

route of Mexico City's Corpus Christi procession. To Spaniards, these arches symbolized Indians' political and religious submission; to Nahuas, their construction was a right and a privilege through which political hierarchies among indigenous communities were annually re-articulated. Provincial towns paid a fee—reminiscent of Aztec imperial tribute—to the native leaders of Tenochtitlán and Tlatelolco in order to participate in the colony's largest religious event. Each contributing town was granted a specific space along the processional route, with distance from the cathedral indicating a town's rank. During Holy Week, disputes centered on such popular customs as dressing as Roman centurions for Passion plays and processions and the public flogging of actors who portrayed Jesus.

Nahua leaders managed to limit the impact of "reform" efforts, even though the framework of royal and noble privilege within which they operated would soon be made obsolete by Mexico's independence. This engaging account of Nahua Christianity in the final half-century of Spanish rule adds welcome insights to the continuing re-evaluation of Mexico's "spiritual conquest."

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Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate. By Elizabeth Hill Boone.
Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. Pp. 320. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index.

An extraordinarily complex calendrical system structured the cosmos and lives of peoples in pre-conquest central Mexico. Books showed how this system came into being and shaped the world, its events, and human daily existence. Highly skilled artists painted these books on either hide or bark paper, forming them into folding screens that stood upright, zigzagging accordion-like across a surface. Equally skilled diviners "read" their information, probably lending drama to the exposition of these "containers of the knowledge of the world."

At one time, such manuscripts would have been ubiquitous throughout the region, but the Spanish conquest ended that (1521). Now, only nine books painted in this sophisticated tradition remain, and only six of them are clearly pre-conquest. The other three, although created in an indigenous style, were produced after the conquest, as were three colonial-influenced copies of lost manuscripts. The books in this indigenous style are key for understanding pre-conquest worldviews, thus making the earlier examples especially valuable. Beyond these books and archaeological evidence, we have only the words of post-conquest Spanish chroniclers. While the chronicles are valuable, their authors sharply mediate indigenous voices. The only primary books are the pictorial manuscripts made in the indigenous style. Many scholars have commented in detail on the books in this corpus, most frequently on single manuscripts, for an academic audience. Up to now, no one has attempted a thorough, yet broadly synthetic study that treats the corpus as a coherent whole, with such clarity as to make it accessible to both lay people and scholars. Boone's work is a tour de force.

The corpus as a whole forms an incredibly large and difficult topic, yet Boone manages the unavoidably vast range of scholarly demands adeptly, with numerous balanced discussions of the many debates swirling around the manuscripts, an appropriate amount of interpretive detail to support her viewpoints, the courage to offer some very interesting new interpretations, and enough caution to back off when evidence seems lacking. What more could one want from a single volume of some 250 pages, with pictures?

That said, *Cycles of Time and Meaning* is not a light read. Boone's intensely packed book will find interested audiences among Mesoamericanists, graduate students, advanced undergraduates, and interested, serious-minded lay people. I would not recommend it for lower-level undergraduate classrooms, although some sections could be usable. And some scholars will find her work lacking in one way or another, but that is only to be expected in an open academic arena. For example, I find her contrast between the nonlinear and divinatory and linear, historical time a bit pat. Although comparing Mexican divination to the "systems of correspondence" of Chinese divination is excellent, to dichotomize time too simply understates the high degree to which pre-conquest "historical" life intertwined with divinatory forces. The historical books were produced in a linear format, yes, but even so divinatory forces governed just about every aspect of life, including human communities (see Boone's companion book, *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs*, 2000). Similarly troublesome is her persistent use of the category "supernatural" versus "natural," another Western dichotomy that does not quite hold up to the extreme intermingling in her subjects' experience of living forces, both human and non-human. Perhaps we lack adequate language to explore this realm, but that should not free us to use verbal categories suggesting a very different sense of the "sacred" from what the pictorial manuscripts seem to depict. I also wonder about a few specific interpretations, but all these disagreements are secondary considering the volume's brilliance.

Particularly stunning is Boone's ability to interrogate the books' spatial canons, suggesting how these visual "syntaxes" structured the "graphic vocabularies." Comparing this visual language to Western mathematical and scientific notation, Boone moves well beyond the common lexical, iconographic studies that focus on discrete elements of a work but often fail to see the larger compositional structures leading one's eye through a manuscript. Her fine-tuned ability to read the manuscripts visually brings to light much possible information that has been hidden in these knowledge-laden containers; her interpretation of a cosmogony pictured in the Codex Borgia is particularly fine. Boone's sophisticated visual focus also helps her locate possible origins for the much-contested manuscripts of the Borgia group, thus allowing her to formulate an appealing theory based on trade patterns, alliances, and frequent interactions. After a very close read, I would say that this volume should be required reading for anyone with a strong interest in pre-conquest Mexican worldviews.

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