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Bradley Benton. *The Lords of Tetzcoco: The Transformation of Indigenous Rule in Postconquest Central Mexico.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xii + 196 pp. $99.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-19058-0.

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In 1551, the Mexican city of Tetzcoco (later spelled Texcoco) was awarded a coat of arms by the king in Spain. Granted in recognition of the city's important status within the Spanish hierarchy, the heraldic design is a wonderful blend of indigenous and Hispanic traditions, symbolizing the continuing significance of pre-Hispanic heritage and lineage in colonial society. A coyote harks back to the great precontact *tlatoani* (ruler) Nezahualcoyotl, and indigenous representations of war dominate the composition: a military tunic and indigenous-style hunting hood; a shield, arrows, club, and drum; the *atl tlachinolli* (burning water) motif; a burning temple or house symbolizing conquest. While the Tetzcocan ruling family clearly sought symbolic privilege within Hispanic structures of power, successfully petitioning for one of these "rather arbitrary and largely ornamental awards" (p. 73), the coat of arms itself made strong statements about their own dominance and bellicosity, in indigenous terms. This balance between the survival of indigenous traditions and the flexibility and desire to adapt to new colonial circumstances is what characterizes the native nobles conjured up by Bradley Benton's excellent study of the sixteenth-century Tetzcocan elite.

A microhistory of one of the most important cities of the Aztec-Mexica empire, *The Lords of Tetzcoco* builds on a strong recent tradition that undermines the idea that the Spanish invasion marked a watershed in indigenous rule. Benton demonstrates the diverse ways in which Tetzcocan nobles responded to the arrival of Europeans who were, in many ways, just "another conqueror in a process of conquest reaching back centuries," and who initially did little to change the status quo at a local level (p. 45). Historians have become increasingly attentive to the role of indigenous conquistadors and allies in the Spanish invasion, but Benton's study is the first to foreground the role of the *altepetl* (city-state) of Tetzcoco, which controlled the eastern side of the Valley of Mexico before the arrival of the Spanish.

Benton's acknowledged focus is on the experiences of the native nobility, which often differed significantly from the majority of the indigenous population, and he deliberately separates the fate of the *altepetl* from the fate of its nobility. Charles Gibson, in *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* (1964), rightly saw Tetzcoco as the "most conspicuous case" of a major central Mexican city being reduced from affluence to "abject depression" by the Spanish conquest (quoted, p. 10), but Benton challenges David Brading's contention in *The First America* (1991) that "the hereditary nobility collapsed along with the city" (quoted, p. 10). Instead, he identifies the ways in which members of the

Tetzcocan nobility negotiated colonial society, clinging to wealth and property, and a degree of prestige, even while their role in the governance of the city was eroded.

The book is organized chronologically, unpicking the gradual transformation of the role of the indigenous elite in the governance of Tetzcoco. The first decades after the conquest were characterized by factionalism and infighting, due to pre-Hispanic practices of flexible succession and compound polygyny, but indigenous nobles nonetheless maintained their influence in local government. The arrival of the Spanish only bolstered indigenous rivalries however, allowing one branch of the Tetzcocan nobility to promote itself at the expense of others by aligning with Spanish norms. Demonstrating how colonial institutions and expectations destabilized traditional rivalries, Benton reframes the infamous heresy trial of don Carlos Chichimecateuctli—traditionally seen as a brutal enforcement of religious orthodoxy—as a dynastic dispute. Benton's detailed analysis shows that the testimony of don Carlos's female relatives focused on his offensive behavior and "inability to conform to normative Christian sexual practices" (p. 45) rather than on religion. Don Carlos's attempt to use pre-Hispanic tactics made him vulnerable to those better able to navigate the new colonial system. This close reading of sources is typical of Benton's analytical approach, which also allows him to correct a number of errors or misreadings by other scholars, including the common claim that don Carlos was ruler of Tetzcoco at the time of his trial (p. 41).

The period 1540-64, covered in chapter 2, saw the reassertion of stable indigenous authority with the rule of two particularly competent *tlatoque*: don Antonio Pimentel Tlahuitoltzin and don Hernando Pimentel Ilhuian. Despite devastating pandemics, increasing Spanish interference, and shifting forms of local government, don Antonio and don Hernando successfully negotiated the colonial order and preserved strong indigenous governance in Tetzcoco. But they were the last Tetzcocan *tlatoque* to do so. Following the death of don Hernando in 1564, factionalization again paralyzed the ruling families and created space for the rise of new *mestizo* players in local politics: men like Juan Bautista Pomar, who—as a child of an elite Tetzcocan woman and a Spaniard—was able to move easily between the different spheres of colonial society (chapter 4).

The period after 1564 has often been seen as rather perplexing by modern scholars due to limited and contradictory sources and, in chapter 5, Benton sheds important light on this rather obscure period. His meticulous disentangling of the available materials demonstrates the ways in which a succession crisis, lasting nearly thirty years, gave the colonial administration the opportunity to intervene in appointments, remodel indigenous governance in Tetzcoco, and effectively replace the ancient office of *tlatoani* with that of the Spanish-style *gobernador*. Intrafamilial wrangling over appointments thus inadvertently ceded power to the viceroys to intervene in Tetzcocan politics, and the end of the sixteenth century saw indigenous nobles focusing increasingly on maintaining their lands and wealth, rather than their authority.

Benton's research is firmly rooted in close analysis of a wide range of sources and he is sensitive to colonial imposition, painstakingly unpicking the complex material. I do, however, think that making an association between the authority of the *tlatoani* as "speaker" and an *alcalde* (judge) depicted as speaking is a bit of a stretch given that precontact judges are shown with speech scrolls in indigenous-style codices (pp. 115-16). But this is just nitpicking, I realize.

While some details will largely be of interest to specialists, Benton's study is well contextualized, including essential background and clear introductions and conclusions to each chapter. It is unfortunate that this slim volume is so expensive (at nearly one hundred US dollars it is about fifty

cents a page) because—despite the density of research—it is accessibly written and would be of value as an undergraduate case study as well as a specialist resource. Many colleagues will be delighted to hear that the book has not succumbed to the scourge of endnotes that often blights academic texts, especially as Benton has systematically included the original quotes from archival sources. The useful prosopographical section at the end giving biographical and source details for each of the protagonists is typical of the careful way this book provides detail for researchers to follow in Benton's footsteps, while remaining accessible and readable.

Benton's work balances admirably clear context with rich personal stories based on meticulous archival research, and it is excellent to see him foregrounding the experiences and voices of women throughout his analysis. If I do have a criticism, it is that I would have liked to see a little more ambitious and far-reaching ending to such an interesting book. Benton's conclusion reminds us of what went before, and provides tantalizing hints as to what came after—hinting at the transformation of the Tetzcocan nobility into "peninsular-style aristocrats" (p. 164). I would have liked to see the author develop his conclusions in the brief section where he compares the experience of Tetzcoco to other ***altepetl*** (pp. 153-56), suggesting that the two factors that most influenced the rate at which indigenous government changed in New Spain were proximity to the administrative center in Mexico City and the degree of direct viceregal control (p. 156). But I am probably being unfair to expect something of the author that he does not promise. Perhaps this is his next project!

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