

## Reviews of Books & Atlases

PAINTING A MAP OF SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO CITY: LAND, WRITING, AND NATIVE RULE / Ed. Mary E. Miler and Barbara E. Mundy. New Haven, CT: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 2012. Pp. 232; illus. (284 col., 13 b&w); 8.5 × 11". ISBN 9780300180718 (cloth), US\$75.00. Available from <http://yalepress.yale.edu/>.

The world needs a *lot* more books like this one. With contributions from nine experts in varying fields – anthropology, art history, history of cartography, chemistry, cultural history, linguistic anthropology, conservation – *Painting a Map of Sixteenth-Century Mexico City* focuses its wide-ranging attention on a single artefact, an indigenous map of landownership from post-Conquest Mexico. Despite puffery about the map's "exceptional" and "extraordinary" qualities, what is actually exceptional is the massiveness of the scholarly apparatus applied to the examination of what amounts to a "deed" to 121 small plots of land in Mexico-Tenochtitlán. It is the very everyday quality of the map that is responsible for my excitement, since it's precisely maps like this one – largely unballooned – that ultimately underwrite the importance of maps in the modern world.

This said, it is important to acknowledge that, as is also true of the map's closest cousins, we still don't know why it was made or what it maps. There is, of course, a profound sense in which this would be true of the maps of our own deeds. Ripped from its register, removed from its archives, one of our plots might be impossible to locate in the wider world – and, given the map's redundancy on the inevitable verbal description, hard to say what purpose the map served in the first place. This is less true of the Beinecke Map. Its 121 plots exist solely as spaces on the map, at least given what we have; and although most are attached to the drawing of a head and a glyph – that is, to a name – the plots themselves carry no further description. In its original situation the map was regularly updated and otherwise modified: it was enlarged, for one thing, sections were replaced, and changes in ownership were recorded. Given the number of times it was folded and unfolded – as attested by the pattern of wear – the map was often consulted.

For what? Well, that we don't know. In a pair of engrossing essays on pictography, writing, and mapping in the Valley of Mexico and on the iconography of rule in the Beinecke Map, Barbara Mundy makes the point, strongly seconded by Pablo Escalante Gonzalbo's essay on what the map shows, that when the map was made in the 1560s, things were tumultuous even for post-Conquest Mexico.

Although perhaps not understood as such by the makers of the map, the line of indigenous rulers stretching back to Acamapichtli – the founder of the line that ruled Tenochtitlán from 1376 on – was coming to (perhaps had already come to) an end at exactly the time the local Spanish *cabildo* was threatening the very idea of indigenous rule and the Spanish crown was demanding increased tribute payments; all, I hasten to add, not long after the epidemic of 1545–1548 had reduced the indigenous population by up to 80% *and*, following the disastrous flood of 1555, the massive rebuilding of the dike along the eastern edge of the island (on which Tenochtitlán was located) with its enormous drafts of uncompensated indigenous labour. Given this constellation of events, what would it have taken to precipitate this map? The dubious usurpation of indigenous land by Spaniards? The exactions of tribute by the Spanish envoy, Jerónimo de Valderrama?

And what exactly was the function of the line of indigenous governors depicted along the map's left edge? Although occupying less than one-tenth of the map's surface, they get more like nine-tenths of the attention of our assembled scholars. Of course: we know something about them, a great deal actually; for most, we can draw up a family tree, while the others have parts in fascinating and well-known stories. But what are they doing here? And what are they doing on the Plano Parcial de la Ciudad de México, which María Castañeda de la Paz so competently compares to the Beinecke Map? Castañeda de la Paz has her answer, Escalante Gonzalbo has his, and Mundy her own, and they are all quite different. They remind me of squabbling authorities having it out over the function and interpretation of cartouches on European maps of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, except that these are less squabbles than frankly admitted alternative hypotheses.

It is another of the great attractions of this book that Mary Miller sketches one scenario in her introduction, Mundy another in her essays, Castañeda de la Paz a third, Escalante Gonzalbo a fourth, and that they are all equally well supported by the physical evidence so carefully marshalled by Dennis Carr in his overview of the map's iconography and physical properties, by Diana Magaloni Kerpel in her treatment of the map's materials and techniques, and by Richard Newman and Michele Derrick in the discussion of their analyses of the map's pigments and binding materials. Among other things discovered in this work was that the *tlacuiloque* – the scribes – of the 1560s still had available to them pigments from the distant Maya of the Yucatán and that they preserved long-standing

practices despite the turmoil of the times. Gordon Whitaker's disquisition on Nahuatl writing and the map (with his totally different take on where in Tenochtitlán the plots were) and Carr's fascinating history of the map in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries round out this volume's circumspection of the map as a human, historical, and material artefact deeply involved – embedded – in the politics of its time.

In the middle of the ruler list along the map's left edge, the Spanish viceroy Don Luis de Velasco confronts Don Esteban de Guzmán, an indigenous judge briefly appointed interim ruler of Tenochtitlán. Guzmán stands higher than Velasco on the picture plane, as though actually confronting the Spanish crown, the sign of Velasco's authority, that floats over his head. Which is to say that the king is here, on this map, in the sign of his crown and in the person of his representative. *Through* Guzmán, then,

appointed indigenous head of Tenochtitlán, the king is linked to the 149 smallholders associated with the map's 121 plots of land. In other words, the map has Europe's most powerful monarch underwriting the integrity of the ownership claims of the 149 smallholders to their 121 plots. Every deed makes some such claim – indeed, all maps do – but it is the grace of this book to argue the fact in an unusually thorough yet soft-spoken way. The demonstration that the map links, through the territory, the person of Philip II with those of Tzompan, Chinal, Omitl, Tadeo, and 145 others is the more trenchant for being barely asserted yet so splendidly displayed. It transforms the book from a monograph about an intriguing graphic to one about what it is that makes a map a map.

This is a *lovely* book, but it is also an important one.

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