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# OF TIME AND SPACE IN MEXICO, NATIVE AND COLONIAL

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SUNY Potsdam

**The Möbius Strip: A Spatial History of Colonial Society in Guerrero, Mexico.** By Jonathan D. Amith. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. Pp. 661. \$75.00 cloth.

**Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate.** By Elizabeth Hill Boone. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. Pp. 307. \$55.00 cloth.

**Annals of His Time.** By Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin. Edited and translated by James Lockhart, Susan Schroeder, and Doris Namala. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. Pp. 329. \$55.00 cloth.

**Testaments of Toluca.** Edited and translated by Caterina Pizzigoni. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. Pp. 272. \$55.00 cloth.

For the last thirty years, scholars not only have studied the history of native peoples of the New World but also have used the voices of those peoples to illuminate their history. The four works examined here all serve as important contributions to this growing literature. Although at first glance they might seem widely disparate, with little in common, in fact they describe a continuum of native concerns with time and space from the earliest civilizations of central Mexico up through the colonial period. Furthermore, all are closely related to the enterprise begun by Arthur J. O. Anderson, Frances Berden, and James Lockhart in *Beyond the Codices*.<sup>1</sup> All these books use manuscripts composed by natives or interviews conducted with natives, overwhelmingly Nahuatl speakers. Some of the manuscripts studied are pictorial in nature, while others are written in native languages using European script. Chronologically, the selection begins with Boone's analysis of the Mexican Books of Fate, calendrical and soothsaying manuscripts from preconquest times. Chimalpahin's historical narrative covers the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries in a manner that draws on older historical traditions but treats colonial events. The testaments presented by Pizzigoni date from the last half of the colonial period and manifest the changes that occurred in two native communities

1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

in the Toluca Valley. Amith then covers the spatial history of the Guerrero region of south-central Mexico and the impact that geography, economics, and politics had on the lives of native peoples, and their agency in that history.

Native pictorial manuscripts have fascinated Europeans since the arrival of Spanish conquerors in Mexico. Unfortunately, missionary friars interpreted these books as occupying a position similar to the Bible in Christian faith. While these books did occupy a special place in the religious complex of natives, they certainly were not canonical in the same way as the Bible or the Koran. Nevertheless, friars and secular officials demanded their destruction. As a result, we have but a handful of pre-conquest pictorial manuscripts. Those that Boone analyzes form the largest single group: divinatory books. Painted on traditional materials or on colonial paper, these codices include the Borbonicus, the Telleriano-Remensis, the Tonalamatl Aubin, the Tudela, the Vaticanus A, and the Borgia Group, which includes Aubin No. 20, Borgia, Cospi, Fejérváry-Mayer, Laud, Porfirio Díaz Reverse, and Vaticanus B. Boone systematically explores different aspects of these works, beginning with an analysis of their construction on the one hand and the function of ritual calendars on the other, to finally demonstrate that they all indeed pertain to the tradition of divinatory almanacs, contradicting earlier interpretations of some of these books.

The Nahuas, and most other peoples of Mesoamerica, used two calendars simultaneously. The solar calendar (most easily recognized by the Spanish) was the *xihuitl*, consisting of eighteen festival periods of twenty days each. Each period carried the name of the feast associated with it. There were five unnamed days, called the *nemontemi*, added to the 360 in order to make the full 365 days of the year. More important for most people was the *tonalpohualli*, or day count, which consisted of thirteen numbers (*trecena*) and twenty signs in an invariable order (crocodile, wind, house, lizard, serpent, death, deer, rabbit, water, dog, monkey, grass, reed, jaguar, eagle, vulture, movement, flint, rain, and flower), a cycle called *veintena* in Spanish. The first day was therefore 1 Crocodile, followed by 2 Wind, 3 House, and so on, until 13 Reed, which was then followed by 1 Jaguar, 2 Eagle, and so on. It would take 260 days for the day 1 Crocodile to return again. The *xihuitl* with 365 days, and the *tonalpohualli* with 260, coincided every 52 years.<sup>2</sup>

A primary function of the *tonalpohualli* was divination. Days had an aspect of good, bad, or neutral fortune, a matter further complicated by the fact that a specific deity ruled each day and imparted good or bad aspects to it. As well, the nighttime of each day was governed by one of the

2. Each *xihuitl* year received its name from the *tonalpohualli* day upon which it started. This could be Rabbit, Reed, Flint or House, numbered 1 through 13. The 52-year cycle began with 1 Rabbit, followed by 2 Reed, 3 Flint, 4 House, and 5 Rabbit.

Nine Lords of the Night, and there were also Thirteen Volatiles, winged creatures associated with each day. As a result, the reading of fortunes was a very complicated matter and divination depended on a dialogue between the participant and the seer.

Almanacs predicted the fortune of children on the basis of their natal day and hour, and played an important role in naming ceremonies, marriages, and other important events, which might be postponed in order to fall on a more propitious date. The books furthermore served as mnemonic devices, allowing the seer to recall the oral tradition symbolically represented in their pages. This symbolic representation functioned in two ways. The books depicted actual things—they look like what they represent—yet they also conveyed a far deeper and richer symbolic meaning. In order to elucidate the latter, present in calendrical elements, actors and actions, scenes, accoutrements, and instruments, Boone draws on explanations of the books provided by colonial sources and on previous annotations of some extant works.

The natives of Mexico wrote in several literary genres, including historical accounts. Unlike the latter, in which chronology dictated a sequential reading from beginning to end, almanacs were consulted more sporadically. Some included all the divinatory elements listed previously, such as the Volatiles, while others featured only a select few. The way in which these elements were presented had meaning; for example, day symbols appeared set on a splayed animal. In other almanacs, days and their symbols were associated with the cardinal directions, a practice that not only dictated a specific reading but also added an additional level of information, as these directions had both mythical and symbolic meanings. Boone analyzes these features and the importance of scenic and diagrammatic representation in her study, treating calendrical and divinatory information, as well as the representation of mythology and legend.

Once the seer had identified the nature of the day in the particular context being queried, he needed to know the ceremonies required to confirm or counteract his reading. Almanacs did not simply depict this information but also embedded it within a larger symbolic system. For example, the god Tlaloc might be depicted with a bone awl for bloodletting, a rubber ball on a pile of kindling, bowls with pulque, a human arm, some sort of grain, or numbers indicating the ceremonial requirements associated with the day. Unfortunately, while we can read the symbols and understand the numbers, we do not know how they all worked together.

Boone builds toward an interpretation of one section of the *Codex Borgia*, a work that has been analyzed and interpreted without consensus by several other scholars, notably Eduard Seler and Karl Anton Nowotny.<sup>3</sup>

3. Eduard Seler, *Codex Borgia. Eine altemexikanische Bilderschrift der Bibliothek der Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Druck von Gebr. Unger, 1904–1909); Karl Anton Nowotny,

She concludes that the section at issue is a divinatory almanac and a cosmological treatise on Quetzalcoatl, insofar as it goes beyond day counts and ceremonial acts to depict the adventures of this god. Boone takes us through eight scenes of Quetzalcoatl's life, analyzing the symbolic meanings of each episode. Her interpretation generally tends to expand on the work of Nowotny and to disagree with that of Seler.

Boone does a masterful job of working with the reader to explore the very arcane subject matter of divinatory books. She explains their symbolism and structure and, using charts to aid in the understanding of reading patterns, makes a very strong interpretation of some of the most complex pre-conquest narratives, especially the central section of the Borgia Codex. Her notes and bibliography are extensive, and the book is well illustrated. One very important contribution is a detailed analysis of each manuscript that describes some of these works page by page.

As noted, the Nahuatl also composed historical accounts, normally chronologies giving the year and its events by means of pictograms. Although produced in the colonial period, the Codex Mendoza maintains a bit of this tradition in folios 2v to 16v, where it lists the conquests associated with each of the *huei tlahtoani*, or emperors.<sup>4</sup> Also depicted are events such as the New Fire ceremony from the reign of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin in 1506. Other colonial writers continued this tradition. By far the most thorough was Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin. A native of Amecameca, Chimalpahin lived most of his adult life in Mexico City. Although baptized as Domingo Francisco, he took the longer, more exotic name for himself in his literary career. His important contribution to the genre of historical writing is his annals of the history of Mexico from 1577 (a date two years before his own birth) until 1615. In the new edition of Lockhart, Schroeder, and Namala, the original Nahuatl is presented on the left-hand page and the English translation *en face* on the right. The text is nicely annotated to help in the interpretation of some of Chimalpahin's more cryptic comments.

Chimalpahin's yearly entries for the 1570s and 1580s are rather spare, with nothing at all for 1587. By 1590, however, many events are listed each year. By the early 1600s, the entries are greatly detailed and reach a peak in 1613. From this, the editors conclude that, from about 1608, Chimalpahin wrote about events approximately as they occurred. They also note various features of Chimalpahin's expression. For instance, his Nahuatl changes over time. Early on, he used the terms *castilteca*, *españolesme*, and

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*Tlacuilolli. Style and Contents of the Mexican Pictorial Manuscripts with a Catalogue of the Borgia Group*, translated and edited by George A. Everett Jr. and Edward B. Sisson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

4. This work has been edited by Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Reiff Anawalt, 4 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

*español* to refer to Spaniards. All are characteristic of the second of three stages of Nahuatl language change proposed by Lockhart,<sup>5</sup> in that early Nahuatl speakers frequently built a Nahuatlized plural on top of an already-plural Spanish word. Thus, they would put the Nahuatl plural suffixes *-me* or *-tin* on a Spanish plural. By the later years of Chimalpahin's account, however, these forms disappear and he uses the Spanish word *españoles*, as again described by Lockhart.

Chimalpahin's account is a treasure trove for scholars of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Mexico. He provides details of events that few scholars have studied in any depth, having been, in the absence of other diarists and formal accounts, a witness to much that appears nowhere else. Many of the events he chronicles have to do with celebrations of the church calendar, activities of religious orders, and the comings and goings of bishops and other prelates. He also comments on political figures of the time: viceroys, *oidores*, *corregidores*, and the like. One of the more fascinating episodes recorded involves the arrival of a delegation of Japanese diplomats. Chimalpahin also narrates the effects of a massive earthquake in 1611 and details of a reputed slave revolt in 1612.

Lockhart, Schroeder, and Namala have done a good job of translating and editing this fascinating work. Their analysis of language and supplemental notes assist the reader greatly. The Reverend Stafford Poole also provided many helpful insights about details of religious celebrations and other ecclesiastical affairs so close to Chimalpahin's heart. In short, this is a wonderful work that can be useful in many contexts. Chimalpahin took a native tradition, transferred it to a new system of writing, and then modified it to report on a wide range of events beyond the conquests of individual rulers to approach modern historical annals.

Caterina Pizzigoni similarly presents a valuable collection of native-language testaments in her *Testaments of Toluca*, editing and translating these works, and providing a solid analysis of their importance to historians. The study of such works has been recognized as an important endeavor, with excellent contributions by S. L. Cline and Miguel León Portilla, and by Teresa Rojas Rabiela, Elsa Leticia Rea López, and Constantino Medina Lima.<sup>6</sup> Pizzigoni's collection differs from these others in that it contains mostly wills from the eighteenth century, whereas the others

5. James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 261–325.

6. S. L. Cline and Miguel León Portilla, *The Testaments of Culhuacan* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1984); Teresa Rojas Rabiela, Elsa Leticia Rea López, and Constantino Medina Lima, *Vidas y bienes olvidados: Testamentos indígenas novohispanos*, 4 vols. (Mexico: CIESAS, 1999–2002). See also Susan Schroeder and Matthew Restall, *Dead Giveaways: Indigenous Testaments of Colonial Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998).

have a general bias toward the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Moreover, this rather large collection of testaments, numbering nearly two hundred (of which only half are included in this volume), comes not from the metropolitan capital of Mexico City, but from the neighboring Toluca Valley, to the west. Approximately one-third come from the city of Toluca, a major *altepetl* (ethnic state) in the pre-Columbian period; another third from the town of Tepemaxalco, to the southeast of the city; seventeen from the latter's twin town of Calimaya; and the remaining ten from villages between Tepemaxalco and Calimaya. The earliest dates from 1652, the latest from 1789, with the bulk from 1690 to 1769.

Pizzigoni looks at various details of the testaments and considers patterns within the corpus as a whole. For instance, in the Toluca sample 63 percent of the wills were drawn up by men, as compared to only 44 percent in the more rural area of Calimaya. Pizzigoni analyzes the features and devices normally found in these documents: preambles and invocations, personal names, marital status, political identity (the city, town, or jurisdiction), funeral arrangements, bequests, kinship, the order of heirs, inheritance patterns, houses and saints, land, animals, debts, and conclusions. She also examines the various notaries at work in the corpus, describing their periods and areas of activity, and distinctive traits. These testaments were all written in Nahuatl and thus provide a rich source for understanding how this language changed over decades of contact with Spanish. In general, the texts fit well within Lockhart's third stage. At the same time, the wills document discrete changes and local variations that appeared over the eighteenth century. In some, final consonants are dropped or modified, while other consonants undergo deformations of various different sorts.

In the end, Pizzigoni concludes that, although the regions of Toluca and of Tepemaxalco-Calimaya were closely interrelated, they constituted two very separate populations. Requests for bell ringing and donations to *cofradías* appear only in Toluca; in Tepemaxalco and Calimaya there are more references to the Holy Family. Toluca wills tend to be very detailed in their descriptions of the house complex, while there are little or no such mentions in the more rural areas. There are also issues of vocabulary. Wills frequently employ perorations, demands, or requests that certain things be done. In Toluca, the phrase used is *neltiz notlanequiliz* (my will is to be carried out), whereas in rural areas it is *neltiz notlatol mochihuaz* (my word/statement is to be carried out and done). The use of native testaments for a better understanding of the world and the people that produced them is a significant trend that will clearly continue. Pizzigoni's work is an extremely important contribution.

Pizzigoni's work goes beyond the temporal realm so central to the tonalpohualli and the annals of Chimalpahin to consider the importance of space. Just as the tonalpohualli of different geographic areas manifest

different emphases and even mythic traditions, as outlined by Boone, the wills produced in different places reflect different social and economic considerations. In *The Möbius Strip*, Jonathan Amith fuses these two dimensions into what he calls a “spatial history,” treating the intersection of change across time and space to analyze social and economic patterns in colonial Guerrero.

Amith studies an area to the south of Mexico City and Cuernavaca, and to the north of Acapulco, generally the districts of Taxco, Iguala, Zumpango del Río–Oapan, and Tixtla. The Balsas River flows from east to west through the central part of this territory. Amith is careful not to call the focus of his study a region. He eschews the term *regional* on two counts. He sees it as coming from a common sense of identity among the local residents and does not believe that this was generally the case for the colonial period. First, he finds that a “conscious sense of place was absent from the colonial ontology” (24). Second, he finds that the term reflects a certain analytical abstraction that in fact detracts from the reality of lived experience. He summarizes his approach, accordingly, as follows:

although this book has been structured to highlight the constant tension between spatial structures and special practices, and between socioeconomic and discursive aspects of structure and agency, these issues are not discussed simply as part of an effort to contribute to a geographically based social science literature but, rather, to assert the importance of spatial patterns and processes in shaping the colonizing experience. (16)

Amith’s book is a thorough and detailed analysis of social and economic activities in the territory he has identified, looking specifically at how these change from the time of contact with Spain to the late eighteenth century. After an introductory chapter, the book is divided into three large parts. The first discusses the basic features of the land, its physical geography, and the role of imperial policy and custom in Spain’s acquisition of the territory. The second focuses on the dynamics of economic transformation in Guerrero from the time of conquest into the eighteenth century. The third and final part deals more specifically with the dynamics of grain production in the late colonial period.

Focusing on the area between Iguala and Taxco to the north, and Acapulco to the south, Amith explains how, over the last four centuries, there has been migration into the Iguala Valley of peoples who anticipated economic success through agriculture in the more fertile valley floor, with its better access to markets and long-distance trade. The legal structures of the colonial political system regulated this movement. Amith notes that the native peoples had different notions from the Spanish about what constituted possession of the land. The Spanish, drawing on a system adapted to the New World from a European context, experienced tensions arising from moral rather than legal considerations. While they could claim territory by right of conquest, there were moral imperatives that obliged

them to recognize the preexisting claims of natives. By declaring the land vacant, Spaniards could acquire it through the courts. Yet they also recognized that the grains of the land, though produced by individuals, were of community benefit. For this, while land was privatized, grain was publicly regulated.

These patterns of acquisition were established in the first century after conquest. Amith seeks to valorize spatial aspects in his analysis, recognizing that there is necessarily a temporal component as well. He establishes a temporal framework for his spatial analysis, seeing the end of the sixteenth century, marked by *congregación* and the beginnings of *composición*, as one watershed.<sup>7</sup> The end of the seventeenth century was another, characterized by a second wave of *composiciones*. Amith then moves to the spatial component, looking at the impact these policies had in Taxco's mines and the surrounding district, as compared to Iguala and Tixtla. In general, the Spanish initially had interest in acquiring land in this area. When it did occur, encomenderos tended to be involved. The *congregaciones* created empty spaces that Spaniards then acquired through *composición*, declaring the lands to have been vacated. Competition broke out between Spaniards and natives for access to external markets and to arable agricultural lands, where both could produce for the market.

Amith traces the consequences of these developments from the late seventeenth century into the eighteenth. Holes between grants were filled, boundaries shifted from natural landmarks to straight lines, places took on new names, and new communities emerged. In the Iguala Valley, a single mammoth hacienda was created out of preexisting estates by the end of the seventeenth century, only to disappear just as quickly into many small ranches, minihaciendas, and *ventas*, a decline possibly due, in Amith's eyes, to a lack of capital investment and the emigration of labor.

Amith also examines the emergence in central Guerrero of the town of Palula, which was originally subject to Tepecuacuilco. In the seventeenth century, when many emigrants left Oapan in the Balsas River Valley for Palula, they established themselves as true residents with historical and patrimonial rights. Palula not only possessed good agricultural land, but was near Taxco and the highway from Mexico to Acapulco. The newcomers therefore wrapped their new native town in the history and pretensions of an original village to bolster their legal rights. Amith weaves an engaging narrative from the tension that this caused between the village and its *cabecera* (district capital), and from the acquisition of land, the la-

7. *Congregación* was also known as *reducción*. This was a system used after the worst periods of native population decline, whereby native peoples were moved from far-flung villages into more centralized places. *Composición* allowed landowners to gain legal title to lands that had merely been occupied and not legally acquired.

bor that villagers provided to local estates, and the beginnings of tenant farming.

Palula provides Amith with a model that he applies more generally to other communities of the Iguala Valley, where emigration from nearby places carried tensions between the old place and the new. Some villages developed as farming communities, others provided labor for nearby estates; some were ethnically simple, others multiethnic. Moreover, the migratory and settlement pattern established in the earliest communities was repeated over and over. While most migrants preferred the Iguala Valley, north of Palula, due to its economic ties to the mines and markets of Taxco, the south had a specific attraction for migrants from the Balsas. Considering this from the perspective of ethnography and process, Amith examines the roles played by estate owners and local producers, and by consumers, popular groups, and elites in the towns and cities. Amith sees conflict as occurring between producers and consumers, not within each group. This conflict prompted the further movement of peoples, which in turn affected the power of villages and their ethnic composition.

All these developments transformed rural society. The older ranches gave way to grain estates, which eventually were partially transformed into sugar estates, further linking the area to the international economy. Successful landowners—who had access to labor and had diversified into long-distance trade, yet kept on producing grain—could again diversify into sugar, provided they had the capital needed for the heavy investment in equipment. Internal and external markets also played an important role in this development. The economy was therefore divided along two axes. While powerful merchants excluded poor peasants and indigenous producers from the most lucrative markets, commercial capital tended to concentrate in the rural hinterland, allowing a degree of independence from the traditional power center of Taxco.

The crown controlled grain market as an essential component of production managed for the common good, not unlike the monopolies on salt and mercury. Cities also tried to control the distribution of grain in their jurisdictions. Local producers sought in turn to maximize their own position. In Mexico, the production of wheat was highly specialized, destined solely for human consumption. Corn was considered more of a raw material, food for man and beast, and therefore essential to mining and other industries. When the crown loosened controls over grain in 1765, it flowed to the markets with greatest demand, mediated by the cost of shipping. The Taxco miners were short on capital and could not compete with other markets for grain. They therefore sought to incorporate Iguala legally into their jurisdiction to control the grain produced there, setting up a confrontation that demonstrates the lack of regional identity and the inadequacy of *region* as a term in colonial New Spain. Spatial analysis,

accompanied by socioeconomic analysis, exposes a deeper and more complex reality.

Amith's study is extensive, well documented, broadly conceived, and rooted in a persuasive methodology. Although some of its methodological digressions do not seem to move the argument along, especially in the introductory section, which compares spatial analysis to the rise of literary realism in the nineteenth century, the book nevertheless is well written and well organized. While the arguments are dense, Amith provides ample signposts along the road. His introductions and conclusions are a model of clear writing. In short, Amith's book will stand as a significant work on land, society, and economy in colonial Mexico.<sup>8</sup> The Möbius strip is a piece of paper that is given a half twist and then made into a loop. What begins as the outside surface eventually becomes the inside surface: in Amith's words, "a mathematical concept that creates the illusion of dimensionality where it is in effect nonexistent" (27). In any line of investigation, there are things that seem to lie on the path of research, only to remain hidden. With his spatial study, Amith hopes to uncover those hidden things and succeeds.

The four books I have considered provide a continuum from the century before conquest up to the independence of Mexico. The region that produced the divinatory almanacs studied by Boone is not too far distant from the villages studied by Amith. The wills studied by Pizzigoni come from the valley north of Taxco and west of Mexico City. Chimalpahin wrote in the latter, in the north-central region described by these works. Moreover, by and large, Nahuatl was the common language of these areas, although some of the almanacs might have been produced by Mixtec speakers. All four authors are conversant in Nahuatl and focus on issues related to native agency.<sup>9</sup> As well, one colonial figure, the viceroy Luis de Velasco, takes a role in three of these works: he was a landowner and encomendero of the village of Calimaya studied by Pizzigoni, and of Oapan studied by Amith; his government appears in Chimalpahin's annals.

All four of the works reviewed sit at the confluence of the chronological and the spatial. Pizzigoni analyzes testaments in terms of the places where they were produced, as does Boone in her study of the Books of Fate. Chimalpahin lavishes attention on chronology, narrating events as they occur in time. By combining the study of time and space, each work achieves a far deeper understanding not just of its own topic but of colonial Mexico as a whole. The interplay of time and space is increasingly seen as crucial to the development of central Mexico and to the cultural dynamic

8. The designer of the dust cover should nevertheless be soundly criticized. Although Amith's book is unabashedly about Guerrero in central Mexico, the cover includes a Möbius strip made up of a map of the coast of Peru!

9. In fact, Pizzigoni learned Nahuatl from Amith.

of colonized and colonizer. Amith and Pizzigoni clearly delineate the differences in the perception of space between Spaniards and Nahuas. Boone highlights how the natives of central Mexico had far different perceptions of time than did the Spaniards. All in all, these four studies are extremely valuable and good additions to historiography.