
Book Review: *Trail of Footprints*

Trail of Footprints: A History of Indigenous Maps from Viceregal Mexico, by Alex Hidalgo. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019. 184 pages. Paperback \$29.95.

In this finely edited monograph, Alex Hidalgo analyzes a set of Indigenous maps that were created at different times between 1573 and 1778 in the region that is now the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Almost all of these maps are now preserved in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City as part of different legal cases brought before the viceregal administration of New Spain. Exceptions are two maps from the sixteenth-century *Relaciones geográficas* series now at the University of Texas at Austin and one map, now missing, that was preserved in the town of Santa María Atzompa until 2008. The richly illustrated book, which includes color images of no less than thirty-five maps, originated from Hidalgo's PhD research at the University of Arizona. A modern map of the many towns mentioned in the text, especially those for which the old names do not match the present-day ones (e.g., Tlacoahuala), would perhaps have been useful.

The frequency with which these often colorful maps were made and included in official court files indicates their significance for both Indigenous communities and Spanish or mestizo parties. Fortunately, the documentation of the legal proceedings and litigation makes it possible to study their context. Why and how were they made? By whom and for whom? What messages did they communicate? In this book, the author takes the reader on a tour of several well-documented cases of the use and manipulation of maps, unveiling the views of the diverse actors involved. He carefully examines the physical aspects of the maps and investigates their creators, including their cultural influences. Furthermore, he addresses the complex matter of their relation to geographical reality and looks into the ways values like authenticity and veracity were created and ascribed within the hierarchy of New Spain. In this way, Hidalgo connects the maps to broader debates about colonialism, technology, literacy, social memory, and artistic innovation.

The result is a stimulating, innovative, and highly readable study that sheds light on the function of maps in the complex, often multi-layered, and even contradictory relations between Indigenous actors (communities, nobility, or the respected elders) on one side, and Spanish parties (magistrates, judges, *hacendados* or small-scale agricultural entrepreneurs) on the other. Between these two groups stood the language interpreters and other cultural mediators. Since the use of maps is an underrepresented subject in studies of the Indigenous peoples of New Spain and Mexico, this book is a welcome addition to the historiography of Native peoples of Oaxaca. Maps were part of the often problematic cultural translation process between the two worlds and can thus shed light on the ideas, desires, and practical solutions developed on both side of this exchange. The late sixteenth century saw maps that adapted Indigenous graphic traditions with pre-Hispanic roots to the needs of the colonial reality. Over time we can see the progressive loss of Indigenous motives, leading to late maps where Indigenous agency is hardly perceivable in the graphic style, though clearly present in the accompanying court files. The dialog between Indigenous pictography and Spanish forms, formats, and materials created a new kind of map that responded to the “double consciousness” of Native painters (2). We also see the intentional creation of archaic-looking documents in later years and the production of “*títulos primordiales*,” often complex amalgams of Indigenous social memory, earlier legal documents, and condensed myth and legend. As Hidalgo convincingly shows, this diverse process was determined by complex decisions about how best to communicate between the two worlds—each with its own agenda—in the colonial setting.

Trail of Footprints begins in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, when Indigenous maps started to flood the courts. This explosion in the production of maps

accompanied the concept of private property in the *mercedes* (land grant) maps that both Spaniards and Indians applied for. This was often negotiated against Indigenous conceptions of land as the repository of collective identity. As Hidalgo points out, the early maps had their antecedents in a rich and complex pictographic tradition inherited from the pre-Hispanic period, which under colonial pressure transformed and was eventually abandoned in favor of new ways of writing and drawing. However, the book's narrative lacks a full description of the relation between this rich pictographic tradition and the maps. Maybe for this reason, the author does not recognize that what he calls "ribbed mountains" (65–67) are a stylistic continuation of pre-Hispanic pictography, or that the place sign for Teozacoalco (40) does not include a man "chiseling a stone temple" but someone "bending a platform" (a rebus using *ca'nu*, "he/she will bend/break," for its near homonym *ca'nu*, "big, undivided"). More generally, over the last two decades scholars have increasingly argued that the sixteenth century saw a dramatic shift from societies in which personal relations or bonds with power were preeminent (and borders were only very loosely defined) into territorially defined units. The growing stress on territory and defined borders, favorable to both sides in the establishment of the colonial regime, seems to explain the contemporaneous surge of pictographic narrative maps with emphasis on border places like the *Map of Teozacoalco* and many other spectacular *lienzos* (pictographic documents on cloth). More attention to this antecedent would perhaps have been justified.

This historical aspect also points to the difficulty in studying sets of maps like the one analyzed in this book. Beyond the maps' content, use, production and direct social context, all well treated in this book, Hidalgo might also have considered the Indigenous languages, stylistic and graphic antecedents, and historical antecedents of the Indigenous communities that made or commissioned the maps. One wonders about the silence on the first major epidemics of the sixteenth century, or the absence of any mention of the eighteenth-century *composiciones* program that was far more relevant in Oaxaca than the 1631 one, especially since the more recent one generated numerous authentication statements on maps and other pictorial documents that Indigenous villages once kept and in some cases still keep.

A minor but ultimately not unimportant comment I have is about the numerous typos and erroneous

translations of words in the Nahuatl and Mixtec languages. To give a few examples, *tepetl* ("mountain" in Nahuatl) is repeatedly rendered *teptl* (53–57). The Nahuatl toponym *çivitlan* (today's Chihuitán) on the map reproduced on page 34 is repeatedly transcribed as Zixitlán. The Mixtec place name *Atata* (place of seeds) for the village of Sinaxtla is hypercorrected into the pseudo-Nahuatl *Astata* (57). The Mixtec adjective *cuisi*, meaning "white," is mistranslated as "paper" (79, 84) and *huisicara* is written instead of *huisicata*, "he/she [is] a better artist" (35). The Mixtec *dzoo yadzi*, meaning "thin cloth," is mistranslated as "cloth, maguey fiber" (84). Also, concerning the Indigenous language lexicons, the author extracts only words for different kinds of paper from the colonial vocabularies in investigating the material quality of the maps. Why weren't the words for glue, ink, or other substances related to Indigenous techniques also examined?

The last chapter of the book addresses the larger issue of late-colonial Western collecting of Indigenous pictorial documents in general. As an example, Hidalgo discusses the role of the Zapotec *cacique* and interpreter Patricio Antonio López in guiding the understanding of the documents of the Boturini Collection. While interesting, it leaves one wondering about the more political and symbolic role of maps and cartographical *lienzos* still kept in Oaxacan communities during the Porfiriato (1876–1911) and postrevolutionary Mexico.

Apart from these minor issues, *Trail of Footprints* is a well-written and illustrative account of the role of maps within the colonial setting. The detailed analysis of the maps of Xoxocotlán are a very welcome addition to the initial observations by Elizabeth Smith and the focus on the Monte Albán toponyms by Maarten Jansen in 1998. However, it is curious that the author claims the 1771 Map of Xoxocotlán is lost (chapter 2, note 72), since it has been part of the holdings of the AGN since 1982. The study of the Xoxocotlán maps and of the map of Zimatlán and Ocotlán, all from the central valleys of Oaxaca, as well as the conflicting maps used in the problems between San Dionisio del Mar and San Francisco del Mar in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, are all illuminating stories about the local use of maps. The grouping of other maps based on shared stylistic characteristics allows us to follow the work of anonymous painters through time. During our book-long voyage guided by the maps, we get a good sense of their use as political instruments. Hidalgo makes the

convincing case that early modern mapping was not only an instrument of colonial power aimed at controlling conquered spaces but also an instrument of the Indigenous population in defending what they considered theirs. It shows us how maps were made, used, and questioned in the interaction between the Indigenous world and the Spanish bureaucracy. Its accessible language and

wealth of data, anecdotes, and examples makes this a welcome introduction to this complex subject for a wide audience.

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