.
And as the gloom begins to fall
I see there is no aureole
and though you came with sword held high
you did not conquer, only die.

And though I hoped for something to find
I could see no maze to unwind.

Reid's lyrics, somber and empathic, foreshadow by four decades and a half what Matthew Restall (2012: 151) acknowledges as a "New Conquest History," the revisionist thrust of which "complicates the traditional triumphalist narrative by emphasizing multiple protagonists and accounts, new source materials, the roles and interpretations of indigenous and black men and women, and the examination of understudied regions of the Americas." Unlike Reid's fallen hero, however, I could see a maze to unwind, one that lured me to pursue graduate studies in Canada at the University of Alberta. From there, Mexico and Guatemala beckoned, the latter's little known colonial past affording me the opportunity not only to earn a doctorate but commit myself to career-long investigations.

"The Richest of the Poor, the Poorest of the Rich"

In June 1974, fieldwork in the Mixteca Alta behind me, I made my way from Oaxaca to Chiapas, hopeful that the master's thesis that would result from my first Mesoamerican sojourn might pave the way for PhD research (Lovell 1975).² An epiphany of sorts occurred one afternoon in a bookstore in San Cristóbal de las Casas, when I came across the recently published magnum opus of Murdo J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America* (1973). Finding a quiet corner, I hunkered down and pored over the book for hours. I was already inclined to follow my supervisor's advice and get to Guatemala, but after the owner of the bookstore turned off the lights and politely showed me the door, I made the decision to head there the next day. On the road before dawn, I changed buses in Comitán and reached the border late in the afternoon, absorbed en route by what MacLeod had to say—that, despite his own considerable labors, work on the territory Pierre and Huguette Chaunu described as "the richest of the poor, or the poorest of the

rich”³ was still in its infancy. I fancied that something fortuitous lay ahead. A sense of anticipation spurred me on.

As I backpacked from one country into another—passport controls, lax and nonchalant, were then the stuff of a novel by Graham Greene or B. Traven—the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, even in the fading light, loomed majestic, alluring yet daunting. A bus I boarded at La Mesilla hurtled up the gorge of the Río Selegua, picking up passengers every few kilometers after it screeched to a halt. Those who clambered on stared as quizzically at me as I did at them. Who were they? Struck though I was by the Mixtec and Zapotec presence in Oaxaca—“the word was like a breaking heart” is how novelist Malcolm Lowry (1947 [1979]: 53) conjures their ancient abode—the indigenous aura of those who crowded aboard was even more palpable, men and women, boys and girls, babes not in arms but wrapped tight across a mother’s back in spectacularly colored shawls. And anyone who spoke did so not in Spanish, but in one of twenty-odd Maya tongues—languages, not dialects. Their dignity transcended any deprivation that stalked them, or so it seemed to me. Darkness had fallen by the time we arrived in Huehuetenango, but clarity reigned: the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, and the Maya peoples who inhabit it, would be the focus of any doctoral foray I embarked on.

On my return to Edmonton, Professor Bergmann was noncommittal, his position characteristically pragmatic: “Let’s see how your MA turns out before we talk about you doing a PhD.” I was to be his one and only doctoral student. Before he took me on, however, he insisted that I first run the idea of writing on the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes past his trusted friend and colleague, Oscar H. Horst, who taught at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. The two had formed a close bond while working on their doctorates in Guatemala in the 1950s. Once again I followed my supervisor’s advice. “The Cuchumatanes?” Oscar’s decidedly taken-aback look—he had screwed his eyes together and leaned his head forward, as if to say “Did I hear you correctly?”—made it clear that the mountain redoubt I wished to investigate was well-nigh *tabula rasa* in the scholarly record, especially for the colonial period that appealed to me most. When he served as my external examiner three years later, the doctoral dissertation I defended was as much a celebration for him as it was for me (Lovell 1980).⁴

Albany Initiation

Two months before my thesis defense I made my first conference presentation, invited to do so by Robert M. Carmack, a scholar whose eminent

contributions to the field of ethnohistory earned him, in 2017, one of our Society's inaugural Lifetime Achievement Awards. When organizing the meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory in Albany in 1979, Bob had collaborated with John D. Early and Christopher H. Lutz to convene a symposium on the "Historical Demography of Highland Guatemala," the same name under which proceedings were published three years later (Carmack, Early, and Lutz 1982). Having driven down from Kingston, Ontario, to the SUNY-Albany campus, which was in leafy fall splendor, I found myself programmed last to speak on a Friday afternoon that coincided with Columbus Day, surely some kind of omen. The jitters that afflicted me when I took to the podium were compounded by the fact that none other than Murdo MacLeod was in attendance. We'd corresponded by then, but ASE Albany was when we actually met. Also present in the packed room were three other luminaries—Henry F. Dobyns, William T. Sanders, and Barbara J. Price. Allotted twenty minutes or so to present, my talk was all that lay between the audience and a gala evening reception. Would they stay and listen?

They did. And they responded in animated fashion, my estimates of the contact population of the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes and its precipitous postcontact decline triggering heated exchanges, voices at times raised to shrill pitch, between representatives of the two camps later designated "High Counters" (Dobyns) and "Low Counters" (Sanders) by the maverick David Henige (1998). What an initiation, not only to an academic gathering but to an ongoing scholarly debate! I straddled what I thought then, and believe still now, to be reasonable middle ground. To this day, as I held forth before question period erupted, I recall an affirmative nod from Don Murdo. The drinks we shared afterward were, for me, celebratory.

The findings that I presented concerning Cuchumatán demography (fig. 1 and table 1) echoed those of Carl Sauer more than four decades before, his estimates made in relation to Northwestern Mexico, not Northwestern Guatemala. The prescient Sauer sums up his inquiries thus: "The record, as interpreted, gives an aboriginal [contact] population between Gila and Río Grande de Santiago in excess of half a million, almost three-fourths of the number now living in this part of Mexico. Bit by bit, the theme has obtruded itself that aboriginal rural populations and present ones are much the same. This, I believe, is not a sensational conclusion, but a quite natural one" (Sauer 1935: 32).

What Sauer concluded, and subsequently advocated beyond Northwestern Mexico, in fact *was* sensational at the time of writing (Denevan 1996). His thesis was simple, if for some provocative: culture and civilization had evolved in the New World prior to European intrusion so as, in

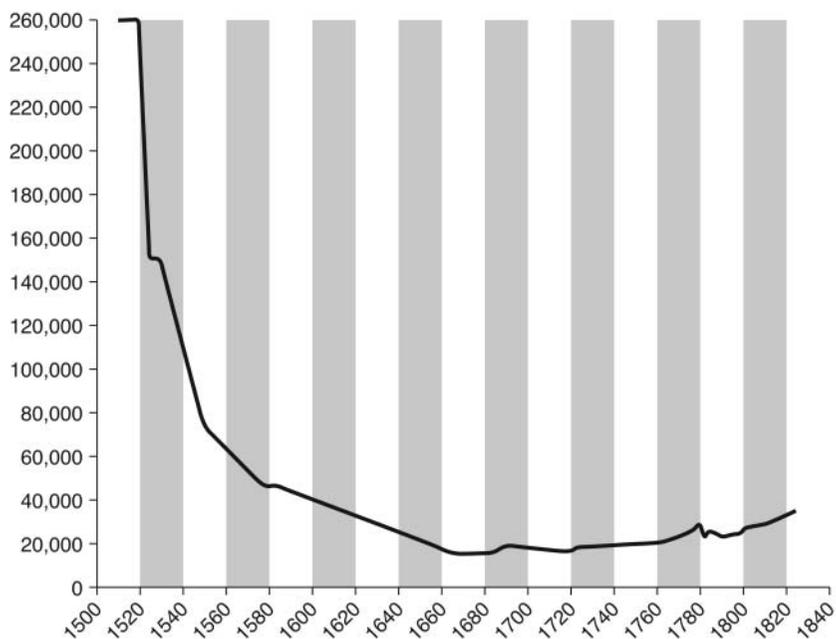


Figure 1. The native population of the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, 1500–1825 (Lovell [1985] 2015: 75–80, 158–86). Courtesy of Jennifer Grek-Martin.

certain favored regions, to sustain sizable human populations, ones of a magnitude and social complexity hitherto seldom invoked. Sauer's reckoning was one that my Cuchumatán data replicated, indicating a possible contact population (ca. AD 1520) of 260,000, an estimate based primarily on extant archival sources. For 1940, close to the “present” in Sauer's day, the Censo General de Población for the República de Guatemala recorded a Cuchumatán population of 234,057.

Statistics, of course, conceal as much as they reveal. Postulating a contact population of the same order of magnitude as that of the early to mid-twentieth century says nothing about what happened in the four hundred years between. Grappling with the interim, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in particular, served as a focal point for postdoctoral inquiry.

“Secret Judgments of God”

Perusal of documents in Guatemala City at the Archivo General de Centro América and at the Archivo General de Indias in Seville indicate that the

Table 1. The population of the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, 1520–1825 (Lovell [1985] 2015: 75–80, 158–86, 244–45). Estimates are based primarily on documents housed in the Archivo General de Centro América (Guatemala City) and the Archivo General de Indias (Seville, Spain), though the published works of Fuentes y Guzmán ([1690–99] 1932–33) and Cortés y Larraz ([1768–70] 1958) were also consulted.

Year	Estimated Population
1520	260,000
1525–30	150,000
1550	73,000
1580	47,000
1664–78	16,162
1683	16,000
1690–99	19,824
1724	18,500
1760	21,176
1768–70	23,418
1778	27,505
1782	23,021
1788	24,678
1790	23,623
1811	29,571
1825	34,691

Maya population of the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes fell sharply in the century and a half after first contact with imperial Spain, reaching a nadir around the year 1680 (see table 1). Cuchumatán rates of indigenous demise, I discovered when I examined the issue for Guatemala as a whole, were experienced also by adjacent and neighboring parts, though estimates at a regional level of analysis suggest that native numbers bottomed out a half-century earlier (table 2). What, in the words of MacLeod (1973: 20), “may well have caused the greatest destruction of lives in history” remains a matter yet to garner full consensus, but the balance of opinion now favors attributing catastrophic decline, over alternate explanations, primarily to the ravages of epidemic disease among immunologically defenseless, virgin-soil populations (table 3).

One illustrious champion of such an interpretation was Woodrow W. Borah, in whose company I learned much when a postdoctoral sojourn saw me spend fall term 1985 at the University of California at Berkeley. Borah’s collaborations with Sherburne F. Cook steered me in many rewarding directions, but it was reading a contemporary eyewitness report in the

Table 2. The native population of Guatemala, 1520–1825 (Lovell and Lutz, with Kramer and Swezey 2013: 173–248, 270–283). Estimates are based primarily on documents housed in the Archivo General de Centro América (Guatemala City) and the Archivo General de Indias (Seville, Spain), though the published works of Enríquez Macías (1989) and Luján Muñoz (2005) were also consulted, particularly pertinent for the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, respectively. See also Lovell and Lutz (1995) and the volume edited by Carmack, Early, and Lutz (1982).

Year	Estimated Population
ca.1520	2,000,000
ca.1550	427,850
1575	184,540
1624–28	131,250
1681	212,260
1684	235,080
1710	236,212
1719	232,818
1722–26	228,152
1760	247,680
1768	238,216
1768–70	252,717
1778	276,237
1811	351,525

teeming Seville archive that convinced me that disease was the single most crucial factor (among a complex play of pertinent others) in comprehending indigenous decline in the wake of Spanish intrusion.⁵

Pedro de Liévano was dean of the cathedral of Santiago de Guatemala, the capital of all Spanish Central America, when Diego García de Valverde served the Crown as its beleaguered president in the late sixteenth century. The decade-long tenure of Valverde was drawing to a close when he was called to account for the ruinous state of affairs in the territory he governed. Despite his mandating reforms aimed to ease the native burden, Spaniards intent on maximizing their hold on Indian labor and on the amount of tribute exacted saw the numbers entrusted them as *encomenderos* continue to spiral down. The president himself noted that “besides the deaths that ordinarily occur, there are also times when sickness strikes in the form of smallpox, influenza-like colds, and other diseases, from which many die.”⁶ When Liévano, in turn, was called on to defend the president’s record, his testimony constitutes a mix of divine attribution and empirical observation. “What causes the Indians to die and diminish in number,” the dean wrote,

Table 3. Outbreaks of disease in early colonial Guatemala, 1519–1694 (Lovell [1985] 2015: 163–186, 246–47); Lovell [1992] 2001: 49–83; MacLeod 1973). Estimates are based on documents housed in the Archivo General de Centro América (Guatemala City) and the Archivo General de Indias (Seville, Spain).

Year	Location	Sickness, Symptoms, Impact of Contagion
1519–21	Kaqchikel communities	Smallpox and perhaps also pulmonary plague.
1532–34	Throughout Guatemala	<i>Sarampión</i> (measles). Very high mortality.
1545–48	Throughout Guatemala	<i>Gucumatz</i> (a type of plague). High mortality.
1552	Aguacatán and environs	Unidentified. Towns have been greatly depopulated.
1571	Sacapulas and environs	Unidentified. Considerable mortality recorded.
1558–63	Throughout Guatemala	Compound epidemic, including typhus (<i>tabardillo</i>).
1576–78	Throughout Guatemala	Smallpox (<i>viruela</i>) and <i>gucumatz</i> . High mortality.
1600–01	Throughout Guatemala	Smallpox (<i>viruela</i>)?
1607–08	Throughout Guatemala	Typhus and plague. Notice of severe nosebleeds.
1613	Todos Santos	Unidentified. Tribute amount lowered, Indians sick.
1614	Throughout Guatemala	Unidentified, said to be confined to Indian towns.
1617	San Martín Cuchumátan	Unidentified. Indians afflicted, doing poorly.
1631–32	Throughout Guatemala	Typhus. Records of high mortality.
1639	Cunén and Sacapulas	Devastating <i>peste</i> , one that has taken many lives.
1650	In parts of Guatemala	<i>Gucumatz</i> . Entire communities depopulated.
1666	Huehuetenango	Typhus. Indian tribute ordered to be lowered.
1686	In parts of Guatemala	Typhus and plague. Incidents of high mortality.
1693–94	In parts of Guatemala	Smallpox and typhus. Incidents of high mortality.

“are secret judgments of God beyond the reach of man.” In his very next sentence, however, Liévano drew on his lengthy residence in Guatemala to offer a more grounded view: “But what I have witnessed during the time I have lived here is that three or four pestilences have come from Mexico, on account of which the land has been greatly depopulated.”⁷ In table 3, disease outbreaks recorded for the years 1532–34, 1545–48, 1558–63, and 1576–78 coincide with Liévano’s spell as dean.

The attrition of indigenous lives was of concern to Spaniards, for they knew well that upon native exertion their colonial project would either flourish or flounder. Situated “between the great mining centers and Indian populations of the Andes and Mexico,” Central America (fig. 2) was destined to be, in the memorable depiction of William B. Taylor, “a rainbow of Spanish illusions and frenzied activities between the two pots of gold.”⁸ Though they would never generate for their masters the wealth and prosperity associated with viceroalties to the north and south, the Maya of Guatemala were a resource to be protected, not squandered. As the tumultuous sixteenth century gave way to a more stagnant seventeenth, which saw Indian lives and labor become increasingly endangered, measures had to be taken to replace the disappearing work force. Reforms such as those promoted by Valverde having failed, the solution was to import black slaves, though never as many were brought to Guatemala as in other Spanish possessions. When it became evident that, demographic collapse notwithstanding, Indians would be around in sufficient quantity to meet the demands made on them, slave imports began to taper off. Although derived from different sets of data, ones pertaining to distinct bodies of literature and historiographic discourse, the native nadir in the years 1624–28 (see table 2) coincides with the peak of slave traffic to Guatemala recorded by scholars of the black diaspora.⁹

Rethinking Conquest

One of the thrills of historical research is finding, or finding out about, new sources. Equally heartening is when a well-known source is reinterpreted in such a way as to furnish a radically different perspective, and thereby break new scholarly terrain. Views of the conquest of Guatemala have shifted significantly, indeed irrevocably, on account of the scrutiny afforded the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* by the Dutch ethnohistorian Florine Asselbergs.

Like scores of unsuspecting researchers, I was exposed to the *lienzo* when I first visited the Casa de Alfeñique, one of the Mexican city of Puebla’s venerable cultural institutions, back in 1974. We had known about the *lienzo* (fig. 3) long before then, but prior to Asselbergs’s sleuthing it was thought that the pictorial artifact referred to past episodes in the immediate environs of San Martín Huaquechula, a Nahuatl community in the state of Puebla some sixty kilometers south and west of the state capital. What Asselbergs determined is that while the *lienzo*, a collage of fifteen pieces of painted cloth measuring 2.35 by 3.25 meters, does depict scenes that relate to Mexico, for the most part it documents the crucial role played by auxiliary forces from Quauhquechollan in the conquest of Guatemala.



Figure 2. The “rainbow of Spanish illusions” as depicted by Antonio de Herrera on his *Descripción del Audiencia de Gvatimala* (1601) (Lovell and Lutz 2011: 65). Original map courtesy of Christopher H. Lutz.

Accompanying Spanish expeditions on their military campaigns, Quauhquecholtecas not only fought alongside them but chose to settle in Guatemala after the embattled years of conflict were over. So, too, did warriors from another indigenous ally, Tlaxcala. Like the much-better-known *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, but in some regard even more so, the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* reveals an intricate involvement hitherto never appreciated.¹⁰ It constitutes a veritable map of the conquest of Guatemala, registering battle after battle of a second wave of subjugation, not carried out by Pedro de Alvarado but by his brother Jorge. This occurred between 1527 and 1529, when Pedro had returned to Spain following the initial invasion that had begun three years earlier. In effect, Pedro left Jorge in charge of an unfinished project, a conquest he is credited with having started but did not oversee to completion. Upon arrival in Guatemala from Mexico, bringing an estimated five to six thousand “yndios amigos” with him, Jorge achieved far more than consolidating the gains of his brother. By penetrating areas Pedro had not, Jorge brought Spanish might to bear on more territory than before. One such region entered and subdued was the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes.

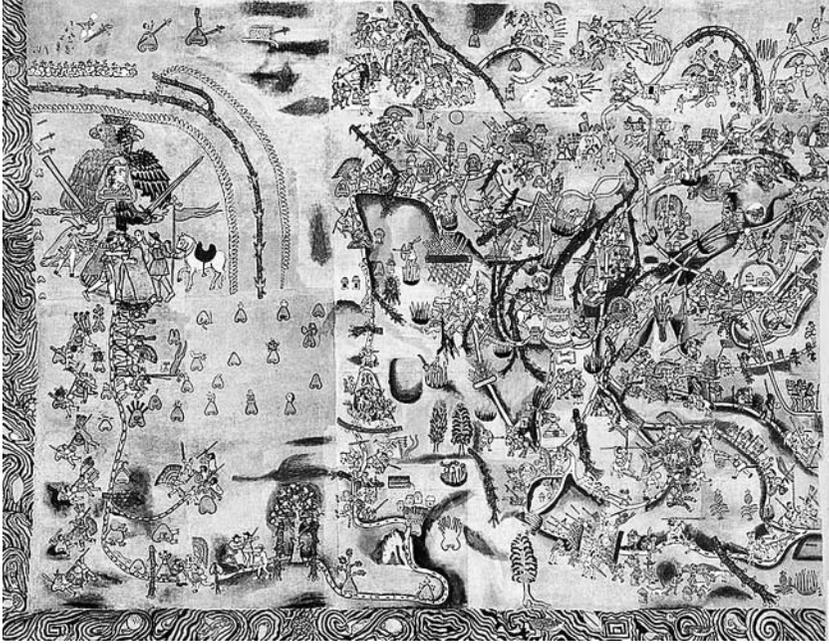


Figure 3. The *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, as reconfigured by the Universidad Francisco Marroquín (2007) in an exhibition it mounted that same year. Reproduced by kind permission of the Universidad Francisco Marroquín.

The true nature of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* not having then been disclosed, I was unable to incorporate its revelations into my doctoral dissertation or the first two editions of a book that came of it. I was, however, able to thread in findings to a third and especially a fourth edition, including having a place glyph from the *lienzo* rendered by Angelika Bauer (fig. 4) adorn the book's cover (Lovell [1985] 2015).

In her incisive dissection, Asselbergs identifies four place glyphs that she seeks to correlate with known Cuchumatán locations. The first depicts a deer (*maza*) above a walled fortress (*tenam*), signifying in Náhuatl (the language of the Aztecs that, in the wake of conquest, became a *lingua franca* throughout Guatemala) the name "Mazatenango." Another Alvarado, Gonzalo, brother of both Jorge and Pedro, conquered Mazatenango (today known as San Lorenzo) as part of a campaign against the Mam of Huehuetenango in 1525. Its appearance in the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* is not rendered as a battle scene, so it may be that Quauhquecholtecas

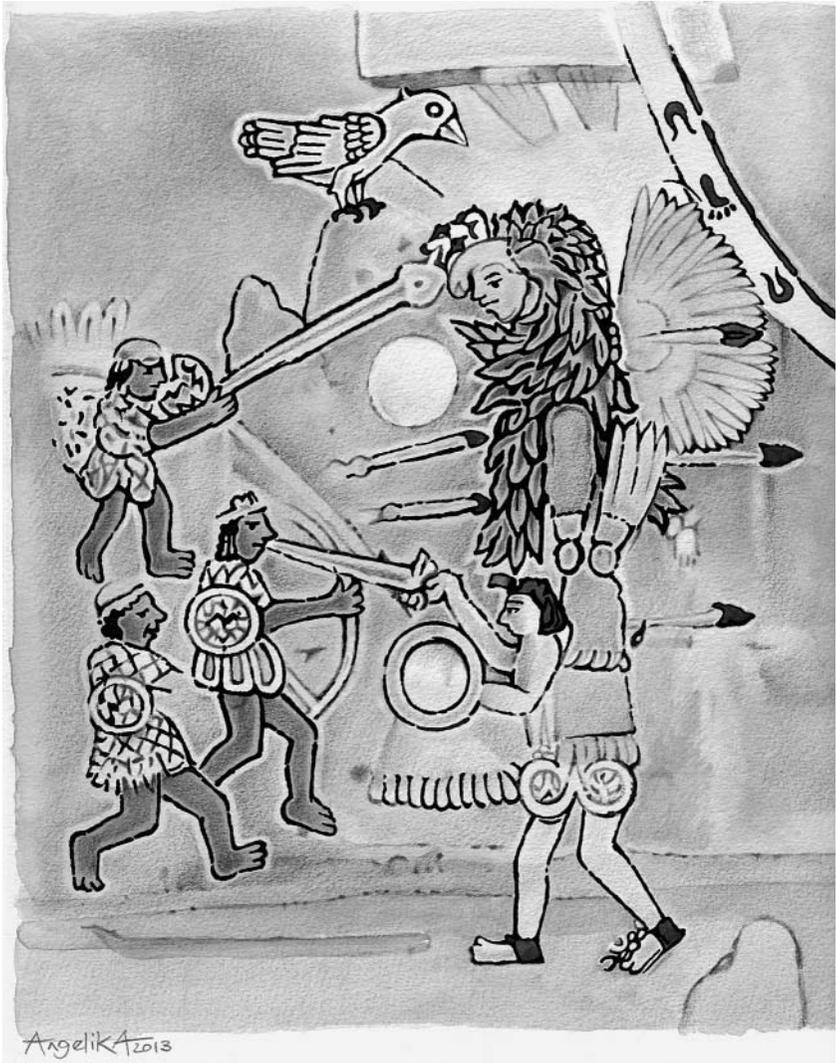


Figure 4. Place glyph in the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, depicting a battle scene in the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, as rendered by Angelika Bauer. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

recorded Mazatenango simply to indicate it as part of the route they took with Jorge to wage war elsewhere (Asselbergs 2010: 280).¹¹ A second place glyph shows a bird perched atop a mountain, which Asselbergs asserts “without any doubt is a reference to the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes,” specifically “the region of Todos Santos Cuchumatán” (Asselbergs 2009: 176, 179). The bird, she states, can be construed to mean *cuchuma*, the Náhuatl word for a linnet or warbler, or *cocho* (plural *cochome*), the Náhuatl word for parrot (Asselbergs 2002: 48; 2009: 179; 2010: 282).

A scene of battle is clearly depicted, with two invaders to the right of the bird and mountain, one clad in a protective garment made of eagle feathers, in combat with three enemy warriors to the left (see fig. 4). The third glyph shows a road ending in the mountains at a place represented by a walled fortress (*tenam*), which may refer to Huehuetenango, the word *huehue* meaning “old” in Náhuatl—hence “the old walled fortress.” Asselbergs (2010: 282) cautions, however, that this glyph, which shows two Quauhquecholtecas fighting against two adversaries, “is too damaged to know this for sure.” She is similarly hesitant about designating a Cuchumatán location to a fourth glyph, stating only that its battle scene “may possibly allude to the war of 1529–30 in Uspantlán, which at that time was part of Verapaz/Tecolotlán.” All four place glyphs are to be found on the uppermost left of the *lienzo*, corresponding to the far northwestern extent of Guatemala, precisely that part of the country (fig. 5) traversed by the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes.¹²

Data have yet to come to light indicating that Quauhquecholtecas chose to settle in the Cuchumatanes after their role in its conquest. A contingent of them, so Laura Matthew (2012) has established, did so in Ciudad Vieja, where (close to the colonial capital of Santiago de Guatemala) the *lienzo* itself may have been stitched together in the 1530s. We do have evidence of Tlaxcalan warriors putting down roots in the Cuchumatanes, hopeful that privileges granted them as key Spanish allies would be respected. Sadly for these “yndios amigos,” at least in two instances, that proved not to be the case. “They treat us here like slaves,” four Tlaxcalan leaders complained to the Crown in a letter drafted in Huehuetenango on 10 January 1562. “The representatives of Your Majesty are well aware of the harm they do us, and of the laws they fail to enforce.”¹³ Five days later, from nearby Aguacatán, three other Tlaxcalan leaders echoed the complaint. “Instead of looking on us as their sons,” they charged, “the president and his judges regard us as worthless. They consider us their slaves! Deprived and forgotten, we cry out, in anguish and in grief, for redress.”¹⁴ Like their Quauhquecholteca counterparts, Tlaxcalteca warriors in theory were afforded all sorts of rights and concessions, among them grants of



Figure 5. The upper left of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, depicting Spanish intrusion in Verapaz (center right) and the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes (bottom left and top left). Photo by the author, taken with permission from a reproduction made by the Universidad Francisco Marroquín.

land, exemption from paying tribute, and (at Sacapulas) control of prized salt deposits. In actual practice, however, Spanish recognition for services rendered could amount to little, or nothing at all.¹⁵

“It is common knowledge,” wrote Diego de Mançanares on 30 June 1564, “that were it not for the friendly Indians who came from the provinces of Mexico it would not have been possible to conquer Guatemala.” Mançanares states this specifically in relation to the “yndios amigos” who accompanied “el Adelantado,” meaning Pedro de Alvarado, not his brother Jorge.¹⁶ While Jorge is the Alvarado to whom, thanks to the unraveling of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, we must devote more attention when rethinking conquest, Pedro remains the “supreme leader” whose actions, even when he was not present to deal with their consequences, dictated the dramatic course of events associated with Spanish subjugation.

“Strike Fear in the Land”

A statue of his imagined likeness (fig. 6) may be found on the banks of the Río Guadiana in his native Badajoz. The bronze effigy, erected in 2003, is



Figure 6. Statue of the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado (1485–1541), the work of sculptor Estanislao García Olivares, in Badajoz, Spain. Photo by the author.

the inspiration of sculptor Estanislao García Olivares. When the bus I am on drives past, halfway between Seville and Lisbon, I point him out to colleagues and students from the Universidad Pablo de Olavide, and croon them Procol Harum's emblematic song. Its lyrics match the statue's demeanor. No sword is held high, however, and no stallion stands. In his solitude, the conquistador leans to one side, face forlorn, helmet in hand, an outstretched palm turned down. Alvarado's valedictory stance is far from triumphant. The Pipil arrow that pierced his leg in a confrontation in Acajutla left him crippled for the rest of his life. "One of my legs," he took pains to tell afterward, "is shorter than the other by four finger widths."¹⁷ The Adelantado limped back, literally, to the Spanish base at Iximché, arriving there on 21 July 1524, his two-month invasion of El Salvador one from which he was forced to beat a very hasty retreat. Instead of being grateful to his Kaqchikel hosts for welcoming him back, along with the surviving "yndios amigos" dispatched to assist the Spanish cause, an incensed Alvarado turned on them, demanding that they make up for the failure of the Salvadoran venture by furnishing copious amounts of tribute. It was not the first time a psychotic mix of volatile temper, unsound judgment, and penchant for gold got the better of him, nor would it be the last.

The insurrection triggered by his behavior remains an episode still not fully appreciated, above all for the precedent it set, and the pall it cast, on how Spanish conquest unfolded and how colonial society would develop. Kaqchikel allegiance had been solicited early on, in Alvarado's own words not merely as a test of loyalty but to help him "strike fear in the land." That he most assuredly did, besides instilling apprehension and dread even among those closest to him, his own brothers and most faithful associates included.¹⁸ In a matter of months a stalwart ally became an embittered enemy, dismayed and outraged at the treatment meted out to them. Henceforth, instead of waging war alongside him, the Kaqchikeles rallied to oppose him (Lovell and Lutz 2018). This they did first from August 1524 to May 1530, led by their rulers Cahí Ymox and Belehé Qat, and again from April 1533 to May 1535. A second uprising was galvanized by Cahí Ymox and Quiyavit Caok, the hapless Belehé Qat having died in September 1532 as a result of his being forced to wash for gold.¹⁹

The contours of the second uprising are not as evident as the first.²⁰ Daniel Contreras initially made the case for it in a brief, little-cited article in 1965, reiterated it in 1971 in a source equally (if not more) difficult of access, and reprised it four decades later, stating that Cahí Ymox felt "so disgusted by the new way of life that he was obliged once more to take up arms against the Spaniards" (Contreras 2004: 70; see also 1965, 1971).²¹ The Kaqchikel leader's disgust arose from the abuse visited on his people,

more heavy-handed, according to Francis Polo Sifontes, than that suffered by other Maya communities. Kaqchikeles, he contends, endured in effect a “double punishment” because they aligned themselves with the Spaniards at the outset, only to rise in rebellion thereafter. While all native polities were exploited, Polo Sifontes asserts that “on Kaqchikel shoulders the burden of conquest fell twice,” adding that “this feisty people, inured to war, were probably exploited even more than any of their neighbors” (Polo Sifontes 2005: 13, 45).²²

Besides demands to pay excessive amounts of tribute, in the years leading up to the second insurrection two projects called for the provision of labor onerous in the extreme. One was supplying workers to assist with the erection of the Spanish capital, Santiago in Almolonga, a massive project ill-advisedly mounted adjacent to the lower slopes of a towering volcano. In the *Memorial de Sololá*, a glimpse of their travails under tyranny is offered by the Kaqchikeles themselves, as rendered in translation by Adrián Recinos and Delia Goetz (1953: 129): “During this year [1530] heavy tribute was imposed. Gold was contributed to Tunatiuh [Alvarado]; four hundred men and four hundred women were delivered to him to be sent to wash [for] gold. All the people extracted the gold. Four hundred men and four hundred women were contributed to work in Pangán [the site of the Spanish capital, Santiago in Almolonga] on the construction of the city, by order of Tunatiuh [Alvarado].”²³

The Lure of Peru

Another project in which the burden of toil fell disproportionately on the Kaqchikeles was the construction of an armada, a dozen or so ships in all, built to fulfill Alvarado’s intent to muscle in on the conquest of Peru. The Adelantado was not the least bit satisfied with what he considered paltry Central American takings. Tales of the riches of the Inca Empire, the Kingdom of Quito in particular, fueled his designs to intervene there and stake out a share of the spoils by wresting control from rivals Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro, whose onslaught focused on Cuzco in the south: the northern Andes in present-day Ecuador, allegedly in territory that lay beyond the jurisdiction allocated Pizarro and Almagro, had yet to be invaded and its peoples subdued. The fleet Alvarado amassed to that end, by all accounts, was spectacular: it included the flagship San Cristóbal, a galleon of 300 tons “as beautiful as anything made in Vizcaya,” and two other sizable vessels, the Santa Clara (160 tons) and the Buena Ventura (150 tons). “Never before, Your Majesty, has there been seen in these parts anything like this,” Alvarado boasted to Emperor Charles Von 18 January

1534, on the eve of his departure.²⁴ One eyewitness at the time, Bartolomé de las Casas, Defender of the Indians, saw things differently:

He took the lives of countless people building boats. From the Caribbean to the Pacific, a distance of 130 leagues, anchors weighing three and four *quintales* were carried on the backs and shoulders of the Indians. By the same means, too, on sad, naked shoulders, heavy artillery; I beheld many as such on the roads, laden and distressed.²⁵

Writing much later, though with the benefit of hindsight, de las Casas's fellow Dominican, the chronicler Francisco Ximénez, also deplored Alvarado's actions:

He began by looking for suitable locations for a shipyard, felling timber, sewing riggings, hauling iron, making tar, transporting pieces of artillery—all at the expense of the poor Indians, removing them from their homelands and taking them far away to very remote shores. Building boats cost the lives of many Indians.²⁶

Investigating the call of Peru is a work in progress. Long after Alvarado's absence from the scene, however, in the country's seething convulsions trying to come to terms with itself, Guatemala remains a beauty that hurts.²⁷

Notes

Acquaintances, colleagues, family, friends, and mentors instrumental in guiding me along receive mention in the text, to whose appreciation I add that of my companion, muse, and copy-editor beyond compare, Maureen McCallum Garvie. Since its establishment two decades ago, the Universidad Pablo de Olavide in Seville has been an intellectual home the equivalent of the one I have been fortunate to enjoy at Queen's University in Canada for twice as long. At the former, nothing would have been possible without the inspiration of *mi media naranja* Juan Marchena Fernández, nor the helping hands of Brian S. Osborne and John Walker at the latter. In Guatemala itself, the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica in La Antigua has served unfailingly as my base of operation. The research pursuits distilled here have been sustained over the years by several funding agencies, but the Killam Program of the Canada Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada have been especially supportive. On the printed page, I have tried to be faithful to the power-point presentation that propelled my presidential address, delivered when our Society convened for its annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, three days after another president, Donald J. Trump, was elected to office. His victory loomed over our proceedings, which at times felt more like a wake, despite my best efforts at good cheer. Wendy Kramer, archival hound cum laude, may have among her files a recording of me singing "Conquistador" at

the Hutton Hotel gala. Readers of *Ethnohistory*, however, might better be spared that, a fate not to be for anyone attending the banquet that haunted evening.

- 1 For an absorbing biography of Sauer, see Williams, with Lowenthal and Denevan, 2014, the even more exhaustive manuscript of which may be consulted in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.
- 2 I defended my master's thesis, "Culture and Landscape in the Mixteca Alta," on 21 April 1975. It remains unpublished.
- 3 The distinguished French historians are quoted in translation in MacLeod 1973, xv.
- 4 My doctoral dissertation, "Land and Settlement in the Cuchumatán Highlands," always in a state of enhancement, has spawned one book in English, four editions, and one in Spanish, two editions.
- 5 See Lovell 2001 for Seville's role in the Spanish scheme of empire, and Cook and Lovell (1992) 2001 for scrutiny of the relationship between Old World disease and New World depopulation.
- 6 President Valverde to the Crown (Archivo General de Indias, hereafter AGI, Guatemala 10). His precise words are: "[D]emás de las muertes ordinarias vienen algunos tiempos enfermos de viruelas, catarros y otras enfermedades en que mueren muchos."
- 7 Pedro de Liévano to the Crown (AGI, Guatemala 10, 1582). The dean's precise words are: "[E]n lo que toca a morir se los indios e ir en disminución son juicios secretos de Dios que los hombres no alcanzan [pero] lo que este testigo ha visto en el tiempo que ha estado en estas partes es que desde la provincia de México han venido tres o cuatro pestilencias con las cuales ha venido la tierra en grandísima disminución." See Lovell (1992) 2001 for elaboration.
- 8 Taylor (1980: 325), summing up his review of Sherman 1979.
- 9 According to Martínez Peláez (1970) 1998, black slaves first arrived in Central America in 1543, after the promulgation of the New Laws in 1542. He identifies two periods of incorporation, 1542 to ca.1650, and from ca.1650 on. In the *Libro Segundo del Cabildo*, however, Kramer and associates document the existence of African slaves—men and women—a decade earlier. Robinson Herrera (1998) records 249 slaves in Santiago de Guatemala between 1544 and 1587. Paul Lokken (2013) reckons that some 3,000 slaves (150 per year) arrived in Central America between 1607 and 1625, "very low thousands" of whom ended up in Guatemala. Philip D. Curtin (1969) records 21,000 as having entered all of Central America between 1520 and 1820. Enriqueta Vila Vilar (1977) has a register of 27,000 "negros y mulatos" in 1640. David Eltis and David Richardson (2010) tally 390,000 for a unit they define as the "Spanish Caribbean Mainland," which stretches from Panama in the south to Mexico in the north.
- 10 Horacio Cabezas Carcache (2009: 13) believes the "illustrative richness" of the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* to be "more comprehensive" than that of the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* on account of the former showing, in addition to scenes of battle, "indigenous weaponry, Spanish soldiers, topographic glyphs, traps used by the K'achikeles [during their uprising], types of clothing, porters and human carriers, roads and trails, ball courts, markets, defeated Indians being hung or thrown to the dogs, ritual dances in honor of the fallen, and offerings to the gods as thanks for victory."

- 11 From its placement in the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, this Mazatenango may be a different Mazatenango than the one conquered by Gonzalo de Alvarado, which the *Diccionario geográfico de Guatemala* (1973–83, 2: 615) identifies as “the village [*aldeá*] of San Lorenzo,” one of twenty such units forming the township (*municipio*) of Huehuetenango. For discussion of Gonzalo’s campaigns of conquest in the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, see Lovell (1985) 2015: 57–64.
- 12 Asselbergs (2008: 179) concludes, “All this upper part of the *lienzo*, then, coincides with what we know about the military campaigns headed by Jorge de Alvarado in the Rabinal area (Tequicistlán) and in Verapaz (Tecalotlán); in the mountain region of Sacapulas and Uspantlán, in what is today the Department of El Quiché; and in Aguacatán and Poyumatlán (now Santa Eulalia) in the Department of Huehuetenango.” Asselbergs (2004: 181) also observes that “the distribution of the place glyphs depicted corresponds more or less to the distribution of those places on the ground. The document thus provides a geographical map that is quite accurate even by modern standards.” Following a decision to remove the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan* from obscurity and neglect in the Casa de Alfeñique, it was subsequently restored in Mexico City and relocated to its present home in the Museo Regional de Cholula, where it is on permanent and prominent display. Explanation of its provenance and import, however, leaves much to be desired, museum rhetoric failing to do justice to the treasure entrusted it. The meticulous work of Asselbergs, inexplicably, is barely acknowledged.
- 13 AGI, Guatemala 52, “Señores y principales de Huehuetenango al Rey” (1562). The precise words of the disgruntled leaders are “estamos desfavorecidos como esclavos, nos hacen agravios por parte de los justicias asi del presidente como de los oidores, no guardan los mandamientos de V[uestra] M[agestad].”
- 14 AGI, Guatemala 52, “Señores y principales de Aguacatán al Rey” (1562). Their precise words are “en lugar de hijos nos tienen en lugar de esclavos, estamos como cosa de nada del presidente y oidores y olvidados de los que pedimos porque pasamos grandes necesidades, quedamos llorando.”
- 15 See Carmack 1973: 38, for more on the Tlaxcalan presence at Sacapulas, where (“possibly in 1551”) a document was composed “by lords of the Canil and Toltecat ruling lines, primarily as a claim to the mineral springs located there.”
- 16 Diego de Mançanares, from AGI, Justicia 291, folio 127, recto (1564). His precise words are “fue publico e notorio que si los yndios amigos no vinyeron de las provincias de mexico con el d[ic]ho [A]delantado no se pudiera conquistar la provincia de guatemala.” Mançanares, an indigenous warrior, fought alongside Alvarado not only in Guatemala but also in Honduras. See Asselbergs 2010: 1, for elaboration.
- 17 The arrow that wounded him went clean through his leg, Alvarado states, and lodged in his horse’s saddle. His precise words—see Recinos 1952: 90, for a transcription of the original—are “entró la flecha por la silla, de la cual herida quedo lisiado que me quedó la una pierna más corta que la otra bien cuatro dedos.”
- 18 From the K’iche’ stronghold of Utatlán, on 11 April 1524, Alvarado had written to his commanding officer, Hernán Cortes, informing him that “word has been sent to the city of Guatemala [Ximché], which lies ten leagues from this city, ordering and demanding of them, in the name of His Majesty, to send warriors to fight alongside me, not only to test their good will but to strike fear in the

land.” His actual words run: “Envié a la ciudad de Guatemala, que está a diez leguas de ésta, a decirles y requerirles de parte de Su Magestad que me enviasen gente de guerra así para saber de ellos la voluntad que tenían como para atemorizar la tierra.” Alvarado’s last three words are the title of a book two colleagues and I—see Lovell, Lutz, and Kramer (2016) 2017—will have the pleasure of seeing appear in an English-language edition in 2020 published by the University of Oklahoma Press as a volume in its *Civilization of the American Indians* series.

- 19 As rendered from the Kaqchikel original by Adrián Recinos and Delia Goetz (1953: 129), we are told: “During the two months of the third year which had passed since the lords presented themselves, the king Belehé Qat died; he died on the day 7 Queh [24 September 1532] while he was washing [for] gold.”
- 20 A collaboration in English—see Lovell and Lutz 2018—is being expanded for fuller treatment in Spanish, enriched by revelations from the *Libro Segundo del Cabildo*, hitherto believed lost but now (along with other documents belonging to the Hispanic Society of America) most emphatically not. For elaboration, see Kramer, Lovell, and Lutz 2014; Kramer 2018; and Lovell 2018. Guillermo Paz Cárcamo’s *Kaji’ Imox* (2014) is perhaps the best study to date of the Kaqchikel uprising.
- 21 His precise words are that Cahí Ymox “se refugió en su antiguo Tinamit [Iximché], descontento con el nuevo sistema de vida. [D]ebió volverse levantar en armas contra los castellanos.”
- 22 His precise words are: “[E]l pueblo cakchiqueles, pueblo luchador y aguerrido, se desangraron en la conquista probablemente mucho más que ninguno de sus vecinos.”
- 23 In the Mesoamerican mindset, the figure four hundred implies “a great many,” not a precise number. The Kaqchikel original, translated into Spanish, runs: “Durante este año [1530] se impusieron terribles tributos. Se tributó oro a Tunatiuh [Alvarado]; se le tributaron cuatrocientos hombres y cuatrocientas mujeres para ir a lavar oro. Toda la gente extraía el oro. Se tributaban cuatrocientos hombres y cuatrocientas mujeres para trabajar en *Pangán* [Santiago in Almolonga] por orden de Tunatiuh [Alvarado] en la construcción de la ciudad del Señor.”
- 24 The words of the Adelantado in the original run “la más hermosa pieza que se pudiera hacer en Vizcaya” and “tenga Vuestra Magestad por cierto, que nunca hasta oy se ha visto en estas partes.” Three other ships were named La Concepción, San Pedro, and Santiago. A transcription of Alvarado’s missives to the King may be perused in the *Libro Viejo* 1934: 282–84 and 286–88.
- 25 Las Casas (1552) 1977, as cited in Recinos 1952: 137. The original runs: “Mató infinitas gentes con hacer navíos; llevaba de la mar del norte a la del sur, ciento y treinta leguas, los indios cargados con anclas de tres y cuatro quintales que se les metían las más dellas por las espaldas y lomos; y llevó de esta manera mucha artillería en los hombros de los tristes desnudos; y yo vi muchos cargados de artillería por los caminos angustiados.” In Spanish units of measure, a *quintal* (or *centena*) is a weight of 100 pounds, some 46 kilograms. Pulling no punches, Las Casas (1552) 1977: 45–50 asserts that “the atrocities perpetrated by Alvarado and his brothers alone are enough to fill a single volume, so many were the slaughters, crimes, injustices, butcheries, and beastly desolations made

- against the Indians of Guatemala.” In his *Forced Native Labor*, Sherman (1979) documents such iniquities with numbing attention to detail.
- 26 Francisco Ximénez, *Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala* (1715-20), as cited in Recinos 1952: 137. The original runs: “Empezó a descubrir astilleros, sacar maderas, fabricar jarácias, acarrear fierro, sacar brea, conducir piezas de artillería, todo a costa de los pobres indios, sacándoles de su patria y llevándolos a partes muy remotas. Mató muchos indios con hacer navíos.”
- 27 My memoir by that name, *A Beauty That Hurts* (Lovell [1995] 2010), inspired by a description from Oliver La Farge and Douglas Byers (1931) as they scaled the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, is presently in its third edition and will appear soon in a fourth.

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