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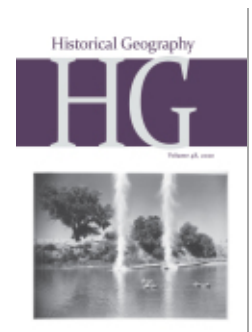
*Trail of Footprints: A History of Indigenous Maps from
Viceregal Mexico* by Alex Hidalgo (review)

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Trail of Footprints: A History of Indigenous Maps from Viceregal Mexico. Alex Hidalgo. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019. Pp. xv+166, color illustrations and maps, notes, index. \$29.95, paperback, ISBN 978-1-4773-1752-5.

Alex Hidalgo's *Trail of Footprints* is a handsome volume, richly illustrated in color on thick glossy paper, and quite readable. The author conveys a good deal of information about the intertwining systems within which the maps he examines were embedded during the centuries of Spanish colonial occupation in Mexico. His spatial focus is mainly on Oaxaca, though given the nature of these intertwining systems, some discussion necessarily extends to the Mexican colonial capital and even across the Atlantic to Spain. These systems include both indigenous and Spanish constructions of land tenure, social class, legal processes, information conveyance, religion, trade, travel, resource knowledge and use, the materiality of documents (including maps), and the power of archives. Hidalgo's overarching message is that the maps made by indigenous people in Oaxaca were key elements in the functioning of this system of systems, and that the changes observed in the maps over the time period were adaptations to increasing Spanish cultural, legal, and spatial hegemony.

Hidalgo has done some things very well. For example, he leaves the reader in no doubt about how entwined the maps were with the colonial legal system. New maps might be made (or sometimes an older one copied) for the purpose of legally confirming a community's land holdings, or as part of a petition to colonial authorities for a grant of land. The map then was "authenticated" by one or more colonial officials; this was a complex process that altered the original map considerably and made it acceptable as evidence in the colonial legal system. Typically, the process involved officials, scribes, and translators traveling to the land in question, observing the land, walking the boundaries according to markers depicted on the map, listening to explanations, annotating the map with descriptions and comments, and finally affixing an official signature. By that point the document has become as much a colonial and textual one as an indigenous and visual one, and was stored with the rest of the (textual) documents for the case.

Hidalgo also notes changes to visual styles and cartographic conventions in the indigenous maps over the colonial centuries, as well as some

that persisted. Emblematic of these changes is the title's "trail of footprints." Preconquest cartographic traditions in the area incorporated footprints to depict specific journeys or routes of travel more generally. Early colonial maps by indigenous mapmakers did the same, for instance, representing a walking of the boundaries of a community's land. With the increasing presence of Spanish settlers and the animals they brought, hoofprints were added to the symbology, typically presenting alternating human feet and horseshoe impressions. Later still, the whole convention was dropped as maps became more standardized to colonial legal parameters. Other changes along that trajectory are mentioned throughout the text, if not addressed collectively as a topic of focus.

My personal favorite in the book is the chapter called Materials. This chapter engages with the materiality of the maps in fascinating detail and from both sides of the Atlantic system, covering inks, color agents, adhesives, paper, and document sizes. It seems that indigenous inks were superior to European inks of the time period; yet, as Spanish suppression of indigenous culture and knowledge proceeded, indigenous mapmakers adopted European iron-gall inks rather than the other way around. Similarly, whereas indigenous adhesives were highly effective and long lasting, allowing maps to be created on large composite sheets, over the colonial period mapmakers instead adopted the Spanish folio document sizing so that maps could more readily fit into legal case notes.

Despite the satisfaction I experienced from learning about these things, however, the book overall has some weaknesses. It is repetitious, with insufficient unique content to effectively fill its pages. It could certainly have benefited from better editing to reduce overlaps, develop meaning, improve word choices, and correct spelling. More importantly, Hidalgo fails to make actual arguments *for* the positions he articulates or *with* the information he presents. Quotes or paraphrases from other scholars are dropped into the text like petals from a flower and left lying there without integration or the building of meaning. Potential tie-ins with larger concepts or systems are treated the same way. For example, Hidalgo never mentions the Columbian Exchange or its implications, despite his many illustrations of it. He portrays maps made in the latter colonial period as expressions of syncretism much like some Latin American religious culture, but he doesn't mention the word. He alludes to the importance of trade routes but avoids examining their roles in

human interaction and cultural diffusion. He inserts cartographic terms but does not analyze the maps in reference to them.

The book also makes use of certain phrases whose power outweighs their contexts. One is Hidalgo's contention that "mapmaking . . . fostered *a new epistemology* . . . used to negotiate the allocation of land" (2; emphasis added). If his assertion is truly that the making of maps ushered in an entirely new paradigm of knowledge about contested land tenure, then he does not support that assertion. The reader is left wondering what word might have portrayed Hidalgo's meaning better, and indeed what that meaning actually was. Along similar lines is his use of the phrase "indigenous cartography," especially in chapter 4. There is a world of difference between the fullness of that term and the much thinner reference to mapping done by indigenous people, which is what Hidalgo discusses. Indigenous cartography should be understood in relation to a culturally specific worldview and way of expressing spatial and environmental relationships without concern for alien cartographic conventions or viewpoints. The term would apply to pre-conquest maps certainly, and to at least some maps made post-conquest, but the maps on which this book focuses were generally made at the behest of or to prove something within an alien colonial bureaucracy, and over time became less and less expressive of indigenous worldviews.

On the other hand, Hidalgo slips in some jewels of insight that go far to redeem the book's weaknesses. Two examples in chapter 4 illustrate this. One has to do with diversity in indigenous expression and the overarching colonial intent to impose sameness on such expression. In the other example Hidalgo highlights a paradox in which colonial administration of land and labor drove "the region's mapping impulse," which could not have succeeded without indigenous knowledge (93). In the end these diamonds combined with the other strengths discussed above make the book a worthwhile read in spite of its weaknesses.

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