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## REVIEW ESSAYS

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### READING SYMBOLIC AND HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS IN EARLY MESOAMERICA

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- Ballads of the Lords of New Spain: The Codex Romances de los señores de la Nueva España.** Transcribed and translated by John Bierhorst. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 237. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780292718524.
- The Monuments of Piedras Negras, an Ancient Maya City.** By Flora Simmons Clancy. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009. Pp. xi + 228. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780826344519.
- The Tira de Tepechpan: Negotiating Place under Aztec and Spanish Rule.** By Lori Boornazian Diel. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008. Pp. viii + 160. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780292718319.
- In the Palace of Nezahualcoyotl: Painting Manuscripts, Writing the Pre-Hispanic Past in Early Colonial Period Tetzaco, Mexico.** By Eduardo de J. Douglas. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 264. \$60.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780292721685.
- Script and Glyph: Pre-Hispanic History, Colonial Bookmaking, and the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca.** By Dana Leibsohn. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, distributed by Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. xv + 199. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780884023616.
- Social Memory in Ancient and Colonial Mesoamerica.** By Amos Megged. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xiii + 342. \$95.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780521112277.

**Indigenous Miracles: Nahua Authority in Colonial Mexico.** By Edward W. Osowski. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010. Pp. xii + 260. \$50.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780816528554.

**Colonial Ch'olti': The Seventeenth-Century Morán Manuscript.** By John S. Robertson, Danny Law, and Robbie A. Haertel. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. Pp. xiii + 364. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780806141183.

**Ruins of the Past: The Use and Perception of Abandoned Structures in the Maya Lowlands.** Edited by Travis W. Stanton and Aline Magnoni. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008. Pp. xvii + 364. \$60.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780870818882.

**2000 Years of Mayan Literature.** Translated and edited by Dennis Tedlock. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 465. \$49.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780520232211.

For many centuries, the sounds of musical instruments and human voices arose from intricately carved and painted courtyards sprinkled across the Mesoamerican landscape. The audiences there understood themselves to be in the presence of a learning and beauty that we, gazing from our own time and place at the remnants of that world, have been slow to see. In the second half of the twentieth century, scholars working as Mayan epigraphers and translators of sixteenth-century alphabetic texts in Mesoamerican languages at last moved beyond an initial impression that we were confronting the almost mystical self-expression of anointed men who seemed “fundamentally weird” to us. We suddenly recognized that we were reading royal biographies, records of war, and demands for tribute, the stuff of real people’s lives. It was so empowering to move from murkiness (one might even say from science fiction) to clarity and historical comprehension that we are perhaps to be forgiven if we have remained on that page of heady discovery somewhat too long.

The consensus seems to be, however, that scholarship should move on. Dennis Tedlock writes in his superb new study, *2000 Years of Mayan Literature*: “The time has come to take a further step and proclaim that *literature* existed in the Americas before the Europeans got here. . . . Much *decipherment* has taken place but very little in the way of *translation*” (1). Such thoughts are echoed by scholars in other disciplines, whose works are reviewed in these pages. Flora Simmons Clancy observes, “The ancient sculptors of Piedras Negras were not automatons or simple creatures of a patron; their monuments were artistic creations and cannot be fully understood if they are only considered as products of or for royal aggrandizement” (17). And Eduardo de J. Douglas comments in his work on sixteenth-century Nahuatl visual texts: “Although I isolate what I consider to be figures of speech, ultimately what I argue for is not a set of specific readings or interpretations, but a method of reading that recognizes . . . [that my sources are] literary, specifically poetic, texts as much as historical records subject to verification” (14).

Tedlock did not write his book for other epigraphers—although they will find much of interest—or for the current mass market of buyers interested in fantasies of Maya life. He wrote it for scholars in general, for those of us who want to

understand what Mayanists know. His first chapter, "Learning to Read," guides readers through the rudiments of Maya literacy, not to enable us to translate a text for ourselves (although we will be able to read certain lines), but to understand how others do it and to recognize the elegance and suppleness of the system used. Once we have mastered this understanding, it no longer requires multiple acts of faith to follow the arguments of a Mayanist.

Tedlock ambles through time in a generally forward direction, pausing to explore specific texts as examples. He begins with the earliest writings on ceramics and then considers ancient monuments, the surviving pre-Columbian codices, and subsequently the various kinds of texts transcribed into the Roman alphabet during the colonial era. Here, we are treated to a marvelous, even humorous, close study of the interviews that Fray Diego de Landa recorded with Nachi Co-com. An epilogue briefly guides readers through the present-day Maya literary renaissance.

An early segment in Tedlock's book, "Reading the Vase of the Seven Gods" (34–42), is a tour de force, comprehensible even on its own, apart from the rest of the work. The vase in question is an eighth-century piece from Maxam, a baby gift for a Maya prince. Tedlock guides us through the translation first of the writing around the rim and then of the poem inscribed amid pictures on the body, with its paired verses and purposeful ambiguities ("who gave the open space its place, who gave the Jaguar Night his place"). Finally, he helps us find three sacred bundles cleverly hidden in the drawings and shows how perfectly they mirror the positions of the three stars that, as a constellation, mark the cosmic hearth for the Maya.

Tedlock reiterates throughout that no straightforward decipherment can communicate the artistry, complexity, and multiple senses of most Maya texts. He has some of his translations printed backward to oblige readers to use a mirror, as the Maya would have had to do to read the originals. He leads our eyes to certain signs placed amid pictures by printing them in red-brown against the black-and-white page, a technique faithful to the color scheme of Mesoamerican art. He shows us how meaning is enriched when apparently repetitive or simply long-winded statements are written out as paired lines of poetry that reflect, complement, or question each other.

If numerous other scholars agree that we should be seeking poetry in Mesoamerican sources, they tend to be somewhat less successful than Tedlock in demonstrating its existence. Where they do excel is in demonstrating the presence of what we might call metaphorical history, or history as an art form. In widely varying studies, scholars show how people we might call either historians or artists sought to evoke useful, beautiful, and empowering communal memories. Archaeologists, for example, show keen interest in the ways that the past was commemorated or erased in buildings, as evidenced by the collection *Ruins of the Past*. The editors, Travis Stanton and Aline Magnoni, acknowledge the difficulties of their endeavor, for despite the mythical cities of textbook illustrations and children's movies, Maya sites nearly universally reveal that there was less than 100 percent occupancy at any given point in time: some buildings were unused or even abandoned, and uses continuously shifted. The meaning that older build-

ings held for later generations is indeed hard to track. "For prehistorical societies and those for which historical documentation is fragmentary and limited, such as the Precontact Maya considered in this work, it is exceedingly difficult to interpret the intentions and perceptions of people long deceased," the editors admit (2). Nevertheless, they then meticulously describe some of the methodologies available to try to gain insight into this question.

One piece in the collection, "The Transformation of Abandoned Architecture at Piedras Negras," admirably illustrates the results of such effort when due caution is used. Mark Child and Charles Golden find that the architectural style of Piedras Negras shifted noticeably in the Early Classic period as a result of influence from Petén, at least among the elite. Such shifts were far from complete, however: "Despite the intrusive architectural styles, . . . the maintenance of distinctly local ceramic traditions suggests that the majority of the Piedras Negras population moved in from the surrounding countryside rather than from central Petén and chose to maintain and emphasize a local identity" (76). In this context, it is significant that even as Piedras Negras grew and the practical needs of the new elite required that a new and clearly politically dominant square be built, the older court complex was renovated and maintained as the center of ritual activity. "After a few hundred years, the founding temple built during the Early Classic was completely surrounded by Late Classic temples" (77). The scholars of *Ruins of the Past* are not alone in this finding. Flora Clancy, an art historian studying the decisions of leaders at Piedras Negras, remarks trenchantly, "What it looks like, from my twenty-first-century vantage point, is a major revitalization movement" (39).

Moving forward to the colonial era, scholars perforce face a host of different theoretical and historiographic issues as they seek to understand the presentation of metaphorical history in the surviving sources. The Nahuas left us a trove of mid-sixteenth-century documents, products neither purely of the Old World nor purely of the New. Dana Leibsohn has done a remarkable job of facing head-on the difficulties not only of studying these hybrid products of the past and their multiple world views but also of studying the generations that have sought to understand them. *Script and Glyph* is a close examination of one of the most fascinating of these documents, one that contains alphabetic transcriptions of performances as well as beautiful and evocative images. The *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* was produced in the 1540s and 1550s under the auspices of Don Alonso de Castañeda, an indigenous noble from Cuauhtinchan born before the conquest. Leibsohn shows that although the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* is in effect a history of Cuauhtinchan, it will certainly never reveal to us a pristine pre-Hispanic world. But neither should we dismiss it as a purely colonial production of a power-hungry individual bent on gaining material advantages for his hometown. It is a work in which precolonial and colonial truths speak to each other, and one that we can read today from our own place in time, with our own pressing questions. "Although I do my level best to grasp the stakes, if not the lessons, that don Alonso's history was designed to cover," writes Leibsohn, "my view of the Pre-Hispanic cannot but diverge from his. I therefore aspire to his model of history-keeping—betting that any Pre-Hispanic past worth knowing is one worth

updating" (10). Don Alonso was in fact deeply embroiled in a legal battle and had territorial ambitions, but he did not merely marshal evidence to suit his needs. He believed that his community's past was both knowable and worth knowing to modern peoples, that the truth of the past was inherently multivocal and multistranded, and that the stories of the land and of the people who lived on it were inextricably bound together. He was, in short, interested in philosophical questions that haunt us still.

The University of Texas Press has recently taken the lead in this scholarly arena by publishing several fine-grained analyses of individual visual histories from sixteenth-century Mesoamerica, as well as closely related sets of such texts. Two excellent examples are Douglas's *In the Palace of Nezahualcoyotl* and Lori Boornazian Diel's *The Tira de Tepechpan*. The *Tira* studied by Diel is a history in the annalistic or *xiuhpohualli* Nahuatl tradition produced in Tepechpan during the course of the sixteenth century, with additions by several artists over time. Tepechpan was politically subsidiary to Tetzcoco but had worked to establish its own independent relationship with Tenochtitlan to gain power, a fact that the people of Tepechpan considered highly relevant in their new colonial context, as the Spanish worked to inscribe a political hierarchy and orchestrate taxation. Diel aspires to demystify the *Tira* for a modern audience to "make the *Tira* make sense" (2), and she succeeds, thoroughly illuminating the shifting terrain of this document as different artists added different layers of meaning. Yet she warns against the recent style of interpretation, which has tended to be overly materialistic or literal: "the manipulations found in these histories should not imply that these were complete fabrications; they had to have some relationship to a preexisting conceptual framework" (6). Diel has a vision of the framework needed: "Ultimately, this study reveals that a community's relationship to the ruling power took precedence over ethnicity . . . in both the pre-conquest and Colonial periods. The pictorial history, then, was a tool of persuasion" (11).

Douglas, as noted already, goes even further in this vein of showing that pictorial histories are multivalent and metaphoric; he insists that the producers of the three Tetzcoacan works with which he is concerned should be categorized as true artists—in fact, as poets. His selection of texts is intended to illuminate a particular indigenous viewpoint: "Although other iconic-script [pictorial] manuscripts, most notably, the Codex en Cruz and the *Tira* of Tepechpan, include references to Tetzcoco's history, the [Codex] Xolotl, Tlohtzin [Map], and Quinatzin [Map] are the only three that focus on Tetzcoco and its royal dynasty: they compose the fundamental pictorial archive from which to reconstruct an Acolhua vision of the pre-Hispanic past" (8). Throughout, Douglas remains consistent in this theme: "To read the three manuscripts in light of metaphor and to read them as poetic texts as much as historical records restores to them communicative power and complexity, even if their full range of meaning remains beyond our grasp. In this way, we can better appreciate the extent to which patrons, painters, and manuscripts rewrote the past and the present" (162).

Other of the works under review focus on the ways in which indigenous leaders and intellectuals sought to create metaphorical history in the later colonial period. Edward Osowski argues in *Indigenous Miracles* that Christianity, and in

particular ceremonies surrounding the figure of Christ the King, were an important medium through which native elites defended community interests, specifically by harkening to the past. Acknowledging a debt to much recent work, he explains the premise of his study: "The historians who have influenced this work do not view Hispanic institutions as stereotypical foils for history from below, but rather as venues of expression through which colonized people created new cultures" (8). Osowski's own contributions focus on the utterances of indigenous elites because, "[i]n the miracle tales told here, indigenous rulers, not humble Indians like Juan Diego, were the first to receive miraculous images" (14). Although the same basic elements reflected in the sites and literature centered on miracles were also found in older indigenous genres, Osowski shows that the motifs under study—"heroic community foundation, rapid acceptance of Christianity, and territory marking" (49)—were deployed in highly creative ways in their new symbolic context.

Using a multiplicity of Nahuatl sources, Amos Megged aims to synthesize and comment on all the latter themes in *Social Memory in Ancient and Colonial Mesoamerica*. He asserts that indigenous intellectuals were not simply recording one fact after another but reenacting the past, moving beyond it, and reapproaching it, because "in Nahua historical consciousness and religious thinking, 'commemoration' signified communication with the past in a versatile and transcendental manner"; this "enabled the merging of historical, mythological, and godly personalities, as well as of far-removed events situated in other periods, with leading figures and circumstances belonging to the present" (1, 3). Megged further asserts that the essential Nahua history of migration and settlement contains two competing traditions that he calls the "subtextual" process of creating bonds, or unity from diversity, and the "supratextual" process of generating fragmentation and multiple remembrances, emphasizing rivalry, conflict, and social dissolution (5). In keeping with all the other scholars whose works are reviewed here, Megged is largely breaking with the older school of thought (exemplified by the studies of Serge Gruzinski), which emphasized catastrophic loss of social memory and cultural norms. Megged finds a large degree of cultural continuity in the colonial period, a flexibility that allowed for transformation without devastation.

Megged employs a wide array of sources—ancient stelae and pre-Columbian codices from non-Nahuatl-speaking regions; and, from the Nahuas, early post-conquest pictorial documents, legal cases, traditional annals, seventeenth-century indigenous writings in Spanish (e.g., those of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl), and later colonial primordial titles (which purportedly dated to the early colonial period but actually did not). He explicitly defends his practice of treating these sources as a "continuum" (86–88) and draws freely on any and all of them to illustrate his claims about the significance that acts of emergence, binding, wrapping, founding, and so on, had to the Nahuas. Megged makes some excellent points along the way, but, in general, I am not convinced that we know enough about any of the genres on which Megged draws to speak confidently of what they do or do not have in common. Scholarship in the field is simply not sufficiently advanced to support assertions in this regard. Where sources clearly reflect one another, Megged asserts "the uniqueness of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican systems of re-



membrance" and of the Nahuas' worldview, but here, too, I remain unconvinced. Such commonalities may also exist in other traditions foreign to the Nahuas; that is, they may reflect aspects of the human condition (a term that we avoid perhaps too reflexively in our postmodern era). Nevertheless, Megged's book stands as a strong example of present-day trends in historiography.

Despite the illuminating nature of much recent work, there are certain pitfalls in consistently seeking creativity, poetry, and metaphorical history in indigenous texts. One is that we may allow ourselves to enter a state of groupthink, in which it is de rigueur to see great art everywhere, and thus delude ourselves on at least some occasions. For example, as powerfully as Tedlock evokes the artistry of Maya glyphs, the recurring drama of a king's ceremonial biography was at times tiring. I longed for the wider array of possibilities seen on other stages of world theater. Indeed, this is a criticism to which Tedlock has been subject in the mainstream press.<sup>1</sup> Can we not say that the *Popol Vuh* is literature without the compulsion to apply this category to every Maya inscription? A second and greater danger in seeking creative expression where there are few or no linguistic sources is that of projecting subtexts and symbolic content of our own imagining, as the archaeologists quoted at the beginning of this review warned us. In a sense, of course, art is art because of its ability to elicit an infinite array of feelings and responses. But if we no longer concern ourselves with the intent of the artists and the reception of their works by the people for whom they were intended, or if we are overly confident that we know the artists' intent without a suitably strong foundation, then we are no longer studying Mesoamerica but instead simply elucidating early twenty-first-century thought.

I give two examples. At Piedras Negras, the architectural contributions of Ruler 3 include stelae emphasizing the noble lineage of his wife (and her mother) and thus of her right to rule. Those of us immersed in Mesoamerican history and politics can have no doubt that marriage to this woman was politically expedient for Ruler 3, probably even absolutely critical to his ability to win local support for his kingship. Clancy certainly acknowledges this, but in her determination to find individual artistry and self-expression everywhere, she first suggests that a predecessor, Ruler 1, was perhaps "truly and deeply in love with his wife and out of this life conceived of a kind of utopian ideal for rulership that would draw on the energy (we would say, metaphor) of the original Creator Couple, the 'Mother/Father'" (111). This idea becomes a central element of her conclusion that "[t]he image of the female in the public artworks of Rulers 2 and 3, and I believe for Maya art in general, bears much more meaning than just a political advantage gained through marriage" (174). Were the pairing of male and female progenitors typical in Piedras Negras—as it was in the case of the Mixtec, for example—one might make this claim. But such assertions seem dangerous in this case. Indeed, they lead to greater speculation: "Apparently the public display of the feminine was difficult for Ruler 4, who would not or could not include a woman on his accession monument" (173).

Douglas, whose important book is integral to the tendencies described in this

1. Benjamin Moser, "New Books," *Harper's Magazine*, July 2010, 67–68.

review, also stretches perhaps too far in seeking high metaphorical content. He says that the religious side of the Codex Xolotl has been “shorn away” from a presumed earlier version (126), and that “the early colonial manuscript, commissioned and perhaps painted by Nezahualcoyotl’s descendants, obscures the numinous powers that featured so prominently in the royal palace and gardens at Tetzcotzinco, and almost certainly featured in the manuscript commissioned by the king in about 1430” (161). He insists, however, that in all three manuscripts “the form, linguistic resonance, and underlying cartographic, genealogical and narrative structures . . . invoke for an indigenous audience what the explicit narratives deny: the gods of the ancestors and the link between the ruler and the divine” (162). In other words, because these self-consciously secular texts employ some of the modes and tropes that would have been featured not so long before in public religious images and ceremonies, indigenous audiences of the sixteenth century would have understood that a parallel was being drawn between their secular leaders and divinities. Perhaps. But as Douglas himself acknowledges, the sources themselves insist on none of this. It is true that they share structural and linguistic elements with other and earlier genres (including, but not limited to, religious ones), but this fact only teaches us that public discourse followed certain conventions in the Nahuatl world. Nahuas did not necessarily see the metaphor of the divine everywhere they looked. Among the *xiuhpohualli* or annals, there are clearly some that indirectly reference the sacred and some that do not. Why might not the same be true in the case of these maps?

A solution to both potential problems is to let historical subjects speak for themselves. The more actual—or perhaps, I should say, oral—language we hear, the more relevant our own responses will be in the grand diachronic conversation between cultures. Scholars of Mesoamerica have not tended to emphasize the need for oral language but rather have privileged the visual. Lines of alphabetic text have not had the cachet of monuments or codices; “the wealth of information available to the world concerning the Colonial era in the Maya lowlands is often overshadowed by the glamorous mystique of the earlier Classic Maya civilization” (Robertson, Law, and Haertel, xi). The scholars who make this statement in *Colonial Ch’olti’* chose to publish not only a facsimile, transcription, and translation of the group of documents known as the Morán Manuscript but also extensive background and grammatical analysis. The Morán Manuscript is the only known attestation of colonial Ch’olti’, a language that was probably the linear descendant of that used in the most famous hieroglyphs. As such, it is potentially invaluable—and most certainly deserves to be in print—but because it is a colonial document, and one known to have been produced by Spanish priests rather than an indigenous author, it has largely been overlooked. Robertson, Law, and Haertel have done a great service in bringing it to attention; the clarity of the presentation and analysis are admirable. Yet they are quite right to suggest that they will have fewer readers than they would if theirs were a book of images.

It almost goes without saying that sixteenth-century pictorial texts, pre-Columbian codices, and monuments from even earlier times together constitute a



treasure for humanity today and are the inspiration and even basis for our great interest in Mesoamerica as a cradle of civilization. It is nevertheless true that we need to hear words—long, intricate strings of words with subordinate clauses and ranging notions of predicativity—to know others deeply. “To take the interpretive step,” acknowledge the anthropologists Richard Hansen, Wayne Howell, and Stanley Guenter, “we rely primarily on two fields of study: ethnography and epigraphy” (Stanton and Magnoni, 25). Epigraphers, in turn, despite access to some written language, see a need to turn to even fuller and richer texts; the *Popol Vuh*, for example, has proved “important for understanding the mythology so poignantly depicted in the iconography of Classic artifacts” (Robertson, Law, and Haertel, xi). Tedlock himself quietly acknowledges that the *Popol Vuh* at last frees us from the “relentlessly formal” language of monuments (300). Tedlock also uses longer alphabetic texts to illuminate terser ones. When he makes a comparison to *Beowulf*, he is able to do so not on the basis of what he himself has gleaned from the Chumayal manuscript at issue but on the basis of what Diego de Landa learned from his conversations. The manuscript alone, we are forced to acknowledge, gives us nothing akin to *Beowulf*. Yet it gives us a great deal more than any visual image on its own.

In an ironic twist that might make certain Mesoamerican gods laugh, our multiculturalist training has perhaps turned us against the richest source of all: alphabetic texts. We have been taught that by imprisoning the rich performances and visual languages of ancient Mesoamerican tradition in frozen snippets and fragments of the colonizers’ written language, we participate in the imperial project. That is, of course, true in some ways. But, however indistinctly, these texts nevertheless enable us to hear the voices of people from whom we would otherwise hear nothing at all. Douglas contrasts the manuscripts he studies with those that “transliterate iconic into alphabet script” and thus “adapt indigenous archival and documentary genres and formats to European ones” (8). Yet to enrich his understanding of the documents that he hopes to privilege, he himself turns to the rich language of lawsuits and Inquisition trials.

Tedlock also eloquently warns us not to overvalorize alphabetic sources, lest we fail to see the beauty and communicative power of the glyphic tradition and at the same time nurture an old imperialistic paradigm: “The possession of phonetic writing has long occupied a place near the top of the list of cultural properties that supposedly made the European domination of the New World not only possible but inevitable” (5). True, but that egregious error should be held quite separate from an analysis of the ways in which a phonetic system is far more accessible to far more people than a logographic one, and thus in some ways empowering, no matter who introduces it. Those who study the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East discuss with ease the spread of cuneiform versus the Phoenician alphabet, unencumbered by the racist paradigms of past centuries about conquest. We should by now be able to do the same in studying Mesoamerica.

I do not mean to deny that narratives or metaphors can be carried by pictures, only to say that the study of oral languages will exponentially enrich all our insights into Mesoamerican narratives and metaphors. And I am forced to admit that even those texts that offer language in the fullest sense, and about whose

metaphoric qualities there can be no doubt, will engender debate on the questions of projecting and ventriloquizing.

John Bierhorst's fine edition of the manuscript known as the "Romances de los señores de la Nueva España" (Ballads of the Lords of New Spain) contains the only Nahuatl songs not included in his earlier *Cantares mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs*.<sup>2</sup> As always, Bierhorst's transcriptions are thorough and faithful, his translations knowledgeable and suggestive. We hear the laments of those facing their own mortality, questioning their role on earth in the time still left to them. Listen: *ça cuel achicatol[n] tiyximati ça titotlanehuico*—"Only for a moment do we know each other. We only come here to be borrowed" (139). These poems (and there can be no question of their being poems) speak loudly on their own; yet even here, where there is certainly no need, Bierhorst perhaps projects more than he ought. He holds to an old idea of his own that these Nahuatl poems are nearly all a sort of Ghost Dance nativism, in which it was supposedly expected that the souls of the dead would come down to earth. Few other scholars share this understanding of the poems, however; Bierhorst might do better just to listen.

In the introduction to her recent collection of essays by nine other scholars, *The Conquest All Over Again: Nahuas and Zapotecs Thinking, Writing, and Painting Spanish Colonialism* (2010), Susan Schroeder addresses the issue that I have raised here, asking the reader what Moctezuma, when nearing his demise, would have wanted his people to know and try to do, and what indigenous peoples in Mexico, as they lived through colonialism, wanted to say in their texts about their own past and present.<sup>3</sup> I think we can all agree that Mesoamerican peoples often spoke in metaphors. Whether they always did so and whether we should necessarily trust ourselves to recognize what their metaphors signified seem to be the questions open for discussion.

2. John Bierhorst, ed., *Cantares mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985).

3. Susan Schroeder, "Introduction," *The Conquest All Over Again: Nahuas and Zapotecs Thinking, Writing, and Painting Spanish Colonialism* (Brighton, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 1–2.