

***The Lienzo of Tlapiltepec: A Painted History from the Northern Mixteca.* Arni Brownstone, ed. With contributions by Nicholas Johnson and Bas van Doesburg. Forward by Elizabeth Hill Boone. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 190pp. [Co-published with The Royal Ontario Museum.]\***

Reviewed by John D. Monaghan

The Lienzo of Tlapiltepec is one of a set of remarkable colonial-era cartographic histories from the Coixtlahuaca region of the Southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. Painted in the native style on cotton cloth, it is inscribed with events from the past, the genealogies of rulers, information on political alliances and boundaries, and the location of special sites. It was composed sometime in the mid-16th century, but it begins with events that occurred hundreds of years earlier. It currently resides in the Royal Ontario Museum where the editor, Arni Brownstone, holds a curatorial position. Although the Lienzo of Tlapiltepec has been discussed in earlier scholarly works, until now it has never been adequately reproduced, subjected to any kind of technical analysis, or put in the context of the early colonial history of the region. This volume contains several readable images of the manuscript (the challenge is its size; at almost four meters, it is literally, as the photo on page 94 shows, as big as a house) and an additional 97 figures illustrating details from the lienzo as well as other manuscripts of the Coixtlahuaca group, along with maps and photographs of the region. The volume is part of a trend in the study of Mesoamerican pictorials that supplements the venerable single-authored commentary and expensive facsimile with an affordable reproduction that examines the manuscript from a variety of angles. As a genre, the commentary has not changed much since the first were published over a century ago. The problem is that today no one person can master the specialized forms of knowledge relevant to the analysis of a complex document like the Lienzo of Tlapiltepec, let alone control all the archaeological, historical, linguistic, and even ethnographic information that might apply. What is now starting to appear are publications like the Brownstone volume, which is the work of interdisciplinary teams, who bring different perspectives and skill sets to the study of a manuscript and publish their work as individual and co-authored chapters.

The book begins with a forward by Elizabeth Boone, who provides a good overview of Central Mexican Post-Classic writing, distinguishing between three different types of Mesoamerican painted texts: the time-based annals histories like those of the Nahuatl people of Central Mexico; the event-based, *res gestae* or “deeds done” histories of the Pre-Columbian and early colonial Mixtec codices; and the spatially organized cartographic histories like the Coixtlahuaca lienzos. In the preface, Brownstone discusses how the project came together and summarizes the work of Ross Parmenter and Bas Van Doesberg, as well as his own research on how the manuscript arrived at the Royal Ontario Museum. The late Ross Parmenter is acknowledged in several places in the book for his early efforts to reconnect the people of Coixtlahuaca with their ancient lienzos, since many of the manuscripts are no longer in Mexico. The Lienzo of Tlapiltepec was actually stolen from the town of Tlapiltepec around 1904, and, after passing through several hands, it was purchased during the Mexican Revolution as part of the Rickards collection by the

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Royal Ontario Museum. By that time its provenience had been lost, and it was only in the 1960s that Parmenter was able to trace it back to Tlapiltepec.

In the first full chapter, Nicolas Johnson begins by asking “what is a Lienzo?” He then proceeds to give us what is by far the best overview of the cartographic history genre and the Coixtlahuaca group that I have seen. He also provides an analysis of the weaving used to make the white cotton cloth on which the manuscript is painted. The next chapter, by Bas Van Doesberg, is on the Post-Classic and early colonial history of the Coixtlahuaca region and its relationships with important Southern Puebla sites in Tepeji, the Tehuacan Valley and Plain of Puebla. This is the first in-depth study of the lienzo based on colonial-era archival materials. One of the many interesting points Van Doesberg makes is the Lienzo of Tlapiltepec is focused on the Coixtlahuaca polity and although a couple of Tlapiltepec rulers are mentioned, they only have a marginal place in the text, leading Van Doesberg to suggest that although the manuscript was stolen from Tlapiltepec in the early 1900s it may have originally come from Coixtlahuaca. In the first appendix to his chapter, Van Doesberg includes transcriptions of documents from the 16th and 17th century that help to locate and contextualize the places, people and events described in the pictorial narratives. In the second appendix, Van Doesberg and Michael Swanton, a linguist and student of the Chocho-Popoluca languages, produce a fascinating analysis of the ten single-word glosses written in alphabetic script on the Lienzo of Tlapiltepec, which turn out to be toponyms in Chocholtec. In the next chapter Nicolas Johnson discusses the complex compositional structure of Coixtlahuaca lienzos. He carries out a semantic analysis of sign sequencing and the way people, places, and scenes are connected by numerous lines in the Lienzo of Tlapiltepec. Finally, in the last chapter, Brownstone and Eckehard Dolinski report on the use of imaging technologies to reconstruct the original colors of the Lienzo.

Anyone interested in the indigenous people of Mesoamerica, the history of Spanish Colonization in the Americas, or the study of writing systems will appreciate the way this book combines general introductions to various topics and specific information on the understudied but historically important Coixtlahuaca region.

*John D. Monaghan is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the author of several works and was an editor (with Victoria R. Bricker) of volume six of Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14434/mar.v9i1-2.19212>