

REVIEWS

DOCUMENTS FROM SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MESOAMERICA

The Testaments of Culhuacan. Los Testamentos de Culhuacán: Vida y Muerte entre los Nahuas del México Central, Siglo XVI. Edited by Miguel León-Portilla and Sarah Cline, with the collaboration of Juan Carlos Torres López. Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2023. Pp. 466. Free PDF.
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During his long, influential life, the inestimable Mexican ethnohistorian Miguel León-Portilla (1926–2019) aimed to reach a wide audience. It is fitting that one of León-Portilla's final publications was a translation, transcription, and reproduction of the original *Testaments of Culhuacán*. He completed the project along with Sara Cline, the highly regarded ethnohistorian, with the collaboration of Juan Carlos Torres López. Scholars and casual readers can now access this series of critical primary sources online as a downloadable PDF.

The collection of 65 wills and 36 additional attached documents, produced in a large quantity due to the impending deaths of many testators from an early colonial epidemic, remains a key documentary collection for scholarship on colonial central Mexico due to its rarity as an exemplar from the early colonial era. Specifically, this publication provides scholars a corpus of documents from Stage 2 as defined by James Lockhart, from approximately 1550 through 1640, during which Nahuatl included many Spanish nouns introduced as loanwords but little grammatical structural change. Cline and Portilla initially published these wills translated into English in 1984 in *The Testaments of Culhuacan*. This latest edition, beyond including context in the introductory material, provides a three-column translation from Nahuatl into Spanish and English, making this online publication the most comprehensive work of scholarship on these testaments, enhanced by commentary aided by a retrospective view on nearly 40 additional years of scholarship, providing glosses for each document in both Spanish and English.

The testaments from the *pueblo* of Culhuacan, dating from 1578 to 1582, have long informed ethnohistorians generally, particularly scholars working in the tradition of the New Philology school, including Cline herself in her 1986 monograph, *Colonial Culhuacan, 1580-1600: A Social History of an Aztec Town*. After the publication of *Colonial Culhuacan, 1580-1600*, the collection of testaments subsequently informed the comprehensive works of James Lockhart *Nahuas and Spaniards: Postconquest Mexican*

History and Philology (1991) and *Nahuas after the Conquest* (1992). Passages have appeared in excerpt form in *Dead Giveaways: Indigenous Testaments of Colonial Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Kellogg and Restall 1998) and in *Native Wills from the Colonial Americas: Dead Giveaways in a New World* (Christensen and Truitt 2016). The framing of the study of wills also shaped the approach of Caterina Pizzigoni in *The Testaments of Toluca* (2007).

This new publication opens with prefatory sections that contextualize the documents, examining both the historical setting in which the documents emerged as well as their importance to researchers over the last half century. Beyond the wills themselves, the inclusion of further analyses of the sources and documentary appendices benefit readers with deeper context and an extensive source base. The documentary appendices include a separate testament found in the National Library of France and division of the property of doña Luisa Juana, which serve as a point of reference for comparing inheritances and land divisions in other regions of colonial Mesoamerica. For further historical context, the editors also reproduced the *Relación geográfica de Culhuacán*, a 1580 survey of the town commissioned by authorities. An analysis of these documents by Sarah Cline adds ethnohistorical background on the government and society of Culhuacan and neighboring communities. The final pages, a selection of facsimile reproductions of the original testaments, will be of interest to those looking to hone Nahuatl paleography skills.

Solidly grounded in over three decades of research, this work is a welcome contribution to published primary source material for ethnohistorians. Long known to New Philologists, this trilingual edition, freely available online, makes this critical documentary base accessible to all.

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EARLY MODERN EMPIRE AND BRAZILIAN REALITIES

Adrift on an Inland Sea: Misinformation and the Limits of Empire in the Brazilian Backlands. By Hal Langfur. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023. Pp. 456. \$35.00 cloth; \$105.000 hardcover; \$52.25 eBook.
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The Brazilian backlands (*sertões*) hold a powerful grip on both the scholarly and popular imaginations. Although the arid, drought-prone shrublands of the northeast are often the first to come to mind, Hal Langfur shifts the focus to the vast “seas” of loosely governed peoples and territories in the southeast, which surrounded more consolidated “islands and archipelagos of inland settlement” (10). In his latest book, Langfur looks at how