

from which specialists in Mesoamerican archaeology, ethnohistory, and gender studies will profit because of her wide reading, original thinking, and interpretive skills.

Reference

Proskouriakoff, Tatiana

1961 Portraits of Women in Maya Art. *In* *Essays in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*. Samuel K. Lothrop, ed. Pp. 81–99. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

The Tenochca Empire of Ancient Mexico: The Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan, Tetzcoco, and Tlacopan. By Pedro Carrasco. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. xviii + 542 pp., preface, maps, tables, glossary, bibliography, general index, toponym index. \$49.95 cloth.)

Michael E. Smith, *University at Albany, SUNY*

Did the Aztec “triple alliance” exist? This question, first raised by Charles Gibson (1971), is answered in radically different ways by three recent studies of the Aztec empire. Here, Pedro Carrasco answers loudly in the affirmative. This scholarly tour de force about the tributary structure of the empire explores the complex and confusing distinctions between towns subject to the entire empire (the triple alliance) and those subject only to one of the three allies (Tenochtitlan, Tetzcoco, and Tlacopan).

Susan Gillespie (1998) responds in the negative. She notes that descriptions of an imperial alliance in the earliest colonial documents are lacking and suggests that the alliance was largely invented in the mid to late sixteenth century by native elites and Spanish chroniclers. Unfortunately, Gillespie does not cite the original edition of the present book (Carrasco 1996), nor does Carrasco cite Gillespie’s work in this 1999 English version. (There are few changes from the original Spanish-language edition, reviewed in this journal by Frederic Hicks [1999]). A third position on Gibson’s question, presented in Berdan et al. 1996, takes an agnostic view of the existence of the triple alliance. These authors (including myself) were developing a bottom-up view of the organization of empire (in contrast to Carrasco’s top-down approach) and decided that the issue of diverse and cross-cutting tributary arrangements was too complex to attack; indeed, it takes Carrasco 430 pages of text and 60 pages of notes to describe. Therefore we assumed for heuristic purposes that the empire was a unitary phenomenon and proceeded with our analysis. Because of the different approaches taken

by Carrasco's book and our study, the two works complement each other nicely with surprisingly little overlap.

The Tenochca Empire of Ancient Mexico is narrowly focused, and from that limited perspective flows its great strengths as well as some weaknesses. The thoroughness of Carrasco's research of early documents—both published and archival—is impressive. He brings a wide range of sources to bear on his analysis and includes frank discussions of the level of empirical coverage in the documents and the subsequent strength of his interpretations. The level of detail—including numerous lists of towns and maps—will deter nonspecialist readers, but the book is a gold mine of information for historians and archaeologists. Indeed this volume takes its place alongside the works of Robert Barlow (1949) and Peter Gerhard (1993) as an essential reference on the area covered by the Aztec empire. For example, Carrasco's book contains more details on imperial organization of the Gulf Coast area than do either Barlow's or Berdan et al.'s, and Carrasco's discussion of the chronology of imperial expansion improves on Ross Haggis's (1988) work. The downside of Carrasco's narrow focus is his failure to integrate the tributary organization with other imperial processes, such as exchange relations, elite dynamics, and ideology. The next step will be to attempt this integration.

Although Carrasco has copious documentation for the organization of the inner part of the Aztec empire (the Basin of Mexico, Morelos, and the Toluca Valley), there are fewer sources on the outer provinces, and I find his model of those areas less convincing. In order to sustain his argument, for example, Carrasco must rely on a novel interpretation of the tribute section of the Codex Mendoza, which is unlikely to find widespread acceptance. He suggests that the first tributary provinces presented in the codex—all located in the central part of the empire—were subject only to Tenochtitlan (i.e., not to the alliance as a whole), but that tribute from the outer provinces presented later in the document was destined for all three capitals of the alliance (69–76). There is no indication in the Codex Mendoza itself, however, for this change in meaning part way through the tribute section. Carrasco also errs in his discussion of the geographic origins of tribute goods, grossly understating the extent to which provinces had to engage in trade to obtain the goods they owed to the empire (435).

So who has the correct answer to Gibson's question about the existence of the triple alliance? I find Carrasco's model convincing, at least for the central part of the empire (for the outer empire, I prefer the interpretations put forward in *Aztec Imperial Strategies*). Gillespie's model rests largely upon negative evidence, particularly the paucity of references to an alliance in the earliest written sources. But she fails to mention that the vast

majority of our documentary evidence on Aztec social, political, and economic institutions (such as the triple alliance) dates to the mid to late sixteenth century. If one took a lack of descriptions in the very earliest sources to indicate the absence of phenomena prior to the Spanish conquest, one would have to conclude that numerous accepted features of Aztec society—from *pochteca* merchants to poetry and formal oratory—were colonial-period inventions. Nevertheless, Gillespie does bring up some important issues of colonial historiography that one wishes Carrasco had treated in greater detail. It is too bad that the authors did not cite each other's work on this question. In any case, *The Tenochca Empire of Ancient Mexico* is an important and timely work that will serve as a basic reference source for a long time.

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