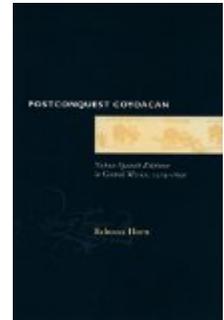


Rebecca Horn. *Postconquest Coyoacan: Nahua-Spanish Relations in Central Mexico, 1519-1650.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998. xiv + 356 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-2773-0.



Reviewed by Kimberly Henke Breuer

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In *Postconquest Coyoacan*, Rebecca Horn uses Nahuatl- and Spanish-language documents to study Nahua-Spanish relations, including those of Nahua commoners and poor Spaniards, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She argues that indigenous postconquest society in Coyoacan and neighboring Tacubaya was shaped through contact with Spaniards in both institutional and informal settings. This work fits nicely into the growing body of recent scholarship which has broadened our understanding of the pivotal early colonial period through a close reading of not only Spanish, but indigenous documents.[1]

The altepetl of Coyoacan provides an interesting case study because of its unique history. It served as Cortes' temporary capital and played an important role in the siege of Tenochtitlan, which meant that the Nahuas of the altepetl had an early introduction to Spanish culture. Because of its proximity to Mexico City, Coyoacan continued its close association with Spaniards as it provided provisions to and labor for the capital. Coyoacan and Tacubaya were also part of Cortes' encomien-

da and therefore part of the *Marquesado*, which effectively removed the region from viceregal authority and allowed it to develop free of a Spanish cabildo.

This well-organized book is divided into two parts. Part I deals with formal relations--both political and economic. The first two chapters describe the reshaping of the Nahua altepetl to fit the model of the Spanish municipality. Spaniards decided which of the preconquest altepetl would be designated *cabecera* (or administrative centers) and determined the legitimacy of the ruling tlatoani line. These chapters discuss the dual nature of altepetl construction in both Coyoacan and Tacubaya and investigates how this structure was poorly understood by the Spaniards. Chapter 1, "The Postconquest Altepetl," examines the response of the altepetl to the new Spanish rule. Horn argues that during the early years of colonial rule it was advantageous for the constituent parts of the altepetl, the *tlaxilacalli* (*calpolli*) to work together as a unit. However as the encomienda and repartimiento systems began to fail due to population loss and as Nahuas became

more adept at manipulating Spanish forms of government, the process of fragmentation began to occur.

Chapter 2, "Nahua Municipal Government," describes the process of the reshaping of the altepetl into a Spanish *municipio*. Traditional political roles were transformed into those associated with the cabildo and early office holding patterns continued to reflect Nahua traditions.

In Chapter 3, "Spanish Provincial Authorities," Horn describes the relationship between Spanish government in Coyoacan and Mexico City. Government officials in Mexico City were higher-ranking, of higher social status, served shorter appointments, and concerned themselves mostly with tribute collection. Local officials, on the other hand, were often drawn from the local Spanish population. These officials were engaged in commercial enterprise in the region and used their close ties to both local Spaniards and Nahuas to their own advantage.

In Chapter 4, "Tribute and Labor," Horn outlines the tribute burden placed upon the Nahuas. The proximity of Mexico City dictated the type of labor service and tribute goods required of Coyoacan. The altepetl provided wood and food as well as the skilled labor necessary for the massive construction ongoing in the capital. Population decline led to reform in the Spanish system of labor allocation while the growth of Spanish commercial enterprise drew directly from the local labor pool and undercut formal institutional arrangements, such as the *repartimiento*.

In Part II, Horn discusses the more informal arrangements between Spaniards and Nahuas in the countryside, especially concerning rural landholding and the rural economy. She argues that, as the Nahua population declined, Spaniards could no longer rely solely upon tribute goods and labor to meet their needs, precipitating increased commercial enterprise in the Coyoacan region. Chapter 5, "Nahua Households and Land," investigates traditional Nahua patterns of landholding

and land usage and describes how these new Spanish commercial enterprises directly impacted the remaining Nahua population. In Chapter 6, "Nahua Land Transfer," Horn uses Nahua *carta de ventas* to examine the methods used by the Nahuas to legitimize the sale of land. She also describes at great length Nahua adaptations of Spanish legal forms.

Horn also delineates the development of Spanish commercial enterprise in the Coyoacan region. At first citizens of Mexico City acquired orchard plots and fields in order to raise produce for their own tables. By the mid-sixteenth century Spanish estates began to proliferate and Spaniards consolidated their patchwork holdings through purchase of Nahua land. In Chapter 7, "Spanish Estates," Horn traces both Nahua and Spanish patronage and follows several Spanish families as they developed and lost estates in the region. Chapter 8, "The Market Economy," looks at both Nahua and Spanish commercial ties to Mexico City and the diversification of Nahua production. Horn uses Nahua notarial records to investigate the impact of the capital on the Nahuas of Coyoacan—who produced for and provided wage labor to the capital.

Horn succeeds at her stated task of investigating Nahua-Spanish relations in postclassic Coyoacan and she aptly describes how the Nahuas of Coyoacan went from a relatively limited contact—through tribute and labor services—with Spaniards to a more integrated role in the local and regional economy. She also discusses the development of personal relations between local Nahuas and Spaniards and shows that Nahuas were both patron to and client of local Spaniards. Of particular interest is the light she sheds on the relations between Nahua commoners and poor Spaniards. Horn seems most comfortable discussing the formal relations between Nahuas and Spaniards, and, indeed, this is the strongest part of her work. Her description of the internal workings of Nahua politics is very discerning. She fol-

lows the vicissitudes of the tlatoani line as its rights and prerogatives changed and examines Coyoacan's response to the ending of that line. But even more impressive is her work with the constituent parts of the altepetl, the *tlaxilacalli* (also known as *calpolli*). She describes politics on this level through a close study of the representation each tlaxilacalli received in public office. Horn also investigates in detail the dual nature of tlaxilacalli organization through their designations as either *acohuic* or *tlalnahuac* which in turn affected the organization of public labor drafts and allocation of public offices. She develops the relationship between the dominant Tepanec tlaxilacalli and those made up of other ethnicities. As the process of altepetl fragmentation continued, these tlaxilacalli reacted in various ways and in their own self-interest. Horn's analysis yields a fascinating insight on indigenous politics.

Equally well done is Horn's development of the Spanish commercial estates. She follows the rise and fall (due to inheritance laws and legal problems) of several commercial enterprises in the region. Here we see the process through which middling-level Spaniards used both Nahuatl and Spanish contacts to build lucrative and substantial estates. We also see how the inability to entail these estates led to their eventual break-up and sale to other commercial concerns.

While effectively using Nahuatl records, Horn perhaps spends too much of her discussion of land tenure on the semantics of the documents and too little on the reasons behind the creation of the documents. In her chapter on land transfers, she convinces the reader with a preponderance of evidence that Nahuatl could and did justify alienating land, that they measured land, and that their use of Spanish legal forms changed over time, but she does not use the documents to tell us why the Nahuatl did so. Horn alludes to the fact that the Nahuatl documents carry much more personal history than their Spanish counterparts, yet she does not use this data to paint a portrait of the

common Nahuatl. The reader is left wondering about the personal reasons behind the alienation of certain types of land. Is the most common reason due to population decline, debt, a personal favor, to fund another concern? This lack of development becomes even more apparent when compared to the sketches she provides of the local Spanish landowners.

Despite this oversight, Rebecca Horn's *Post-conquest Coyoacan* does much to increase our understanding of the changing relationships of Nahuatl and Spaniards in the early colonial era. This work should be of interest to anyone concerned with learning more about the process of social change in postconquest indigenous societies.

Notes

[1]. Other excellent works on the Nahuatl using indigenous documents include: James Lockhart, *The Nahuatl after Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) and Susan Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Society, 1500-1700* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995). For comparative purposes see, among others, Matthew Restall, *The Maya World: Yucatec Culture and Society, 1550-1850* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) and Steve Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

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