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Book Review

- *Contested Contest. Indigenous Perspectives on the Spanish Occupation of Nueva Galicia, 1524-1545*, by Ida Altman. Latin American Originals 12, Pennsylvania University Press, 2017

This short volume of one hundred and thirty-three pages presents a collection of original texts about the conquest of Nueva Galicia, in the West of current-day Mexico. It is part of a series meant for scholars, but especially for teaching. Conquest of the areas on the central highlands, outside the core lands of Mexico, were more difficult than that of Tenochtitlan and surrounding territories. They were characterized by a series of setbacks for Spanish conquistadors as a result of a lack of coordination, internal strife, and more fragmented settlements and socio-political indigenous entities that were harder to control than the indigenous heartlands.

The volume is organized into four chapters that contain several contemporary texts based on both Spanish and Indigenous witness accounts of the different stages of the conquest and resistance. The sources from Spanish language publications or archives have been translated to English. Altman provides the reader with an introductory chapter about the conquest of what the Spaniards would call Nueva Galicia and its different stages. The sources are a petition by an indigenous ruler that was taken captive and sent to Spain for trial, several Spanish accounts of the vicissitudes of the conquest, an indigenous account of the expedition by Spanish and indigenous troupes to crush the indigenous revolt. These are all useful texts that highlight not only different aspects of the events, but are also selected for their different points of view. The main differences between the texts are about the role of Nuño de Guzmán, president of the first Audiencia from 1528-1530 and governor of Nueva Galicia from 1529-1534 who came into conflict with other influential Spaniards, among whom Hernan Cortés. In 1537, he was arrested and sent back to Spain in shackles. Obviously, the accounts about him are rather partial and aim to depict him as a cruel tyrant. The texts are well introduced by Altman as she highlights their (political) differences and the opinions. The texts are all from within twenty-five years after the conquest and stress the indigenous noble remembrance of when they still were rulers. Especially

interesting are those by indigenous authors. For instance, the ‘lament of Don Francisco Tenamaztle’ who first revolted against the Spaniards, and then fled and hid for ten years before he turned himself in and was transported to Spain for trial, is interesting because he tries to mitigate his own actions by accusing Spanish governors (especially Nuño de Guzmán) of tyranny, cruelty and injustice. It is a cleverly constructed piece that uses layers of Spanish judicial and victim rhetoric to try and accomplish rehabilitation, a lost case before Spanish courts. From Altman’s footnotes it appears that apparently he died in Spain, so his lament did not have much effect. The other longer indigenous text is that by Don Francisco de Sandoval Acacitli, indigenous ruler of Tlalmanalco in the indigenous altepetl (polity) of Chalco, near Mexico-City. He wrote an account of the campaign against the revolt in which a Spanish army led by viceroy Mendoza was joined by indigenous troops from a number of central-Mexican polities. Don Francisco de Sandoval Acacitli describes the indigenous generals, who once more put on their war garments and campaigned together with the Spaniards. Like before, they were even allowed to take prisoners among the rebels. We may wonder whether, for most indigenous armies, fighting along the Spaniards was much different than fighting with the Mexican (Aztec) imperial troops. Altman suggests that now the success was even greater, as the Aztecs had never before been able to conquer the areas of the North-West (see p.96).

For teaching purposes and scholars alike, this is an interesting small volume that makes previously rather inaccessible (fragments of) texts available. To make students see through both the different points of view of opposing authors and the layers of rhetoric they employed to get through to their original audiences - the ruling and judicial courts in Spain in the sixteenth century - the texts however still require a lot of explanation by teachers.

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