

BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

The Historian's Craft: Creating the Past in Colonial Latin America

Mark Christensen

Brigham Young University, US
mark_christensen@byu.edu

This essay reviews the following works:

Unlocking the Doors to the Worlds of Guaman Poma and His *Nueva corónica*. Edited by Rolena Adorno and Ivan Boserup. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2015. Pp. 483. \$78.00 paperback. ISBN: 9788763542708.

Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Native Archive and the Circulation of Knowledge in Colonial Mexico. By Amber Brian. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 187. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780826520975.

Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl and His Legacy. Edited by Galen Brokaw and Jongsoo Lee. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016. Pp. vi + 306. \$60.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780816500727.

Inca Garcilaso and Contemporary World-Making. Edited by Sara Castro-Klarén and Christina Fernández. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 373. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822963646.

Epics of Empire and Frontier: Alonso de Ercilla and Gaspar de Villagrà as Spanish Colonial Chroniclers. By Celia López-Chávez. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 293. \$29.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780806152295.

Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive. By Camilla Townsend. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xi + 313. \$35.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780190628994.

Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1500–1800. By Peter B. Villeda. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xi + 337. \$120.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781107129030.

The recording, interpretation, and retelling of past events in works designed to influence present ideas and beliefs has occurred for millennia. As a historian, I follow in the footsteps of countless others who allowed their understandings of the past to be influenced by social context, intellectual movements, and personal interpretations and motives. Too often, however, the keepers of history today and their historiographies neglect their predecessors, choosing instead to focus on what was recorded rather than record keepers and their aims. The works examined in this review essay offer some respite in that regard. Although diverse in geographic setting, culture, and people of study, the works join together to offer insightful scholarship on some of the most influential historians, chroniclers, and poets in colonial Latin America. Certainly even the most objective observer is subject to his/her own objectivity, thus allowing personal agendas and cultural context to influence the written narrative. The following works, then, also demonstrate how such agendas and context affected the historical records of colonial Latin America in ways more telling, at times, than the actual events recorded.

This essay begins with some of the most prolific writers of the colonial Americas, the Nahuas. The following works examining the role of Nahuas as historians represent a current crest in the wave of scholarship examining natives from the point of view of their own writings initiated by such schools of thought as the New Philology and, more recently, the New Conquest History. Camilla Townsend offers new and powerful insights into the Nahua (Aztec) *xiuhpohualli*, “yearly count” or “Mexican historical annals,” with her *Annals of Native America*. Nahuatl annals contain histories recorded by natives and told from a local point of view that include anything from the reign of various rulers to momentous events to earthquakes. The book is not a study of Nahua history as recorded in the annals. Instead, Townsend plainly states, “What I have tried to write here is a history of the annals” (9). In doing so, she examines the authors of the annals themselves, their beliefs and motives, and how their versions of history persisted and/or changed in the face of an increasingly pervasive colonial society. This, then, provides a new lens through which to view this genre of histories, paradoxically well-known and misunderstood at the same time, and often ignored for their arcane and seemingly disorderly nature. The book represents the recent methodological trend of examining Nahua historiography and colonial intellectuals whose writings and collections served to connect the pre- and postconquest worlds.

Each chapter presents the reader with English translations of excerpts from a set of annals, followed by an analysis of the author and then the text itself. As a result, the chapters provide much-needed context and authorial perspective that in turn reveals unseen insights into indigenous colonial life. The creation, meaning, and impact of the renowned *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* becomes inherently clearer upon understanding the motives of its orchestrator, don Alonso de Castañeda, to protect and preserve a knowledge of the past through a combination of preexisting and colonial traditions of record keeping. An understanding of the importance of multiple points of view and the variable notion of truth to Nahua historians likewise clarifies the out-of-order dates and seemingly confusing histories recorded in the *Annals of Juan Bautista* regarding the turmoil in Mexico City in the 1560s concerning tribute payments.

The human nature of Nahua historians becomes particularly evident in Townsend’s examination of the annals left by don Mateo Sánchez and, presumably, don Pedro de San Buenaventura. Their training and close association with Franciscan friars informed their writings, to be sure. Yet their writings—from the *Annals of Tecamachalco* to the history of Quetzalcoatl—betray the awkward position they endured as their exposure to preexisting traditions combined with their Franciscan training placed them in the middle of two worlds. One of the strengths of Townsend’s work is her ability to add new perspectives to the existing historical narrative through archival sleuthing and comparative analysis. Readers, then, can appreciate in new ways the cosmopolitan education and style of the famed Nahua historian Chimalpahin and his efforts to preserve as much history as possible in the face of a decline of indigenous intellectuals.

So too can readers better appreciate the annals from Tlaxcala and their heightened efforts to preserve a Nahua past they saw threatened by Spanish colonialism; or the later *Annals of Puebla* that clearly denote a duplicitous colonial world of indigenous and European traditions. Aside from Townsend’s skill in weaving ostensibly drab facts and events together to construct a highly readable tapestry of vignettes that breathe life into the colonial past, and in addition to her providing readers with hitherto unavailable English translations of Nahua texts, the work excels in its ability to provide a truly native account of the annals. Such annals were written by the Nahua for Nahua audiences and thus reveal those things they deemed worthy to record.

Often, historians place their subjects into categorical groupings distinct from one another and with different, even conflicting, interests. Amber Brian, however, offers an important work combining the traditional groupings of “Indian and mestizo” and “creole” that picks up, in many ways, where Townsend leaves off—examining the histories produced by a duplicitous colonial world of native and European traditions. Born of a mestizo mother and a Spanish father, don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl became one of the most famous historians of the colonial period, amassing an archive invaluable for modern researchers for its collection of texts. In the late seventeenth century, the son of Alva Ixtlilxochitl gave his father’s archive to the creole historian don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora. In her study examining the contents and context of the archive and its gifting, Brian argues that “Sigüenza the creole and Alva Ixtlilxochitl the mestizo both bridged the cultural and discursive distance between the Spanish and Indian communities ... they were involved in parallel projects” (6). Both historians possessed fluency in the culture of the other and both were colonial subjects who took part in Mexico’s intellectual community, which, while diverse, contained many intertwining networks. Rather than the conflict and dichotomy of Ángel Rama’s *Lettered City*,¹ the work

¹ Ángel Rama, *The Lettered City*, edited and translated by John Charles Chasteen (1984; Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

provides an image of mutual and negotiated experiences between those with privilege and power and those on the peripheries.

Brian employs the various works of Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Sigüenza to expose such connections throughout her work. Examining the archive itself, she illustrates how access to pre-Hispanic histories via documents provided validation to the historical work of both Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Sigüenza. Indeed, they considered their works important because they cited and drew knowledge from this archive. Like the other works under review, Brian explores the importance of context and, in this case, how it shaped the archive as it originally emerged from Alva Ixtlilxochitl's desire to defend familial claims to the *cacicazgo* (family estate), and then subsequently became transferred to a family friend, Sigüenza, by Alva's son so that he could continue employing the archive for legal support of the family's lands and titles. This exploration of context also extends to the methodology Alva employed as an historian to create his archive. As a mestizo, Alva framed the pre-Hispanic past along European discursive and intellectual traditions, including humanism, that made his work relevant for a colonial audience.

Important in her study is Brian's focus on the historical value of the archive itself, and not necessarily what its contents tell us about history. This is shown clearly in Sigüenza's use of the archive to, however ambiguously, connect the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the archive and its native compilers, thus creating a valid line of authority. Throughout the book, Brian inserts her work into the existing historiography, which she describes in some detail. Overall, her study challenges the reader to accept the collaborative nature of the intellectual spheres of colonial Mexico and their resulting texts, which often drew from native and European sources.

This theme of collaboration continues throughout Peter Vilella's *Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1500–1800*, which deftly exposes how both indigenous elites and creoles selectively employed the historical past to serve the different needs of each body. The indigenous elite sought precolonial precedents to emphasize a continuity between the past and present that legitimated their authority and made them “co-architects of the Hispano-Catholic colonial entity known as ‘New Spain’” (4–5)—adding yet another dimension to the ever-growing New Conquest History. For their part, creoles selectively appropriated aspects of the highly urban native civilizations in central Mexico to paint themselves as the “‘new’ caciques: A ‘native’ ruling class” (13) worthy of rule in the face of an increasing population of *peninsulares*.

Although studies on the native elite in central Mexico and their strategies to maintain power are not new, Vilella provides an additional angle from which to view the efforts of such elite. He argues that the elites' engagement of the past in the immediate years following the conquest to support their claims to legitimate rule made relevant the local histories of the region. Indeed, he illustrates how such disputes dated before the conquest, and continued throughout the colonial period in the lives of both native elites and Spaniards who had married into noble native households and their descendants. Seen in this light, the arrival of the Spaniards did little to thwart the importance of central Mexico's historical past and instead encouraged its continued relevance to natives and Spaniards alike. Like Brian and Townsend, Vilella reveals the mercurial nature of history, differentiating between the actual events of the past and their interpretation, the latter always shifting with contemporary views and agendas.

This fluidity in interpreting the past allowed for various individuals to call on its events in service of personal agendas—ones that typically served to defend or promote the rights and claims of a town or noble lineage. The political continuity and connection of New Spain's origins to the precolonial past instead of to the conquest served native elites as well as Franciscan friars, who, like their native counterparts, bemoaned the decline of society and called for a return to the idyllic order of the past as outlined in their histories. The histories compiled through the efforts of Franciscans and native historians, or as Vilella has it “cacique-chroniclers,” shaped works such as Torquemada's *Monarquía indiana* that would subsequently influence creoles' understanding of Anahuac and their own sense of nationalism.

Vilella's work is impressive in its use of archival sources to cast a brighter light on the myriad ways natives, and even creoles, engaged history to further their ambitions, whether through the mythologizing of native conquistadors, appropriating ancestral lineages, or serving as patrons to or early proponents of the Catholic faith or connecting its roots to Mexico. Such efforts evolved under the tutelage of the Jesuits and the expectations of the Bourbons—something the work outlines nicely. Like Brian, Vilella acknowledges the important role of Sigüenza in making relevant the natives' historical records but examines it from the lens of a creole adoption of the indigenous past as its own heritage. This admiration, however, had its limits and only extended to the near-mythical past of Anahuac; it did not include the present indigenous population who were seen as unruly overall. In the end, Vilella convincingly demonstrates how the creole construction of Mexican nationalism owed its roots to those indigenous elites who invoked their past and

heritage to emphasize a harmony and connection between the old and the new. He joins Townsend and Brian in illustrating the utility of the fluid nature of history's interpretation.

As a figure largely considered one of the most important and influential historians from the colonial period, Alva Ixtlilxochitl receives much warranted attention from scholars. Whereas Brian focuses on the importance and influence of his archive, and Villella examines his contribution to forming a creole identity, the volume *Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl and His Legacy*, edited by Galen Brokaw and Jongsoo Lee, provides an interdisciplinary examination of the mestizo's life and works to better understand his contribution to what the editors rightly describe as "colonial indigenous historiography" (Brokaw and Lee, 7).

In many ways, the present volume can be seen as a sequel to their previous volume on Texcoco.² The concise and informative overview of the historiography surrounding the study of Alva Ixtlilxochitl demonstrates the effectiveness of the historian's siren song over the years to those interested in both the man and his writings. The volume's contributors—adept and skilled in their own fields of study—offer new insights that often confirm existing theories and expand (sometimes controversially) present understandings. For example, Alva Ixtlilxochitl's identity as a historian and voice receive attention in the chapters of Gordon Whittaker, Jerome A. Offner, Heather Allen, and José Rabasa. Whittaker uses remarkable archival skills and analysis to present Alva Ixtlilxochitl not as a mestizo fluent in Nahuatl (as most scholars do), but a *castizo* (offspring of a Spaniard and mestizo) who more often than not identified as a Spaniard and who possessed less than fluent skills in Nahuatl. Whittaker's chapter also argues the historian's use of texts with glyphic writing and posits Agustín de la Fuente as the unnamed informant of Alva's *Historia tolteca*.

Jerome Offner also seeks to understand better Alva Ixtlilxochitl as a historian and his writings, particularly his accuracy in reading the Codex Xolotl compared to fray Juan de Torquemada. Offner's excellent attention to comparative detail allows the mestizo (*castizo*) historian to emerge not as a self-serving noble biased toward Tetzco and interested solely in the promotion of his lineage, but as a gifted and talented scholar whose interpretation of the codex remains unparalleled. Although also examining Alva as a historian, José Rabasa's chapter employs more theory than data, unlike Offner. Rabasa attempts to identify four different voices in Alva's discourses and correlate them with specific sources. Although some scholars—even within the volume—may disagree with some of his assertions, Rabasa's exploration of the use and power of the historian's voice complements those other contributors examining the voice and identity of Alva.

Complementing well the monographs of Brian and Villella, the chapters of Jongsoo Lee, Heather Allen, and Pablo García Loaeza provide further insight into both the context that shaped Alva's writings and the political landscape of creole patriotism to which he contributed. Lee allows the indigenous political context of the time to influence his exploration of Alva's works to uncover further insights into the writings of the historian and his contemporaries. The chapter's detailed description of the historical events that led up to Alva's writings clarifies for the reader the means and modes of Alva's successful justification of his family's claim to the *cacicazgo* of Teotihuacan; those not wholly familiar with the complicated details surrounding the narratives of Alva will want to begin their reading of the volume with this chapter.

Like Lee, Allen exposes the political motives of Alva Ixtlilxochitl, but he does so through a linguistic examination of the "constructed dialogue" evident in Alva's "Decimatercia relación" and *Historia*. Focusing on the different uses of direct and indirect dialogue in the texts, Allen argues for a heightened appreciation of such rhetorical devices and their role in helping Alva achieve his goals. In his contribution, García Loaeza effectively demonstrates the lasting impact Alva had on Mexican nationalism. Through the works of various creole historiographers, he illustrates how Alva and others reshaped the historical native elite into examples of "reasoned religious enlightenment" living in a land that "had never been removed from God's providence" (264–265). Loaeza's discussion continues into the late nineteenth century to reveal the creole vision of the Mexican pavilion on display during the 1889 Paris World's Fair that simultaneously honored the elite of the past while denigrating the common *indios* of the present.

While others analyze Alva's ethnoracial identity or the validity of his writings given their context, language (all were written in Spanish), and aim to promote family claims, Susan Kellogg provides an insightful chapter examining issues of gender, in particular the portrayal of Tetzcoacan women and Marina, or Malinche, in Alva's writings. Kellogg employs the history surrounding the marriage of Alva's great-great-grandmother, Papantzin, to Ixtlilxochitl; the baptism of Ixtlilxochitl's mother; and the presence of Marina to further illustrate the gender roles that affected Tetzcoacan women during and after the conquest, and Alva's marginalization of Marina to focus on the Tetzcoaca and Ixtlilxochitl. Instead of gender issues, Amber Brian scours Alva's writings

² *Texcoco: Prehispanic and Colonial Perspectives*, edited by Jongsoo Lee and Galen Brokaw (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014).

for connections to the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Demonstrating a possible connection between a miracle associated with the Virgin and Alva's translation of Francisco Verdugo Quetzalmalitzin's 1563 will, which mentions the miracle, Brian portrays the creation of the legend as a result of a collective, not a singular, discourse.

By this point, the reader may surmise that the well of scholarly research on Alva and his writings has been sufficiently tapped. Yet, as always, there is more to do. In the general realm of native historiography, certainly, but also concerning the work of Alva. Much has been said regarding the influences of native culture and colonial politics on his work. And there is still more to say about the European world and its texts that he engaged to align his histories with an audience of such a background. In this way, we can better understand why Alva employs Herod to familiarize the actions of Tezozomoc or the humanist influences on his work.

Despite the wealth of native historiographies originating in Mesoamerica, the region does not hold a monopoly on native historians. Indeed, the historical chronicle penned by the Quechua nobleman Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, his *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, remains one of the most well-known and studied colonial texts. The handwritten and illustrated book—included in UNESCO's *Memory of the World Register* in 2007—aligns in many ways with the works of Alva in its ability to interpret and reshape history in a way that achieves a desired outcome. In the case of Guaman Poma, his seventeenth-century work intended to present native Andeans to King Philip III as loyal subjects with a noble past who deserved better government than what the Spaniards presently provided. In 2013, a wide variety of scholars gathered at the Royal Library in Copenhagen for the Second International Guaman Poma Conference to celebrate the near four hundredth anniversary of Guaman Poma's work (created in 1615) and to present new research on the historian and his text. The library has served as the home to Guaman Poma's work since the 1660s, so the setting seemed fitting. The resulting volume, *Unlocking the Doors to the Worlds of Guaman Poma and His "Nueva corónica"*, edited by Rolena Adorno and Ivan Boserup, contains fourteen papers presented at that conference.

As a whole, the volume's central questions resonate with those asked of Nahua historians and their works, particularly those concerning motives, audience, indigenous and European influences, and colonial context. Some of the papers examined the *Nueva corónica* itself to understand better its origins and influences. Through an expert use of comparative analysis, Ivan Boserup and Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer demonstrate how an item from the controversial Miccinelli manuscripts, the *Contract*, which supposedly confirms that the Jesuit priest Blas Valera authored the *Nueva corónica* and not Guaman Poma, is a forgery. Gregory T. Cushman brings an insightful ecological lens through which to view the *Nueva corónica*. Highlighting the importance of trees and wood, Cushman explores the unsuccessful court case of Guaman Poma to defend his ancestral ties to Chupas and its trees and argues how this personal loss and dispossession inspired the composition of his famous chronicle.

Various contributors pay due homage to the European influences on the text as well as those indigenous. Guaman Poma authored his text, to be sure, but he did not work in an intellectual vacuum. Indeed, José Cárdenas Bunsen demonstrates the influence of early eschatological prophecies and Bartolomé de las Casas's political thinking, as recorded in the Ternaux manuscript and circulated among the intellectual community, on Guaman Poma's argument for the restitution of power to the native rulers. Moreover, the chapter by Jesper Nielsen and Mettelse Fritz Hansen compares imagery found in both Mesoamerican works and the *Nueva corónica* portraying the presentation of a written work to a superior and the devil. As a result, the authors demonstrate the influence of a shared repertoire of European iconography. Similarly examining imagery in the chronicle, Audrey Prévôtel convincingly illustrates the influence of images from the *Flos sanctorum* on Guaman Poma's own illustrations, while exposing how the native historian altered the European images to convey new colonial meanings.

Certainly native sources and culture likewise played an influential role. In his comparative and philological study of the conquest narratives related by the *Nueva corónica*, and various indigenous accounts as oral histories preserved in dramas still active in various locations in central Peru, Jean-Philippe Husson argues for the influence of the latter on the former. Similar to those works examining Nahua annals, Husson addresses the malleability of the historical past in such histories that often fall subject to the authors' motives. Examining the miracles surrounding the 1536 siege of Cuzco, Amnon Nir provides a new—and to some, perhaps controversial—perspective that seeks to include an Andean influence to the miracles themselves. Moreover, the ability of Guaman Poma to represent Andean reality visually is examined in Juan M. Ossio A.'s chapter. Through an impressive textual and visual comparison of images found in the *Nueva corónica* and two manuscript versions of Martín de Murúa's chronicle, Ossio illustrates how Guaman Poma portrayed Inca nobility and *tocapus* more accurately and consistently than did Murúa.

Both Regina Harrison and Gregory Khaimovich cast a brighter light on the important issues of Guaman Poma's audience and his intentional use of language. Found within Guaman Poma's work is a sample writ of *amparo* (statement of protection) and a sample will. Harrison examines these documents to illustrate both the familiarity of Guaman Poma with Spanish law, particularly to defend the rights of Andeans, and the absorption of such legal and ecclesiastic traditions into native society. The inclusion of such samples hints at the inclusion of an Andean readership, something that the chapter of Khaimovich posits through its linguistic analysis of Quechua passages included in the *Nueva corónica* and its strategy of code-switching. Bruce Mannheim also contributes to the linguistic examinations of the chronicle. He examines the specificity, production format, and genre of the *Warikza arawi* text found within Guaman Poma's description of a ritual that occurred in the autumn in Cuzco concluding that it is "a festival narrative, generic rather than specific, a polyptic that provides a normative guide to performing the ritual" (227).

Like many of the works examining Nahua historiography, the present volume focusses less on the historical narrative of the *Nueva corónica* and more on the influences and motives of its author. Yet some exceptions exist. With regards to the *Nueva corónica's* description of government agencies, Jan Szemiński argues that the narrative is overlooked because it is "either rejected as a provincial nobleman's fantasies, or simply bypassed in silence" (398). Szemiński seeks to remedy the issue by illustrating the complexity of imperial and local administration of the Inca Empire through a detailed analysis of the agencies described in the *Nueva corónica* and philological studies of the Quechua words. Similarly, R. Tom Zuidema's interests concern the Inca ranking system and hierarchical model as outlined by Guaman Poma. Employing an examination of the dress of the individuals drawn in the work, Zuidema demonstrates the value of the chronicle's model and its reflection of an original understanding of the matter.

Bringing the *Nueva corónica* into modern times, Frank Salomon examines the presence of *sapçi*—a term relating communal property—in the pre-Columbian, colonial, and modern eras. Salomon draws from extensive ethnographic experience and historical knowledge to propose the endurance of *sapçi* as a practice in various forms from pre-Hispanic precedents to modern-day communal structures in Rapaz and Tupicocha. In the end, the interdisciplinary nature of the volume provides a variety of analyses, from linguistic to historical to anthropological, appealing to a diverse audience of scholars. Moreover, the volume is visually engaging although lengthy, for the press spared no expense on the inclusion of images; the entire volume contains copious illustrations beautifully reproduced and many in color.

As shown in the works of Alva Ixtlilxochitl, those of mixed-race descent played important contributory roles in the historiographies of their culture. Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and his *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* and *General History of Peru* are no exception. As a mestizo born of a conquistador father and an Inca noblewoman, Garcilaso became fluent in both Spanish and Andean worlds. Born in Cusco, Peru, in 1539, Garcilaso traveled to Spain in 1560, where, many years later, he penned his history of the Incas, the *Royal Commentaries*. As the *Nueva corónica* would not be discovered until 1908, Garcilaso's work enjoyed enormous popularity and influence for centuries. In their edited volume *Inca Garcilaso and Contemporary World-Making*, Sara Castro-Klarén and Christian Fernández present "a serious attempt to bring to the English-speaking academy a sense of the importance of Garcilaso's work on historiography" (Castro-Klarén, 3). While not quite as interdisciplinary as the volume on Guaman Poma—most contributors hail from departments of language and literature—the present volume offers a wide range of topical themes from historiography to rhetorical sources to translation. The volume's modes and means of analysis differ than the previous works discussed, and literary scholars will certainly feel more at home here.

After presenting a biography of Garcilaso, Christian Fernández examines the coat of arms that appears on the frontispiece of the *Royal Commentaries*. Representing both European and Andean iconography, the coat of arms is a visual testament to Garcilaso's dual identities and his authority to speak to both European and native worlds. Further examining symbolism contained within the work, José Antonio Mazzotti performs an alternate reading of the text to uncover symbolic connections between Garcilaso's imagery and that of the Andean worldview. Mazzotti recognizes the influence of European thought and iconography, to be sure. Yet he also reveals the multiple meanings such imagery can hold in both native and European cultures. Further exploring the topic of influences, Sara Castro-Klarén argues for the role of the Neoplatonist philosopher Marsilio Ficino in shaping the *Royal Commentaries* and its portrayal of Inca civilization and the great pagan civilizations of the ancient past as connected to a single world.

The dissemination and readership of the *Royal Commentaries* is a topic often overlooked, but one that Pedro M. Guibovich Pérez addresses in his well-researched and clearly written essay. Similar to the works of Nahua historians, Garcilaso's work was claimed by creoles in their efforts to build up a national image. Yet indigenous elite, such as Tupac Amaru II, read the work through a different lens, one that influenced their

political demands and agenda for change and restitution. James W. Fuerst further extends the readership of the *Royal Commentaries* to include John Locke. Fuerst's chapter offers insights into how Locke employed the work of Garcilaso in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) in Anglocentric ways to convey "an illusion of indigenous compliance" (291) but also how Garcilaso's portrayal of the Inca reflected his own Cuscocentrism.

Issues of translation and race appear in the chapters of Susana Jákfalvi-Leiva and Margarita Zamora. The former studies how Garcilaso's ideas on translation—whether faithfully translating another's work, or rewriting the historical past—influenced his works (this theme of translation is also discussed briefly by Julio Ortega); the latter explores his definitions of racial terms as they appear in his writings to show his agency in challenging existing stigmas. Gonzalo Lamana likewise contributes to alternate readings of Garcilaso. Lamana reads the *Royal Commentaries* as a two-layered text emerging from a "consciousness of coloniality" (310) to contribute additional motives to Garcilaso and his readership. Finally, Walter D. Mignolo addresses historiography and the act of writing history broadly in the New World. His chapter illustrates shifts in the historiographical discursive formation over three centuries of writing and analyzes the evolving concept of historiography among historians and their preoccupation with reality. Francisco A. Ortega Martínez asks why scholars continually return to Garcilaso's texts and illustrates our changing need to read in the texts evidence of ideological and interpretive "specters" both past and present. The volume concludes with an afterword by John Beverley that offers his thoughts on the influence of transculturation and creole identity on postcolonial and revisionist studies.

All works thus far have addressed the theme regarding what can or should be considered a historical text or a chronicle, and what type of "truth" such texts may contain. They all have rightfully recognized the multiplicity of truth and its myriad perspectives and interpretations that, in turn, create different historical events. The final work examined here is Celia López-Chávez's *Epics of Empire and Frontier*, whose analysis of two epic poems to explore Spanish imperialism and native resistance proves effective in arguing the genre's value as a contributor to historiography. The poems examined are Alonso de Ercilla's *La Araucana* (published in three parts in 1569, 1578, and 1589, respectively), which recounts the conquest of the Arauco region in Chile and the resistance of the Mapuche, and Gaspar de Villagrà's *Historia de la Nueva México* (1610) relating the battle of Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico. López-Chávez casts a bright light on the northern and southern frontiers of Spanish America that all too often find themselves in the shadows of scholarly attention. Moreover, the author's experience in both history and geography allows "space" and "cultural geography" to play an influential role in providing context for the poems' creation.

Throughout its pages, *Epics of Empire and Frontier* illustrates the influence of imperial politics, intellectual movements, and geography on the two authors' texts. The first of the book's two parts concerns the space of the empire, or imperial space, whose politics and legal framework shaped the poems. López-Chávez illustrates this influence through both poems' frequent reference of the importance of royal authority in bringing order and Christianity to the world. Throughout, the poets strive to connect their own deeds and labors with those of the monarch and his kingdom. Continuing to highlight the impact of empire, the work illustrates the influence of the legal uncertainties and debates surrounding conquest. Early, unchecked violence and the treatment of natives represented in the arguments of Bartolomé de las Casas affected Ercilla, whose poem highlights both the Araucanians' free will and ability to govern themselves, and the violence committed against them. Later, the legal context of the New Ordinances for Settlement and Discovery issued in 1573, which attempted to curtail abuses, would influence Villagrà, who emphasizes the role of religion and just war, reflecting his education at the University of Salamanca.

López-Chávez then turns to explore the influence of geography and how "the two poets make the description of the landscape an important element to heighten the central theme of violent confrontation" (138). The description of geography as untamed and wild frontiers inhabited by natives of a necessarily fierce nature played important roles in *La Araucana's* portrayal of the indomitable Araucanian, and the *Historia's* spiritual conquest over an equally toughened native. Although speaking of American subjects, the poems reflect a genre of literary Renaissance epics. Yet neither truly explores what the geography meant to the natives or even contain accurate historical narratives of the native past. Interestingly, Villagrà's poem and its reflection on the distant native past and its achievements with pride evinces a burgeoning creole nationalism evident in many of the works already discussed.

Furthermore, both poems evoke the unruly geography of the frontier to add drama and plight to the conquering Spaniards, whose conquests involved both the natives and their landscape—the former using their knowledge of the latter often to impede the Europeans. Within this landscape, the geographic landmarks of rivers, lakes, volcanoes, plains, and rocky bluffs also entered into the poems as elements of frontier savagery that often resisted the conquering efforts of the Spaniards. An epilogue concludes the book with thoughtful

comments on the legacy and scholarly critique of the two poems, bringing the relevance of both colonial texts into a contemporary light.

Camilla Townsend commented on the Nahua perspective that “no history should be told in only one way” (*Annals of Native America*, 187)—something all the works here have demonstrated. Although ranging throughout the colonial territories of Spain, and although dealing with subjects and cultures equally diverse, the studies provide new insights into the motives of authors; the influences of their education, ethnicity, and colonial context in general; and the myriad perspectives from which to view their writings. Certainly, the historical contributions of colonial chroniclers are important and insightful. Yet so too are the forces that guide the historian’s pen. Together, the studies reveal colonialism not as a one-way street of intellectual exchange, but an expansive highway full of cultural intersections and exchanges that formed the elements of a larger intellectual community whose parameters changed throughout the colonial period, as did the histories they created.

Author Information

Mark Christensen is an associate professor of history specializing in colonial Latin America at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Among his various publications are *Nahua and Maya Catholicisms: Texts and Religion in Colonial Central Mexico and Yucatan* (2013), *Translated Christianities: Nahuatl and Maya Religious Texts* (2014); *Native Wills from the Colonial Americas: Dead Giveaways in a New World* (with Jonathan Truitt, 2016), and *The Teabo Manuscript: Maya Christian Copybooks, Chilam Balams, and Native Text Production in Yucatan* (2016).

How to cite this article: Christensen, Mark. 2018. The Historian’s Craft: Creating the Past in Colonial Latin America. *Latin American Research Review* 53(4). pp. 839–846. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.337>

Submitted: 15 September 2017

Accepted: 04 October 2017

Published: 20 December 2018

Copyright: © 2018 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

LARR

Latin American Research Review is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Latin American Studies Association.

OPEN ACCESS 