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Review of *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk

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Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, (eds.), *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); 320 pp. \$45.

Taken as a whole, this collection of essays provides readers with a clear and satisfying re-orientation of the study of the early Spanish conquest of the Americas. By placing indigenous peoples at the center of the frame of analysis, the collection delivers a coherent description of the process through which the Spanish subjugated the regions surrounding the valley of Mexico. Although generations of historians have understood the ‘conquest’ of Americas to be a process, rather than a single shocking event, these essays make clear how deeply the long-term endeavor depended upon indigenous agents for its success.

The essays, based upon careful research in primary sources, cover accounts and documents written by Spanish *conquistadores*; narratives produced by hispanicized indigenous leaders; and maps, *lienzos* and other visual materials. What emerges from the authors’ diligent work is a clear understanding that indigenous leaders and peoples did more than just collude with the Spanish in effecting the ‘fall of Tenochtitlan’ or any other specific site. Rather, indigenous peoples accompanied the Spanish in their various expansionist endeavors, often numbering in the thousands (and in some cases, tens of thousands).

As the Spanish moved out into the regions beyond Tenochtitlan, reaching Nueva Galicia and Guatemala, they did so in the company of indigenous peoples who had sometimes been impressed as laborers, or were often raised by their own local leaders to serve as warriors, carriers, cooks, colonists and settlers. What is more, the very routes taken by the Spanish as they pushed out from Tenochtitlan were established by long-standing indigenous trade (and conquest) routes.

Michel Oudijk and Matthew Restall make this point in the first essay of the collection, “Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century.” The authors provide a strong overview and argue that the Euro-indigenous alliances and the process of sequential conquests followed pre-hispanic norms of expansionism. In addition, the Spanish followed established, pre-Colombian paths: “[c]onsidering that during their military campaigns the Spanish were to a large extent led by local lords and guides, we can presume that they followed existing routes.” (49)

The essays in the collection are wide-ranging, covering a lot of geographic and conceptual terrain. Florine G.L. Asselbergs, in “The Conquest in Images: Stories of Tlaxcalteca and Quauhquecholteca Conquistadors” examines narrative descriptions of indigenous polities that were embedded into *lienzos*. Laura Matthew (“Whose Conquest? Nahua, Zapoteca, and Mixteca Allies in the Conquest of Central America”) mines an account by Francisco Ocelote to establish that a large indigenous force assisted the Spanish in subduing the K’iche Maya of Guatemala, and follows with an examination of a colonial legal process to show how the survivors of this force petitioned the crown to be freed from tributary obligations. Robinson Herrera explores the role of indigenous women in the conquest in “Concubines and Wives: Reinterpreting Native-Spanish

Intimate Unions in Sixteenth-Century Guatemala.” Ida Altman describes the role played by indigenous allies in two expeditions into Nueva Galicia in “Conquest, Coercion, and Collaboration: Indian Allies and the Campaigns in Nueva Galicia,” and studies the account of Francisco de Sandoval Acaetli to illuminate the ‘Mixton War’ of the 1540s.

John F. Chuchiak IV carefully charts the movements and mixtures of peoples engaged in the expeditions carried out in the Yucatan in “Forgotten Allies: The Origins and Roles of Native Mesoamerican Auxiliaries and Indios Conquistadores in the Conquest of the Yucatan, 1526-1550.” Yanna Yannakakis in “The Indios Conquistadores of Oaxaca’s Sierra Norte: From Indian Conquerors to Local Indians” charts how an ‘irridentist’ Tlaxcalteca community established itself through its services to the Spanish, worked to maintain the privileges it won for those services, but in the end lost its privileged status. Stephanie Wood provides a rewarding close reading of a visual source in “Nahua Christian Warriors in the Mapa de Cuauhlanzincó, Cholula Parish,” and Bret Blosser explores militia service in “By the Force of Their Lives and the Spilling of Blood’: Flechero Service and Political Leverage on a Nueva Galicia Frontier.”

The volume’s introduction carefully delineates the various lines of interpretation that have been brought to bear upon the conquest by historians over time (from heroic to villainous to thematic), framing the present collection as emerging from a crucial analytical turning point. In addressing the full range of indigenous engagement in the conquest, the opportunity to effectively bring together ethnohistorical and narrative approaches is now available to historians.

How, then, is the conquest to be described, analyzed, and framed? Rather than a radical departure, the authors argue that continuity underpinned the way that non-Mexican indigenous peoples historicized the process of conquest. In her study of three *lienzos*, Asselbergs makes two statements that are paradigmatic for the entire collection that I will quote in turn. First she writes that “[t]he alliance with the Spaniards and the conquest achieved under the Spanish banner are not depicted any differently from prehispanic conquest narratives.” (86) Second, and most forcefully, she states that the narrative structure in the *lienzos* “contributed to the [indigenous polity’s] self-image as conquerors and victors rather than victims of the conquest.” (91)

In exploring the ways in which some indigenous polities acted as – and depicted themselves as – co-conquerors, colonists, and defenders of the crown, the essays in *Indigenous Conquistadors* allow for a more nuanced picture of early conquest society to emerge.

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