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Review of Barlow and Graulich, eds. *Codex Azcatitlan*

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of the manuscript page it deciphers. It is a fitting complement to Barlow’s lucid and thorough commentary, one that is still largely valid after 47 years.

The first section of the manuscript (it has three) pictorially recounts the migration of the Mexica (who would be known to history as the Aztecs) from mythical Aztlan, and in this respect is close kin to the better-known Codex Boturini. The Aztlan migration history occupies the greatest number of pages of the manuscript, and closes on the 12th scene with the founding of the imperial capital of Tenochtitlan. Barlow, following Boturini’s «Mapa» designation, scrupulously decoded the toponyms, as well as the personal names and symbols of the migration section to more clearly delineate the landscape — which was both mythic and terrestrial — through which the itinerant Mexica traversed in their search for a homeland. Following the founding of Tenochtitlan, the theme and the format of the manuscript shifts. It now centers not on the patrilineal tribe, but the reigns of Mexica dynastic leaders. Instead of the meandering path of homeless itinerants, it now shows elaborately costumed rulers and pictorial events of the reigns, each verso-recto scene devoted to a single ruler. Again, this section has a more famous counterpart in the pages of the Codex Mendoza devoted to the Mexica kings. The final section is perhaps the least coherent as it recounts, in pictures, episodes of the Spanish conquest and the tumultuous years following.

In this new edition, Barlow’s insightful commentary had been amended, by means of numerous footnotes, by Michel Graulich, whose œuvre embraces works on the Mexica migration. Graulich also contributes a new introduction, which deftly sketches the relation of the Aztlan to a larger corpus of colonial Mexican histories, both alphabetic and pictorial, that describe the Mexica peregrination and dynastic history.

While Barlow was insightful, he was not always right, and Graulich has scrupulously corrected mistakes and misinterpretations Barlow committed, either by reinterpreting old sources, or by drawing on others, such as Chimalpahin, whose currency has been revalued in recent years. I learned a great deal from Graulich’s emendations, but I found the format of the presentation a little disquieting. To have a commentary (in the form of one-hundred footnotes) on a narrative commentary, which is, in turn, a commentary on a pictorial document, makes for a fractured reading experience. At times, I wondered why the capable Dr. Graulich could not have offered us a new synthesis entirely.

Finally, to return to Boturini’s original description of the Codex Aztatan, I want to highlight one phrase, falling in between the «Mapa» and the «Historia», in which Boturini mentions that this manuscript may have been copied from an earlier work, and the style of the codex suggests that this occurred around the end of the sixteenth century. In this casual aside, Boturini points to a line of inquiry taken up by neither Barlow nor Graulich but which the manuscript desperately calls for. This is the vexing question of originality and authorship. Graulich lays to rest Barlow’s suggestion that the manuscript was based on a single personal viewpoint, but he does not exactly say whose viewpoint, if not a personal one, this manuscript offers. We cannot assume it was that of the artists at work, there were two, and although the quality of their work is different, one being more polished and exact, the other rough and daring, they both seem to have been
drawing from a pre-conceived scheme. So who actually authored the manuscript? In posing the question, I use « authored » in its largest sense: not just to track down the names and corpus of yet-unnamed craftsmen, but to question whose view of history is on display in the pages so elegantly reproduced in this volume. The use of nahuatl inscriptions suggests that the Codex Azcatitlan was a history manufactured and kept, at least until Boturini bought it, within an indigenous domain, much like the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca, another of Boturini’s purchases. And note its particular narrative progress, as the standard procession of the Mexica migration (on plates 2 to 12) and the triumphal march of Mexico kings (from plates 13 to 22) completely unravels on the last pages of the manuscript, like a parade dissolved by a thunderstorm. From the rout emerges an unrehearsed account of events, one so original that not one source allows us to decode it. We see, among other scenes, elegant indigenous women arrayed of rooftops, the theft of coins from church coffers, a corpse laid out on a candlelit bier, and a native with a shirt stripped back as he prepares to be immersed in the baptismal font. The scenes that close the Codex Azcatitlan have a distinctly parochial air, and seem to recount the particular, local events of a specific indigenous community. That is, it is within the narrowly cast historical space that we see on these last pages — not the panorama of imperial Mexico history that precedes it — that the origins of the Codex Azcatitlan lie. Perhaps this new, elegant facsimile of the Codex Azcatitlan will inspire more questions to be asked, and more answers to be found.

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Lupo, Alessandro — La tierra nos escucha. La cosmología de los nahuas a través de las súplicas rituales. Dirección general de publicaciones del Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-Instituto Nacional Indigenista, México, 1995, 320 p., ill., carte, tabl., bibl.

C’est une question déjà en partie soulevée dans une publication antérieure (à partir d’un terrain mené en compagnie d’I. Signorini), qui revient au cœur de ce nouvel ouvrage d’Alessandro Lupo, à savoir la manière dont des prières rituelles nous informent sur une vision du monde indigène du Mexique oriental, telle qu’elle est attestée aujourd’hui dans la communauté nahu de Santiago Yancuictlapan.

Dans un premier temps, au terme d’une brève présentation de la communauté, l’auteur décrit les transformations intervenues dans le système de transmission du savoir, véhiculé naguère de manière informelle dans le cadre domestique, avant de devenir formel et public par le biais de l’école. Cette dernière suscitera, de par son image « progressiste », un sentiment d’insécurité identitaire, mais aussi, par ricochet, une rétention de la tradition locale. Quant à la cosmologie, malmenée par l’occidentalisation, elle reste encore aujourd’hui au centre de la vie quotidienne. Si, dans ses aspects les plus techniques, elle demeure entre les mains d’experts indigènes, la plasticité et la perméabilité du système de croyances permettent néanmoins une circulation de la sphère dévouée au profane à celle du spécialiste, c’est-à-dire celui qui travaille fondamentalement dans le champ thérapeutique, lequel implique une relation d’étroite vassalité par rapport aux divinités. Trois histoires de vie viennent, fort à propos, montrer la diversité des cursus des