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Painting a Map of Sixteenth-Century Mexico City: Land, Writing, and Native Rule

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Mary E. Miller and Barbara E. Mundy, *Painting a Map of Sixteenth-Century Mexico City: Land, Writing, and Native Rule*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, xv + 216 pages, US\$75 hardcover.

Startlingly beautiful in its colorful renditions of people, trees, canals, dikes, and agricultural fields of a small area in the sixteenth-century Basin of Mexico, this map has remained virtually unknown to scholars until now. Several anonymous, Nahua cartographers drafted the map about 1565 on a rectangular sheet of fig-bark paper that measures 177 by 72 centimeters. Along the left margin appear the second viceroy of New Spain, Luis de Velasco, and the succession of native governors of Mexico City from 1538 until 1565, their faces, clothing, and footwear rendered in noteworthy detail. To their right, surrounded by canals, a rectilinear array locates 121 agricultural fields and their owners or tenants through two generations. Not a single toponym of a place, stream, or landmark identifies the precise location.

After service as a cadastral map, and perhaps in the city's courts during legal disputes over land titles, the map lay forgotten in some backroom until somehow acquired by an antiquities dealer who exported it, illegally, to the USA in the late nineteenth century. It continued to remain unknown to scholars for another century, however, and does not appear in the comprehensive *Guide to Ethnohistorical Sources* that makes up the last four volumes of the fifteen-volume *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin, 1964–1975). Then, in 1974, a Yale undergraduate found it in a lot of rare books he had purchased at an auction. After William Reese brought it to the attention of one of his professors, a reputed Mesoamericanist named Michael Coe, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University purchased it in exchange for Reese's remaining three years of tuition. At first named the Codex Reese, it eventually became known as the Beinecke Map but has until now remained relatively unknown. Wishing to bring such a cartographic treasure to the attention of a greater number of scholars, art historians at Yale assembled a team of curators, epigraphers, chemists, linguists, historians, and others to study the map and produce this publication.

The volume constitutes both a reproduction of the map and a detailed interpretation of the map's context, contents, meanings, and functions. As a reproduction it includes two facsimiles of the entire map. The first measures 41 by 7 centimeters spreading across two pages and interrupted by the gutter. The second is a gate fold, measuring an uninterrupted 57 by 23 centimeters to display the map at about a third of its actual size so that details are easily distinguishable. In addition, more than a hundred other color illustrations appear throughout the book, focusing in on details of the Beinecke Map and contemporaries such as the closely related, but much better known, Plano Parcial de la Ciudad de México.

Each of the nine chapters and two appendixes interprets a different aspect of the map. Some concern its conservation, artistic techniques, pigments, and provenance. The ones of likely greatest interest to geographers deal with the place it evokes, the social relations it was involved in, and the agricultural technologies and ecologies it represents.

The authors are not able to definitively locate the place that the map depicts but suggest the eastern margin of colonial Mexico City. They speculate that some of the fields might be *chinampas* used for the cultivation of maize and that the other crop indicated might have been *tule*, a reed used as a building material and, after colonization, as fodder for the introduced livestock. They offer no identification at all for the trees, despite being rendered in great detail in a row along the left edge of the fields. The farmers seem to have lived in a village between what might be a dyke and the bank of a large canal. The authors

interpret the putative canal as one used for irrigation even though abundant reeds would suggest a wetland in which drainage seems a more likely function. In fact, they generally confound the very different forms and functions of upland fields irrigated by canals with those of *chinampas*, the intensive wetland agriculture that produced the high yields necessary to sustain the densely settled, urbanized population of precolonial times, see Sluyter, 'Intensive Wetland Agriculture in Mesoamerica, *Annals of the AAG* (1994).

The social relations that the map took part in are as intriguing as the location of the place and its agricultural system. Heads drawn within each field depict owners, or possibly tenants, most of them accompanied by a hieroglyphic rendition of the person's name. Those name glyphs personalize these people, some of whom must have battled the conquistadors, others among the first post-conquest generation. In some cases a second head and accompanying glyph was added by another cartographer and the first head shaded in to indicate death, demonstrating that the map spans successions of land tenure through two generations. Most of the 143 people involved were male, but a significant number of women also appear: a tenth of the first-generation owners and nearly half of the second. That rapid escalation of ownership by women after mid-century probably relates to changes in colonial policies that began to tax female heads of household but at lower rates than men, thus motivating a gendered shift in land titling.

Not surprisingly, given that the multidisciplinary team of authors did not include a geographer, the aspects of the map that this volume treats least well are precisely those that readers of this journal might be most interested in pursuing. For example, the crops and other vegetation, bodies of water, topography, and possible dykes and other built features all invite much additional analysis. That comment should be taken more as an invitation to geographers than a criticism of art historians and epigraphers, of course. This volume makes a high quality facsimile of a little known map available to a much broader range of scholars and provides an exacting analysis of many, but certainly not all, of its attributes. In addition, Yale has made a digital facsimile available at beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/codex-reese (accessed April 24, 2014) that readers can use to explore its potential for their own research and teaching.

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W. George Lovell, Christopher H. Lutz, Wendy Kramer and William R. Swezey, *"Strange Lands and Different Peoples": Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Guatemala*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2013, 288 pages, US\$45 hardcover.

The University of Oklahoma Press has since 1932 produced a distinguished monograph series that focuses on the indigenous populations of the Americas. This is the 271st volume in The Civilization of the American Indian collection, and it is a good one.

In 1524, on the eve of sending his lieutenant Pedro Alvarado in conquest to Guatemala, Hernán Cortés wrote to King Carlos V of Spain that he expected the discovery of 'many rich and strange lands and many different peoples.' Hence, the title of this book. The story told here is what happened in Guatemala over the century that followed Alvarado's abusive entry.