

beliefs legible to US and non-Indigenous scholars, however, the authors at times risk replicating the colonial dynamics they astutely critique. Readers could have benefited from a more robust reflection of their social positioning and standing not only as *coyomeh* (non-Indigenous) but also as *compadres*—as US scholars and yet familiar foreigners. This was also a missed opportunity to attend to questions of relationality, academic extractivism, and coloniality, perhaps due to disciplinary imperatives.

Overall, *Pilgrimage to Broken Mountain* is a monumental study that helps its readers understand the historical, spiritual, and philosophical dimensions of the role of Nahua pilgrimages and ritual praxis not just in terms of sociocultural differences but also in terms of ongoing environmental and religious changes.

MANUEL R. CUELLAR, *The George Washington University*

Aztec Antichrist: Performing the Apocalypse in Early Colonial Mexico. Ben Leeming. Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2022, 314 pp. \$35.95, paper. ISBN 9781646422999.

Aztec Antichrist: Performing the Apocalypse in Early Colonial Mexico is a translation and study of some of the most striking Nahuatl texts brought to light in the twenty-first century: two sixteenth-century religious plays about the antichrist in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs or Nahuas of Mexico. The plays had been in a notebook held in the bowels of the Hispanic Society in New York City. This notebook was long thought to have only held Nahuatl manuscript copies of Christian texts. During research for his doctoral dissertation, Leeming discovered that the notebook also contained these unique and provocative dramas. As he explains, they are not simply unusual, but rather literally one of a kind. Though the antichrist was a common figure in early modern European religious writings, the character is nearly absent in the vast library of Christian texts from colonial Mexico written in Nahuatl. The plays also feature Mesoamerican gods such as Quetzalcoatl, as well as archetypes of Aztec social classes, roles, and occupations from “pagan” times, such as priests, diviners, and prostitutes. In the plays, all of these characters are in league with the antichrist to (unsuccessfully) lure Nahua Christians into returning to preconquest ways, which the antagonists describe in suspiciously graphic detail. The detailed depiction, let alone mention, of such figures and their “idolatrous” ways was virtually forbidden by colonial authorities, making these “illicit” works all the more strangely singular. As a result, the plays provide perhaps the most illuminating window into Aztec religion since the Florentine Codex.

Leeming renders these heretofore unknown plays, for all their strangeness, readily intelligible to the modern scholar. *Aztec Antichrist* contains both an extensive introductory

study and a thorough, masterful translation and transcription of the original Nahuatl, with minimal questionable word choices or uncertainties. In the explanatory chapters preceding the translation, Leeming makes a convincing case that the copyist of the texts, Fabián de Aquino, an early Nahua Christian intellectual, was also the playwright. Moreover, he wrote them on his own early in the colonial period, free from the supervision or influence of any Spanish friar. As to his motivations, Leeming explains that the middle of the sixteenth century in New Spain (that is, colonial Mexico) was a time rife with apocalypticism, among both Spaniards and Indigenous. On the Indigenous side of things, Leeming argues that this resulted from the trauma and violence (both in the physical and “epistemic” sense) of colonialism and the imposition of Christianity. He argues that Aquino drew on this apocalyptic fervor and trauma and wrote the proselytizing plays to paradoxically further limit the damage caused by Christianization. The plays were meant to sternly call on his peers, particularly Nahua nobles and leaders, to truly embrace Christianity and cease their “idolatry” so that the evangelizing friars would have less cause to police and terrorize Indigenous communities.

Aquino and his people were certainly suffering from a kind of trauma—and it is refreshing to see Anglo ethnohistorians finally acknowledging the traumatic effects of Spanish colonialism, after decades of arguing that the conquest was a mild non-event to the Indigenous. Reading Leeming’s masterful translation, however, one can’t help but think that Aquino may have also been up to something much craftier and more subversive. Although Fabián ostensibly tells his audience to follow Christianity, his scripts call for each god and idolater to step out on stage, arrayed in all their dazzling sacred finery, and excessively elaborate on old modes of worship and prognostication (a note in the play says that the “actor” playing the diviner is to actually explain to the audience exactly how divination was done, leading Leeming to presume on p. 116 that an *actual* Native religious specialist was cast in the role). It seems likely that even if Aquino was indeed a sincere, faithful Christian, rather than trying to completely extirpate his people’s ancestral religion to placate authorities, he also wanted to have future generations remember it and witness it in all its visual splendor. Many of the Nahuas would not have seen a contradiction in this; as Leeming and other ethnohistorians have observed, many of them believed Jesus Christ was just another deity who could supplement, not replace, the Aztec pantheon.

Regardless of whatever alternative interpretations there may be of these two plays, Dr. Leeming’s discovery, treatment, and presentation of them is one of the most significant developments in the field of Nahuatl studies in a long time. The work is a veritable motherlode for the scholar of Aztec religion.

CELSO MENDOZA, *University of Illinois, Chicago*