

The Codex Mexicanus: A Guide to Life in Late Sixteenth-Century New Spain. By Lori Boornazian Diel. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018. viii+164 pp., appendices, color plates, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 hardcover.)

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The Codex Mexicanus fortifies Lori Boornazian Diel's reputation as a leading art historian of colonial Mexico. An in-depth study of a postcontact pictorial manuscript from central Mexico, this book artfully combines a catalog of the contents with the author's own significant analysis. Though intended for a specialist audience, the book also speaks to a broader readership by exploring connections with early modern European history. This book is informed by a variety of interdisciplinary studies, from manuscript studies to art ethnohistorical research. Diel's analysis of the visual content is impressive and reveals the multivalent nature of the colonial source.

The layout of the book follows from the general themes found in the codex, focusing on time and religion, health, lineage, and history. The first chapter establishes the context in which the manuscript was produced. Approximately sixty years after the Spanish invasion, Nahua creators in Tenochtitlan wrote and illustrated the *Mexicanus* as a guide containing essential information for life in New Spain. The second chapter explains how the authors and artists conceived of time and its relationship to their beliefs. In the third chapter, Diel explores connections between human and celestial bodies, presented by the authors in a distinctly European form of medical astrology. The last two chapters present the codex's historical records represented in the forms of the lineage of the Tenochca royal house and the pictorial history of the Mexica from the ancient past until colonial rule. The final chapter reveals the author's keen analysis of these themes to show that the codex must have served as a tool to document knowledge during a transitional and, considering the prevailing epidemics, terrifying time period. The final section of the book contains beautiful color plates of the entire codex, allowing for independent study of the visual and alphabetic texts.

Building on her previous scholarship on the same manuscript, Diel contextualizes the lives of the creators. Her evenhanded analysis allows for the makers of the codex to have been engaged in balancing rather than battling various colonial systems. Her analysis does much to rescue terms

such as *hybrid* from the heap of unfashionable terms because scholars have yet to settle on appropriate terminology for the cultural products of the colonial period. Diel nimbly avoids absolute labels of *Native* or *European* and instead explores the biculturality of religious, medical, and historical knowledge. The book benefits from Diel's research insights on European traditions, a facet previous studies of Mexican codices have often ignored or allowed to be the sole focus of their analysis. The author brings to bear all of her impressive expertise in comparing with other codices the Mexicanus's alphabetic and visual sections on the lineage and history of the Mexica.

A topic hinted at but left partially explored is what the materiality of the Mexicanus tells us about its authors and artists and the time of its creation. Diel briefly explains throughout the book that the folios of the codex indicate whitewashing of heretical material (20), deterioration likely to the result of frequent usage (66), and poor condition of images leading to confusion of annotations (147). I would have truly enjoyed reading what Diel's brilliant mind would puzzle together from an in-depth material analysis of the codex.

The Codex Mexicanus joins the ranks of excellent books centered on a single text. In addition to providing beautiful color plates of the original manuscript, the author shows the context of its creation and comparisons with related codices. Overall, this book is a balanced and well-written examination of the content of the source, both visual and alphabetic, accompanied by Diel's expert analysis.