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Pizzigoni, Caterina, and Camilla Townsend. Indigenous Life after the Conquest: The De la Cruz Family Papers of Colonial Mexico

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Pizzigoni, Caterina, and Camilla Townsend.

Indigenous Life after the Conquest: The De la Cruz Family Papers of Colonial Mexico.

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021. Pp. 184 + 13 b/w ill., 2 maps. ISBN 978-0-271-08813-6 (paperback) US\$19.95.

The dynamic between colonially induced changes and indigenous cultural continuities is a recurring theme in this study of Nahuatl manuscripts once kept in a valley close to Mexico City, the political and economic capital of New Spain. The use of the word “conquest” in the title of this book conjures up a huge and dramatic change, but the reality on the ground, even in this region so close to the centre of Spanish power, in fact shows remarkable indigenous agency, negotiation, and resilience in the face of colonizers’ demands. This should no longer surprise those familiar with what postcontact Nahua authors wrote about their lives, times, and communities, at least since the landmark book, *Beyond the Codices: The Nahua View of Colonial Mexico*, appeared in 1976 (Berkeley: University of California Press).

The manuscripts in *Indigenous Life after the Conquest* are two handwritten books in Nahuatl by a literate, native speaker in Tepemaxalco, a moiety of the more famous town of Calimaya, in the southern half of the valley of Toluca. The author’s name is don Pedro de la Cruz, making clear his status as an elite, baptized Nahua. One of his books (1657–65) has a focus on tributes—the first part, payments in coin made by adults of his community, and the second part, payments made by elected officials on behalf of their subjects. The second book (1607–1842), again largely written by don Pedro, also has dual features: a report of expenses for enhancements to the Christian temples and religious activities provided by both humble and generous donations, and a record of historical events (annals) and the provision of religious alms.

The tribute records show something of the evolution of taxation from Mexico to Spanish imperial times. Don Pedro’s drawings (139) of the “pieces of eight” (a *real*, in Spanish, or a *tomin*, in Nahuatl), represent a hint of what the pictorials—such as the Tepetlaoztoc, Tepotzotlan, and Chavero codices—had so colourfully captured the century before. But they go beyond, elucidating place names, people’s names, social status, gender, amounts paid, and more. In don Pedro’s century, colonial officials demanded coin, and it was difficult to collect, given that families were largely subsistence farmers. Single men were

paying three *reales*, married men double that (implying an equal contribution from the wives), and even widows had to scrounge together their three *reales*. Men who held the honorific title “don” were paying the same amount as the others, despite the fact that they typically had more robust resources. While this was not a progressive taxation, elected men often had to cover the debts of community members who were unable to pay.

Various sixteenth-century codices about tributes were created as complaints against abusive labour practices and pleas for the reduction in tribute assessments, given the waves of epidemic disease that were decimating the indigenous population. Such protests did not abate with the changeover to alphabetic record keeping of tribute, for a significant resistance from humble farmers arose against making payments in Calimaya-Tepemaxalco in at least 1655 and 1666, when demographic losses were still painfully felt. While don Pedro had to make up the tribute shortages, in 1666 he was still so flush that he donated 400 pesos for the purchase of an organ for the church dedicated to the patron saints Pedro and Pablo. His wealth and that of his son also become apparent in their testaments. This was a well-to-do family with considerable property, including houses, agricultural parcels, rows of magueys (for making *pulque*, an alcoholic beverage), images of saints, corncribs, oxen, horses, mules, cattle, and more.

These Nahuatl-language books and testaments are presented here with moderately normalized transcriptions and English translations—a great benefit for readers who are translating manuscripts themselves. What is more, the authors of this latest contribution to the burgeoning New Philology of alphabetic Nahuatl could not be better equipped to impart these quality editions. Caterina Pizzigoni and Camilla Townsend were both guided in their early work by the late James Lockhart, and they have continued to excel with translating and analyzing Nahuatl over their distinguished careers.

Pizzigoni’s work with Nahuatl testaments of the Toluca Valley (*Testaments of Toluca* [Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007]) and her publication on the “life within” these pueblos (*The Life Within: Local Indigenous Society in Mexico’s Toluca Valley, 1650–1800* [Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012]) under Spanish colonialism—based on Nahuatl manuscripts of the same valley—prepared her well for this deeper dive into the selected records of the De la Cruz family of Tepemaxalco. Pizzigoni’s knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of this region’s alphabetic Nahuatl also supports the comments the co-authors

add about the transitions in orthography (related to evolving pronunciation) and loanword usage, including the borrowing of Spanish verbs. Likewise, Townsend brings to bear her expertise with seventeenth-century annals in alphabetic Nahuatl from the Tlaxcala-Puebla valley (*Here in This Year: Seventeenth-Century Nahuatl Annals of the Tlaxcala-Puebla Valley* [Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010]). She is familiar with the ways annals content could be borrowed and reproduced across time and space, and she is able to recognize lingering dimensions of the *xiuhpohualli* (indigenous solar year count and annals) of pre-Cortesian traditions.

By the time don Pedro's annals come to a conclusion at the hand of one of his many descendants in 1842, the co-authors note, "the writers had largely lost sight of what kind of material would have been included by their ancestors, but they added entries nonetheless" (9). Content had evolved, but the drive to keep history alive was an enduring passion in this family. The indigenous temples of this region may have been replaced with Christian churches, but the people's devotion to providing for this new faith thrived with donations in kind, money, construction, painting, and agricultural labour. Families still worked the land for their "saints," in some ways akin to earlier practices directed towards ancestral divinities. Religious celebrations, including song and dance, continued to lift their hearts. Thus, "everything changed for the indigenous people, and at the same time nothing changed" (2). *Plus ça change.*

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