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Rebecca P. Brien and Margaret A. Jackson (eds.), *Invasion and Transformation: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008), pp. xii + 231, \$55.00, hb.

Of late, a growing coterie of scholars have revisited Spanish and Mesoamerican narratives of the conquest of Mexico. Rebecca Brien's and Margaret Jackson's anthology adds to this conversation in valuable ways. The common point of departure is the Kislak paintings, a seventeenth-century series depicting the conquest of Mexico, currently held at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. The editors intend to use the paintings' 'highly conservative and pro-Spanish version of history' as a 'foil to the new interpretations of the Conquest' (p. 7). They combine art history, history, linguistic anthropology, literature and archaeology to consider how the Spanish conquest of Mexico has – and should – be remembered.

The first two sections of the book address competing stories of the conquest, and sometimes overlap. In both, famous characters loom large. 'Remembering the Legends' focuses explicitly on Moteuczoma, Cortés and Malintzin/Malinche. Although glossed with considerable nuance, the stock characterisations of a weak and timorous Moteuczoma, a gallant Cortés, and an indispensable but mysterious Malintzin remain largely intact. In a colonial Nahuatl Epiphany drama, Louise Burkhart sees Herod standing in for an 'angry, cruel, and paranoid' Moteuczoma, but also for an ill-behaved, Spanish-speaking Cortés. The Magi, meanwhile, are worthy Nahuatl ancestors who act courteously and accept Christianity on their own terms. Susan Gillespie, focusing on the omens that are said to have foretold Tenochtitlan's fall, contends that blaming Moteuczoma did not simply rationalise a defeat. More profoundly, the omens story integrated a horrific, transformative event into indigenous understandings of divine rulership. Her demonstration of the Mesoamerican principles at play in stories of bodily attacks on Moteuczoma provides a refreshingly new way of looking at this most persistent and well-known conquest story.

For Viviana Díaz Balsera, Hernán Cortés's Second and Third Letters to Charles V encompass the two extremes of European imaginings of the conquest, as unbelievable triumph and hellish despair. Díaz Balsera's appreciation of Cortés's rhetorical 'triumph' adds a new layer to his already larger-than-life historical personality. He becomes not only the 'dauntless' conqueror of Tenochtitlan, but a creator of the 'founding texts of a Latin American imaginary'. Constance Cortez compares the Kislak series' passive, background portrayal of Malintzin/Malinche with contemporary indigenous portrayals, in which Malintzin is an active agent of change. She sees a 'new imaginary' reflected in the Kislak paintings, as power passed from indigenous to Spanish colonial elites by the mid-seventeenth century.

The second section of the book, 'The Transformation of History', considers conquest narratives more generally. Matthew Restall and Michael Schreffler both see in the Kislak series the consolidation of an imperial ideology of conquest (and not, Schreffler argues, a nascent *criollismo*). Restall links the paintings' 'mythistory' to the 1684 publication of Antonio de Solís y Rivadeneira's *Historia de la conquista de México*, whose episodic chronology the series closely follows. Cortés represents the triumph of Catholic, Spanish civilisation. His heroic feats are heralded, while episodes that reflect poorly on the Spanish are deemphasised or omitted. Schreffler compares the Kislak paintings to three contemporary pieces in which New World space appears naturalised and chaotic, but ultimately subordinated and rebuilt by the orderly hand

of Spain. Such images rebuffed criticisms of Spanish colonialism and soothed an anxious nobility concerned about the monarchy. Diana Magaloni-Kerpel revisits the Spanish-Nahua story of the eight omens, and her essay complements Gillespie's. Rather than focusing on Moteuczoma, Magaloni-Kerpel argues that the omens more generally chart the transformation of an old world consumed by fire into a new one born of water: that of the Spaniards and the Christians. She very usefully integrates the *Florentine Codex* illustrations with a *Codex Fejérváry* calendar round to make the point. She also points out Christian influences evident in the omens' illustrations – a reminder of the religious transformations embedded in these early, indigenous-authored stories of invasion.

I especially appreciated Brien's and Jackson's inclusion of the third section of the book, 'Effects of Invasion'. It recalls the most devastating transformation of the period: the death of millions of Mesoamericans in the first century after contact. Martha Few analyses autopsy reports of 'Indian' bodies consumed by *cocoliztli* in Mexico City in the 1570s. Although all social groups were affected by the disease, only Indian bodies were examined. The resulting ethnicised discourse described Indians as particularly susceptible to disease, and denigrated local cures in favour of colonial medicine. Few avoids a Foucauldian interpretation, however, highlighting instead the 'limits of the power of colonial medicine'. Chávez Balderas posits a disjuncture between the rapid adoption of certain Christianised funerary rituals – hastened by the extreme contexts of war and epidemic disease – and the ideological transformation these new practices implied. This is a large topic, perhaps too large to be covered satisfactorily in a single essay. It is highly suggestive of new research directions for the colonial period, however, and enriched by archaeologist Chávez Balderas's past work on ritual sacrifice and burial in the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan.

The essay of Brien and Jackson details straightforwardly and systematically the provenance of the Kislak series, and the content of each of its frames. Coming at the end of the volume, this summary treatment of the paintings seems almost an afterthought. But perhaps this was the editors' intention. Introducing the Kislak series last spotlights the essays that preceded it. By then, the assertion that the series is 'highly biased' in favour of the Spanish comes as no surprise. Indeed, the point has been made before, often by the same authors presented in this volume. Here, they collectively continue paving the way for ever richer dialogues across disciplines about the interpretive possibilities still latent in the themes of conquest and colonization. Brien and Jackson seem to think the point about Spanish bias bears repeating, but not belabouring. I agree.

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