

Daniel I. Wasserman-Soler. *Truth in Many Tongues: Religious Conversion and the Languages of the Early Spanish Empire.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020. Illustrations. 227 pp. \$84.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-271-08599-9.



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Spanish conversion in the sixteenth century was a global undertaking, reaching from newly conquered lands in the southern Iberian Peninsula to the Philippines, across two oceans. In addition to practicing many different religions, the people who came under Habsburg rule and the influence of the Catholic Church during this period also spoke a wide array of languages, which posed an immense challenge for clerics attempting to convert them. Daniel I. Wasserman-Soler's *Truth in Many Tongues* takes as its subject Spanish church and royal officials' attitudes and policies toward language in the context of their conversion projects in Spain and New Spain from about 1492 to 1600. Using an impressive breadth of print and newly unearthed archival sources, including letters, Inquisition reports, and assembly records from some thirty archives across Spain, Italy, England, the United States, and Mexico, the book reconstructs the varied thought processes of Catholic officials and the Spanish Crown, "reconsidering them as they would have seen themselves" (p. 12). Focusing on the Moriscos (Christian converts from

Islam) of Granada and Valencia and the Indigenous peoples of New Spain, Wasserman-Soler contends that the church and crown were essentially pragmatic in their approach to language, selecting policies on a case-by-case basis and relying on neither an ideological view of language nor a unified language policy. Counter to prior scholarship—especially Shirley Brice Heath's *Telling Tongues: Language Policy in Mexico, Colony to Nation* (1972), Wasserman-Soler's main interlocutor—he finds that Spanish officials used vernaculars where useful and did not actively prioritize propagating the Spanish language, seeing religious and not linguistic conversion as the goal.

Wasserman-Soler's book is a meaningful contribution to the religious history of the Spanish Habsburg Empire that works across the fields of early modern and Reformation studies, colonial Latin American history, and early modern transatlantic studies. His work suggests far greater continuity between Spain prior to 1492 and during the sixteenth century than previously postulated and argues against the dominant view that six-

teenth-century officials dogmatically sought to spread Castilian as the language of the empire. In the context of Reformation studies, it also shows how Catholic officials made extensive use of vernaculars in indoctrination, even while viewing them with suspicion. The book will be of interest to early modern historians, anthropologists, ethnohistorians, and sociolinguists. Its accessible style and foregrounding of archival sources also make this book valuable for undergraduate teaching.

The book's stated intent is to reconstruct the thought processes of elite church and royal officials, and it is highly successful in this endeavor. The book's major strengths are its transatlantic framing of an upper echelon of officials and its rich archival materials, which permit a granular understanding of their views and actions. While taking a different perspective than much recent scholarship, which has focused on mendicants and Indigenous people, Wasserman-Soler presents an overarching vision of the ideals and debates that shaped this world and provides important context for these other studies. The juxtaposition of Granada, Valencia, and New Spain also convincingly recreates the sphere of action of the book's main actors, many of whom moved between or oversaw multiple of these locations, and suggests key differences that officials perceived between these areas. Wasserman-Soler brings to light fascinating archival sources that often take front stage in the chapters, effectively drawing out officials' evolving and sometimes conflicting views. The meticulously collected archival sources are themselves an immense contribution, although it is unfortunate that the book rarely includes the original language quotations, which would have better enabled future scholars to build on Wasserman-Soler's extensive archival work.[1]

Chapter 1 focuses on the famous 1558 Inquisition cases against Bartolomé Carranza and Louis of Granada, authors of two popular doctrinal books written in Castilian. Building on extensive

scholarship on personal vendettas in these cases, Wasserman-Soler shifts attention to the fact that both books were written in vernacular Castilian rather than the more erudite Latin. Drawing on Inquisition writings and correspondence, he argues that officials saw the books' language as itself compromising, because it made doctrine directly accessible to an uneducated, common readership—notably, including women—without the mediation of priests, introducing the danger of misinterpretation and touching on a major point of contention with the Protestant Reformation. Using original archival work, Wasserman-Soler contextualizes these two well-known trials with half a dozen cases from the 1580s–90s that show a shared suspicion of doctrinal and catechistic books written in the vernacular and support the author's contention that the use of Castilian language in such works presented a real concern.

Chapters 2 and 3 respectively examine official attitudes toward the Arabic language in Granada, first captured from Islamic rule in 1492, and Valencia, which had been under Spanish Christian rule since the thirteenth century. Both kingdoms had substantial Morisco populations who were subject to church and royal campaigns to promote Christianization and assimilation. This period saw Spanish officials advocating some use of Arabic yet also culminated in Philip II outlawing Arabic in Granada in 1567 and expelling Moriscos from Spain in 1609–14. Against the characterization of this history as a shift from a tolerant to a repressive period, Wasserman-Soler argues that there was actually significant continuity in the mindsets behind first advocating and then criminalizing Arabic. In Granada, he describes how Archbishop Hernando de Talavera (1492–1507), Bishop Martín Pérez de Ayala (1548–60), and the Jesuits advocated using Arabic in preaching and confession while also using Castilian, suppressing Islamic culture, and working to assimilate Morisco children. In Valencia, Wasserman-Soler follows Pérez de Ayala's subsequent career as archbishop of Valencia (1564–66) and that of his eventual successor, Juan

de Ribera (1569–1611). The Valencian Moriscos' longer history of assimilation led officials to declare clerical Arabic unnecessary and to strategize for Islamic language and culture to be "taken from them little by little" (p. 81). In both cases, Wasserman-Soler finds that the various officials who advocated Arabic's use only ever saw it as a "temporary tool," ultimately to be eclipsed by Castilian or Valencian when the Moriscos became fully Christianized, something officials believed was actualized when they prohibited Arabic (p. 41). In this light, it is instead the later move to expel Moriscos that marks the true break, as clerics began to believe that Moriscos were fundamentally unwilling to convert fully and that their assimilation presented a danger to Christian society.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine contemporary policies in New Spain, where Spanish officials more heavily promoted Indigenous languages. Chapter 4 focuses on the First Apostolic Assembly of Mexico (1524), called by Franciscan leader Martín de Valencia, and a series of provincial councils convened from 1555 to 1585 by Archbishops Juan de Zumárraga and Alonso de Montúfar. Assembly records show evolving strategies, from Valencia's early support of Castilian monolingualism to a consensus that clerics should speak Indigenous languages. Wasserman-Soler sees these as practical stances that existed alongside accommodations for clerics who were clearly overwhelmed by the linguistic task at hand, including allowing preaching by Indigenous people and even confession by interpreter. The author argues that these policies produced a "linguistic coexistence" in New Spain, although the sources' often pejorative characterization of Indigenous languages and the advocacy of their use only by clerics suggest important power asymmetries that do not feature in his analysis (p. 122).

Chapter 5 continues the discussion, examining, first, King Philip II's response to clerical language policies for New Spain and, second, mendicants' representation of how their orders used Indi-

genous languages. Conflicting with earlier scholarship, Philip II's letters show his support for the bishops' stance that clerics learn Indigenous languages, despite the opposing views in the Council of the Indies that Castilian should be propagated and that Indigenous languages could not convey Christian doctrine. Changing pace, the chapter then portrays the situation on the ground in Mexico, based on mendicant publications in Nahuatl, Mixtec, Quiché, and P'urhépecha. The chapter highlights both well-known and lesser-known works by Dominicans Francisco de Alvarado, Domingo de Vico, and Benito Hernández; Franciscans Alonso de Molina and Maturino Gilberti; and Augustinian Juan de la Anunciación. Although he does not examine the doctrinal texts themselves—as Louise Burkhart, Mark Christensen, and others have done—Wasserman-Soler's comparison of the works' prologues reveals widely varied linguistic competency among clerics as well as the authors' differing views on the necessity of linguistic proficiency. This discussion colorfully illuminates the situation that led to the creation of a plethora of Indigenous linguistic and doctrinal materials that have been the subject of extensive recent scholarship.

The book's few weaknesses lie in its organization and theoretical framing. Chapter 2, on contrasting views of Castilian and Latin, feels somewhat disconnected from the book's main narrative and could have been better integrated. Chapters 2 and 3, on Arabic in Granada and Valencia, and chapters 4 and 5, on elite church versus royal and mendicant attitudes toward New Spain, might more effectively have been discussed together to allow for overt comparative analysis. As is, the book often relies on juxtaposed chapters and parenthetical comments, rather than explicit analysis, to evoke the relationship between case studies, a major issue that is only taken up directly in the conclusion. Given the importance of Wasserman-Soler's claim that scholars have failed to recognize a key turning point in the late eighteenth century, when sixteenth-century linguistic pragmatism

turned to imperialism, one also wishes that this later chapter of history had been included in the temporal scope of the book. Lastly, the book's stance that official views toward language were purely practical, though largely supported by the sources presented, seems overstated in places and may have benefited from more consideration of power structures, biases, and lived experiences of language policies. The author misses a key opportunity to theorize pragmatism as itself a political strategy and means of exercising power and not simply as an apolitical counterpoint to uniform language ideology. Similarly, the rhetoric of the sources—which Wasserman-Soler occasionally analyzes in the endnotes, and to great effect—suggests a far more complicated view of languages than we get in the main analysis and could have permitted a subtler portrayal of officials' balancing of pragmatism with bias. Finally, although the author does not set out to address the experiences of Morisco or Indigenous people in this project, developing deeper connections with the rich existing scholarship on these topics would also have helped substantiate the real-world repercussions of official attitudes and drive home the significance of Wasserman-Soler's research for our understanding of the histories of those whose languages were being legislated.

Note

[1]. The author's "Note on the Text" refers to an appendix with the sources' original text, which can be found at www.academia.edu/42644283/Appendix_Original_language_notes_for_Truth_in_Many_Tongues. This partial second set of endnotes for the book is somewhat cumbersome in presentation but provides valuable information that is otherwise missing from the book.

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