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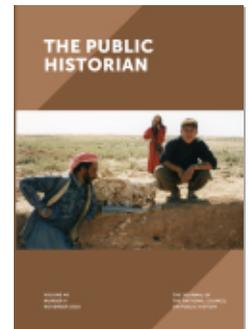
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*San Miguel de Allende: Mexicans, Foreigners, and the Making of a World Heritage Site* by Lisa Pinley Covert (review)

Ruth Hellier-Tinoco

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collaboration with foreigners resulted in the pillaging of antiquities, which in turn helped to build the impressive collections of Mayan art in London, Paris, New York, and Philadelphia. Chapter 3 focuses in greater depth on the international race to claim and collect the ruins of Palenque. Here, Achim convincingly demonstrates how physical conditions, such as impassable roads or the resistance of local authorities obfuscated the state's attempts to convey objects to Mexico City. Chapter 4 explores the museum's exploitation of an emergent independent press to produce and circulate information about its antiquities. Chapter 5 emphasizes the development of comparative archeology. Chapter 6 tracks the museum's fate across the tumultuous War of Reform (1857–61) and the French invasion that made Austrian Archduke Maximilian Emperor of Mexico (1864). With his execution and the restoration of the liberal republic, Juárez brought an end to foreign intervention in Mexican affairs. However, Achim shows that the museum benefited enormously from funding and support during the Second Empire.

Achim's book is an impressive academic study, produced by a scholar working at Mexico's Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa in Mexico City, a powerhouse of Mexican anthropology and cultural history. It is therefore intended for scholars working in the fields of Latin American studies, Mexican cultural history, anthropology, archeology, and museum studies. The book makes major contributions to the study of museums in Latin America and to the historiography of nineteenth century Mexico. As such it complements but significantly expands upon the literature on Mexico's exhibitionary histories, such as studies of its participation in World's Fairs or Victorian era displays, histories of key cultural institutions such as the Academy of San Carlos or the National Museum of Anthropology, as well as scholarship that traces the relationship between visual technologies, such as maps and prints, in the construction of the modern nation. The public historian may not find much in this book to inform their practice directly. However, the history Achim narrates helps to situate US collections of pre-Columbian antiquities within the conditions of their gathering. Likewise, she re-contextualizes influential texts like John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood's *Incidents of Travel in the Yucatán* (1943) that continue to inform both scholarly and popular interest in Mexican and Central American ruins to this day.

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*San Miguel de Allende: Mexicans, Foreigners, and the Making of a World Heritage Site* by Lisa Pinley Covert. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. xi + 289 pp.; illustrations, notes, bibliography, index; clothbound, \$65.00; paperbound, \$30.00.

Although all scholarly studies expect some prior knowledge of contextual details, this book presumes a great deal of readers in relation to twentieth- and early twenty-first century socio-economic and cultural-political histories of Mexico. Lisa

Pinley Covert's study is tightly focused on the town of San Miguel de Allende, offering some interesting insights into the particulars of a few comings and goings, and transformations and conflicts over the course of roughly eighty years (1930s to early 2000s). With a particular emphasis on questions of decision-making processes around economic development, the author examines how locals and migrants made choices about constructing their identities and institutions in this town.

Written in narrative style, the descriptions are evocative and detailed, based on evidence drawn from sources such as official state documents, newspapers and magazines, tourist paraphernalia, and personal communications. The study is divided into five chapters, with an introduction and epilogue, taking a roughly chronological trajectory (although rather too often the author hops back and forward between decades, generating a narrative that loses contextual socio-political accuracy).

As the title of the book suggests, Pinley Covert describes tensions between "Mexicans" and "foreigners," which encompasses issues of Catholicism, counter-cultural movements, gender and sexuality, and language. Discussions include topics such as the opening of school of fine arts in the 1930s, later frequented by US veterans after World War II; the transformations of the textile factory La Fábrica Aurora; the opening of another art school in the 1950s for "foreign clientele" and a governmental cultural center in 1961 (86); the use of the town as a "backdrop for Mexican and Hollywood films" in the 1950s and 60s (92); the 1982 designation as a Zone of Historic Monuments; and the 2008 designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The detailed descriptions are in and of themselves interesting. However, there are some perplexing elements underpinning this study, most notably, a lack of engagement with wider contexts and other studies, seemingly suggesting that San Miguel de Allende was constructing itself (or rather the inhabitants of San Miguel were constructing their town) almost within a vacuum. Thus, many of the broader issues described in the introduction are not fulfilled (for example, that this study "challenges us to rethink how Mexicans debated and defined their national identity," xxi). One of the most puzzling aspects is that the author seems to suggest that her realization that economic concerns and national identity are intertwined is innovative. Yet, most studies of nation building and modernity in Mexico discuss economic issues, not least seminal works by renowned scholar Néstor García Canclini, who has examined how "economy and culture march along intertwined with one another . . . any cultural fact . . . always leads to an implicit socioeconomic level . . . [and] any practice is simultaneously economic and symbolic."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, engagement with studies of developments in tourism practices (particularly in relation to postrevolutionary national identity construction), even in nearby locations such as Michoacán, are absent. Although the author does include some

<sup>1</sup> Néstor García Canclini, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 11.

mention of policies of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), reference to his very overt strategies (in his role as Governor of Michoacán) to generate a tourist attraction and to develop an economic infrastructure in the Lake Pátzcuaro area through the construction of the 132-foot high statue of Morelos in the center of the tiny Island of Janitzio, would have placed the specifics of San Miguel into relationship with other key developments from the 1920s onward.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps more seriously disconcerting is the seeming conflation of “head-shaving” with the state-sanctioned massacres and disappearances of the 1960 and 70s. Pinley Covert opens chapter 4 by describing an incident in 1969 in which a group of eighteen “long-haired Americans” were taken to jail and had their heads shaved (113). The author suggests that the “head-shaving raid was emblematic of efforts the ruling elite was making across Mexico to contain deviant bodies in an attempt to preserve the future of the nation,” making some connections to the Cold War (113–4). Yet, this was precisely the era in which governmental actors of the highest level were engaged in a dirty war involving killings and disappearances, not least the 1968 Tlatelolco massacres of protesting students. Although Pinley Covert briefly mentions the 1968 massacre later in the monograph (145), she seems to offer a more benign description that was connected only to the representation of the Olympics, and not to a wholesale challenge to the rule of the long-standing political party (the PRI).

Overall, then, for public historians and even *sanmiguelenses* (residents of San Miguel) this book opens up some little known details of this unique town. For readers unfamiliar with political and cultural histories of Mexico more broadly, this book should be read in conjunction with other historical, ethnographic and socio-cultural studies in order to understand the complex and transforming contexts within which the location-specific examples of San Miguel de Allende were taking place.

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<sup>2</sup> See: Ruth Hellier-Tinoco, *Embodying Mexico: Tourism, Nationalism and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 95.

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*Australian Lives: An Intimate History* by Anisa Puri and Alistair Thomson. Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2017. 14 + 873 pp.; illustrations, notes, index; paperbound, \$39.95; eBook, \$18.00.

I had the pleasure of reading and listening to this book as I moved between the hardcopy and the electronic version. I was keen to compare the experience of engaging with both, wanting to learn more about the experience of eBook reading and writing for authors, readers, and publishers. It is rare for me to read what I consider to be scholarly books in electronic format but public historians, more than most perhaps, need to think carefully about producing and publishing their work in different media to reach as wide an audience as possible. Many academic