

institutional barriers that may be as artificial as the disciplinary narrative that *Vernacular Latin Americanisms* aims to confute.

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LORI BOORNAZIAN DIEL. *The Codex Mexicanus: A Guide to Life in Late Sixteenth-Century New Spain*. U of Texas P, 2018, 228 pp.

What is time? Is time the possibility of all events? If so, what is the fate of human beings, a species both cursed and blessed with memory and imagination? Dividing time into past, present, and future is how many human societies have anchored themselves, as they manage and organize the temporal flow, tether memory to the past and assign imagination to the future. But what about the relationship between the past, present, and future? A corporeal existence ensures that we carry with us always and everywhere a very particular past, that of the origin and development of our individual body. Living inside of this personal time capsule offers almost nothing to help us with both the human collective in time nor to develop an understanding that time existed before our bodies and will extend beyond them. When Norbert Elias published *Über die Zeit* in 1984 (translated as *An Essay on Time* in 2007), he pointed to the importance of the calendar and the clock as the great organizing mechanisms of social time, means through which any human group could coordinate its activities, like planting and harvesting, to ensure its survival. The calendar does more: in extending a count back through time, it offers a means to connect the past to the present, and holds out, in its reliable repetition, a promise of the future. The calendar allows a structure for commemoration, so that the past is even more strongly anchored to the present. Moreover, solar and lunar calendars, perhaps the most common ones known today, are marked by naturalism. Like a photo-realist painting, whose authority derives from closely mimicking human visual experience, calendars take their power from their alignment to the perceived movement of the celestial bodies. They thus offer a way of naturalizing what could be the arbitrary nature of human event. Set into solar time, a birthday becomes anchored in time, consistently available for annual commemoration, offering the first point of a span of life dates, ready for historical reflection.

In Mesoamerican societies, two calendars were used to record time, the solar-year calendar (xiuhpohualli) and the 260-day tonalpohualli. These were recorded pictographically in manuscripts, with the years of the xiuhpohualli forming the backbone of annals-style histories. The tonalpohualli was a sacred calendar, used to understand how the cycles of past time colored the present-day moment and what they augured for the future. Once ubiquitous, only eleven pre-Hispanic tonalpohualli survive today. But calendric manuscripts continued to be produced during the sixteenth century, and Lori Boornazian Diel's new book is a close study of one of these. Produced by indigenous scribes in Mexico City who still employed traditional pictography, the 102-page *Codex Mexicanus* is devoted mainly to a xiuhpohualli (18–87), recording events from the departure of the Mexica from the mythic homeland of Aztlan, through the events of the Conquest,

up to 1581, about the time that the manuscript was largely finished. It also includes two tonalpohualli (13–14; 89–102).

Reflecting its post-Conquest moment, the *Mexicanus* contains not only these indigenous calendars but also includes a Christian perpetual (also called dominical) calendar, used to calculate when Sundays fell in any given year, as well as European-style charts, one lunar and two zodiac, one of the latter connecting the zodiac to parts and organs of a human body to create a “zodiac man.” Unique to this manuscript is a double calendar wheel representing an attempt to synch the Christian perpetual calendar with the xiuhpohualli. A single alphabetic annotation noting the arrival of Augustinians to San Pablo, one of Mexico City’s indigenous neighborhoods, suggests that this might have been the ambit of its creation. Given the plurality of the *Mexicanus*’s content, which brings together various calendars but provides no overarching rationale for their union, scholars have tended to treat only its parts, like the xiuhpohualli that dominates the manuscript, or the genealogy of the royal house of Tenochtitlan on pages 16–17, the subject of an excellent recent article in *Itinerarios* by María Castañeda de la Paz (2016). Diel’s book is especially valuable for treating all parts of the manuscript and trying to make sense of it as a whole.

The four body chapters loosely track the different sections of the manuscript. Diel made the decision to discuss both the Christian perpetual calendar, the indigenous tonalpohualli, and the calendar wheels together in chapter two because she understands them all to be the work of native intellectuals “fully embracing Christianity and melding it with traditional beliefs, . . . the two systems held in balance, not in tension” (19). Chapter 3, “Astrology, Health, and Medicine in New Spain,” takes up the parts of the manuscript dealing with medical astrology, which included the zodiac. While it has been well established by Alfredo López Austin and David Tavárez that the Nahuas were quite familiar with period books called *Repertorios de los tiempos* published in Spain and used them as sources for the lunar tables and zodiac material in the *Mexicanus*, Diel offers a more comprehensive account of the correlation. Moreover, she is able to identify one anonymous *repertorio* of 1554 as being the likely source for the golden number chart in the *Mexicanus*, as well as the zodiac man. Chapter 4 deals with the royal genealogy. And chapter 5, perhaps the most conventional in its approach, works through the content of the largely pictographic xiuhpohualli, interpreting its recorded events carefully and systematically, page by page, year by year. Because pictography, which depended in its day on informed interpreters, can be ambiguous today (for instance, what does the image of a bishop mean?), Diel triangulates with other colonial-period tonalpohualli. She draws frequent comparisons to the *Codex Aubin*, a manuscript of similar origin and date, which includes alphabetic texts written in Nahuatl to complement its pictography.

The University of Texas Press and the author are to be commended for their decision to reproduce the manuscript in its entirety (added kudos for the reasonable list price of the book). The *Mexicanus* is an odd shape, about twice as wide as it is high, and some pages at the front and the back of the manuscript are now missing. The designer solved the problem of the book’s presentation by placing two bifolds of the manuscript across a single bifold page of the book, so that the gutter of the manuscript appears as the gutter of the book. Thus, the reader can

access not only the book's content, but also envision its reality as an object. It is the latter that has stymied so many of its researchers. The *Mexicanus* is the project of different a number of authors and was abused and repurposed by a number of them: probably in the seventeenth century, an unknown writer filled the bottom half of 12 pages of the tonalpohualli with a Nahuatl text about the zodiac; at some other point, probably earlier, a painter inserted symbols representing the Catholic Articles of Faith across three pages. Such interventions signal the importance of this manuscript to a changing interpretive community across time, and preclude any single-strand analysis of its meaning.

Diel's conclusion—that the *Codex Mexicanus* served as “a guide for living as Nahua Christians in late sixteenth-century New Spain and beyond” (161), which allowed its users to “[gain] control over an unstable world that was increasingly threatening their way of life and autonomy” (164)—is capacious enough to apply to much of the wide-ranging content of the book. And certainly, it is particularly germane to the sections derived from the Spanish *repertorio* tradition. Her emphasis on the coping strategies of Nahua elites, as they synched native counts to foreign calendars and recorded European medical astrology while their ranks were thinned by European epidemic disease, puts indigenous resilience front and center.

But it also serves to soften the brutal realities of the long war of conquest, one of whose fronts was the order of time itself. And I use “conquest” here pointedly, because unlike many indigenous technologies which were either considered useful and adapted by the settler colonists, or benign and ignored, the tonalpohualli was a dangerous instrument. Efforts to understand the native calendar and then eradicate it were among the first agenda items of settler colonists, right after they had figured out how to profit handsomely from native labor and goods. As suggested above, the calendar promoted in Christian Europe was not just a device to coordinate human activity, but an expression of an entire regime of time, which began in the year 1 with the birth of Jesus, and would end with Messiah's Second Coming. Assigning Christian dates to the xiuhpohualli years, as did one of the contributors to the *Mexicanus*, was to bring native peoples into a regime of time that was in the process of establishing itself as universal, not only in its claim to mark time's beginning (its effort at predicting the end had failed spectacularly in 1000), but also in its naturalism. Small coincidence that the date of the *Mexicanus*'s initial creation coincided with the global effort, led by the Pope and Philip II of Spain, to introduce the new Gregorian calendar in 1582, which allowed the humanly constructed and Christo-centric count to better represent the movements of sun and earth.

By bringing us closer to the minds of indigenous intellectuals as they pondered their era's regime of time, Diel is to be applauded for addressing another of colonization's cruel legacies: the denial of indigenous history. And part of that history, seen in the last pages of the manuscript where the sacred tonalpohualli has been scraped off the manuscript surface, was the destruction of indigenous time. This episode of erasure has its own predictive force: if calendars offer a future, then the only one possible to the creators of the *Mexicanus*, and to millions of other indigenous people, was a Christian one.