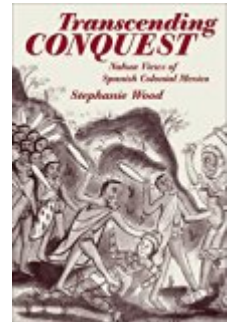


Stephanie Wood. *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico.*
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Many colonial textual genres written either in Spanish or in native languages by indigenous authors within the Mesoamerican cultural area share three features that distinguish them as a group, when compared to other writings by native subjects in Asia, Africa, or other regions of the Americas. These texts often reference an "immemorial" past with distinct sociopolitical rights and traditions whose retelling is anchored by early colonial records influenced by pre-Columbian writing systems; they also display a rather broad spectrum of narrative depictions of the Spanish conquest, which range from a passing reference to a full-fledged agonistic account. Furthermore, these sources may occasionally appear cryptic, unsystematic, or haphazardly ordered to the scholar, as they often privilege a localist viewpoint. In this compact but richly detailed study, Wood takes us through a strategic selection of examples and case studies that focus on Nahua and other Central Mexican accounts that illustrate each of these three features. Given the complex context of production of these sources and the difficulties inherent in a comparative approach built on solid ethno-historical and philological bases,

Wood provides here an able and provocative synthesis that should inspire further comparative research.

The first difficulty that a student of such texts encounters is their intense heterodoxy. In a pronouncement that seems parallel to Frances Karttunen's division of Mesoamerican genres into "overt" and "covert" traditions, Wood begins by drawing a contrast between "public" sources composed for the Spanish crown or its courts, and works written for an "internal, native" audience, such as the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (p. 15). While this contrast does not designate perfectly delimited categories, this book does showcase the guiding principles, fluidity, and multiple aims of works written by indigenous authors deeply concerned with the interests of indigenous audiences. Since the diversity of such genres limits the merits of straightforward sampling methods, Wood uses indigenous perceptions of Spanish people and their customs as a guiding thread, taking a necessarily eclectic approach. Thus, the book opens with an overview of the pictorial portrayal of Spaniards in indigenous historical narratives,

then plunges into two detailed case studies: first, a dramatic account of the Spanish conquest from Santo Tomas Ajusco, a formerly Nahuatl-speaking town where town officials still read parts of this narrative during public celebrations; then, a contrasting view of Spanish conquerors as key partners in an alliance that included eager Tlaxcalans, preserved in the late colonial Map of Cuauhtlantzinco. The book then closes with a consideration of native perceptions of Spaniards in a group of late colonial Central Mexican local historical accounts that often were presented in court as evidence of land claims, and frequently plagiarized by would-be plaintiffs (*titulos primordiales*), which are then contrasted with similar Mixtec, Purepecha and Maya texts.

Chapters 2 and 5 are, by necessity, the most synoptic elements in Wood's study, and the chapters that would probably draw great interest as an assigned reading in introductory courses. The first chapter features a compendium of depictions of Spaniards in a variety of strongly or primarily pictorial native sources usually designated with the blanket term "codices," accompanied by Wood's astute discussion of selective emphases on graphic depictions of European accoutrements. The tracings and line drawings in this chapter, however, should be regarded as an expedient editorial tool that allows a quick glance at these elements--readers intrigued, say, by the tracing of the rarely reproduced central scene in the "Manuscrito del Aperreamiento," which depicts an indigenous victim under attack by a trained mastiff, will need to consult a detailed depiction of the original. The fifth chapter showcases Wood's commitment to the comparative weighing of native sources. By reviewing several texts drawn from a complex corpus of *titulos primordiales* from the Valley of Toluca, Chalco, and Xochimilco--some of which had been previously discussed from somewhat diverging perspectives by James Lockhart and Serge Gruzinski--Wood arrives at a judicious characterization of common strands and preoccupations in a genre character-

ized by fluidity and divergence. In her view, these texts tend to represent the conquest as a "cosmic event with only gradual repercussions" (p. 134), and to memorialize the Christianization of native communities with recurring yet rhetorically powerful formulas, such as "ohualmohuicac in tlanel-toquiliztli" (the faith arrived) in Nahuatl--an observation confirmed by recent research on similar northern Zapotec texts, which often contain phrases such as "bida titza que Dios" (the word of God arrived). On the other hand, the *titulos'* authors focus their anxiety on the legitimating of ancestral land claims for a particular community, or on the intrusions and threats presented by specific political actors. This focus on a "growing threat" provides us with an unusual and fresh indigenous perspective on the emergence of novel administrative and educational programs in the eighteenth century.

Furthermore, the two detailed case studies present a vibrant exploration of one of the principal lessons of Wood's project: that any attempt at placing colonial genres under the label of "indigenous writings" must take very seriously the multiplicity of viewpoints and motivations that underlie these genres. For instance, both cases privilege indigenous agency by emphasizing individual motivations, but the tone employed in each text exhibits a marked contrast. Wood's discussion of a conquest account from the Ajusco region--which may have originated through sixteenth-century oral tradition, and is now known through Spanish- and Nahuatl-language versions first compiled in the early and mid-eighteenth century--stresses the anguished tone of a local ruler, a "Senor Tecpanecatli," who mentions the burning of various Mesoamerican rulers after the Spanish military victory, and even seems to refer to an early colonial cause celebre: the legally unjustifiable burning of the *cazonci* (ruler) of Michoacan by Nuno de Guzman in 1531. On the other hand, the Tlaxcalan Map of Cuauhtlantzinco--produced in the mid-seventeenth century or later--depicts through carefully composed illustrations and a Nahuatl

gloss the exploits of Tepoztecatzin, who was one of four local rulers who are said to have greeted Cortes and who uses military force to compel other native rulers and their subjects to convert to Christianity.

In the end, Wood provides a necessarily nuanced characterization of native authorial motivations--which must account for the range of attitudes that produced localist accounts about a grieving Tecpanecatl on the one hand, and a zealously Christian Tepoztecatzin, on the other. To do so, the author goes beyond a rhetorical gesture towards hybridity, which, in assuming that conqueror and conquered melded together in some nebulous and uncharted middle ground, dilutes the specificity of local indigenous voices. Instead, she proposes that these texts share both "primordial claims to the land and a strong sense of local collectivity and history" (p. 146). This conclusion will help us reformulate received notions of indigenous identities in colonial Spanish America, which were not merely "indigenous" or "hybrid," but also possessed manifold qualities in terms of rhetoric, tone, and motivations. Through this ambitious comparative argument, Wood provides us with a contribution that is accessible, insightful, and provocative.

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