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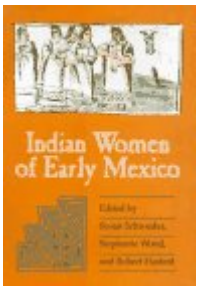

Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, Robert Haskett, eds. *Indian Women of Early Mexico.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. x + 446pp. $29.95(cloth), $15.96 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8061-2970-9.

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Or, Indigenous Women in Colonial Mexico

The smorgasbord of essays in this volume – fourteen essays by fifteen authors, plus a substantial introduction by editor Susan Schroeder and concluding remarks by editors Stephanie Wood and Robert Haskett –exemplify the state of studies on women in the indigenous worlds of colonial Mexico from the mid-1980s, when the first papers were written, to the publication of the book in 1997.

These essays ignore the tired preconceptions about "Indian women's lives "that appeared in the few historical treatments that went so far as to mention women at all before the 1970s. Like the histories of Mesoamerican Indians in general before Gibson's pathbreaking works of the 1950s and 60s, historical treatments of Indian women well into the 1980s continued to be based far too often on introspection backed by presupposition. A severely limited range of images – the downtrodden and ignorant peasant woman; the long-braided woman grinding corn at daybreak; or, alternatively, the bejeweled and befeathered Indian princess – served to take the place of historical analysis. This limited vision began to change in the 1970s and 80s. The book under review is fruit of this new historiography. Its authors analyze the nuanced differences among the social and geographical groups that comprise the category of Indian women, while paying close attention to the social realities of these women's lives, which as always prove more interesting than received preconceptions.

Editor Susan Schroeder opens the book with an excellent introduction in which she places the varied essays in a broad theoretical and historical context. In the first chapter Louise Burkhart writes about "Mexica Women on the Home Front: Housework and Religion in Aztec Mexico." This useful summary of what we can learn about pre-Columbian gender roles from the works of the sixteenth-century friars is, like all of Burkhart's writing, lucidly written and cogently argued. A major point – one which will run through many of the essays in this book – is the inapplicability of European "public/private" distinction to the gender roles of Mexica women before the conquest. The second chapter, "Aztec Wives" by Arthur J. O. Anderson, examines the institution of marriage as it was understood in Tenochtitlan before the conquest and as it was transformed by the friars, based on the Nahuatl-language prescriptive that the latter collected. The essay, apparently unfinished, was included in the volume largely as a posthumous homage to the great scholar who died in 1996.

In the third chapter, Pedro Carrasco explores marriages between Indian women and Spanish men in sixteenth-century Central Mexico through a series of thumbnail sketches of such marriages. He brings considerable knowledge about Mexica marriage to the task, though his admitted unfamiliarity with Spanish practices limits the comparative usefulness of the essay. In chapter four, Rebecca Horn uses baptismal records from Coyoacan (1619-1646) to uncover "Nahua naming patterns a century after the conquest" as a window on the social status of Nahua women" (p. 105-6). There are few surprises in her conclusions: "differentiation by social rank is evident" (p. 121); "gender differentiation was pronounced" (p. 122). But Horn makes the valid point that, since commoner women are all but invisible in the received historical record, the imaginative use of mundane documents such as baptismal ledgers is one way to bring them into our histories.

The fifth essay, "From Parallel and Equivalent to Separate but Unequal: Tenochca Mexica Women, 1500-1700" by Susan Kellogg stands out as one of the best in the volume. More than just documenting the progressive decline in social status of Nahua women in the two centuries after conquest, Kellogg delves into the nuances of gender complementarity for the Mexica, who "embraced all the contradictions inherent in the ideas of parallelism *and* hierarchy and separation *and* merging that gender as a set of structures, practices, and symbols provided" (p. 142). This is, in brief form, the thesis of Kellogg's well received book on *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500-1700* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995). The complexity of her vision becomes the field for a rich social history.

In chapter six, Robert Haskett provides us the story of Dona Josefa Maria of Tepoztlan, arrested for adultery in 1712, as a case study in the perils and possibilities of political activism for indigenous women. In chapter seven, Stephanie Wood uses Nahuatl-language testaments written by rural women in the Toluca region, 1589-1801, in much the same way that Horn uses baptismal records: as a window onto the lives of a social group who have remained largely invisible to historians.

With chapter eight, we move out of Central Mexico, journeying south for Ronald Spores' look at "Mixteca Cacicas" in southern Puebla and Oaxaca. The essay is somewhat sketchily written, but in it, Spores makes a compelling argument that "women did play active, important, even influential roles in indigenous and Euro-Indian society" – and that the documentation exists to study their agency (p. 196). He leaves the reader impressed with the range of material that still waits, unexplored and unexploited, for a scholar with the vision to tap it. Lisa Mary Sousa continues the tour of colonial Oaxaca in chapter 9, looking for "Evidence of Complementary Gender Roles in Mixtec and Zapotec Societies" through an examination of criminal records.

The southern tour proceeds in chapter ten, in which Kevin Gosner provides a kind of precis for his excellent book *Soldiers of the Virgin: The Moral Economy of a Colonial Maya Rebellion* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992) on the Chiapas revolt of 1712. Moving to Yucatan in chapter11, Marta Espejo-Ponce Hunt and Matthew Restall look at "Work, Marriage, and Status" among Maya women, as seen through Maya-language wills and other documentation. The authors show that in spite of Maya women's gender-defined roles in colonial Yucatan, they could and did exert limited influence; in fact, they argue, the documents portray them "not as victims but rather as survivors" and as "active participant[s] . . . in the social drama of Maya life" (p. 252), another theme echoed in many of these essays.

In Chapter twelve, Susan Deeds takes us north for an insightful look at the Tepehuan and Tarahumara "Indian Women in Jesuit Missions of Nueva Vizcaya." In a concise introduction, Deeds summarizes what is known, or rather what can be known given the paucity of documentation, about changes in gender organization under Spanish rule. The picture that emerges is of a society profoundly transformed by colonization, yet profoundly resistant to conforming to Spanish/Catholic norms. We are then treated to an illuminating examination of the trial of a Tarahumara woman accused of the brutal murder of her husband in 1806, at a time when the indigenous people of her community were swiftly losing control of land and resources to Spanish and mestizo newcomers. Given the atmosphere of a time and place harshly repressive of both Indians and women, the best defense her ineffective lawyer could put forward was to plead she was "ignorant not only because of her race but also because she is a woman" (p. 255). Deeds' study demands that more attention be paid to the gender-based inequalities of criminal sentencing in the colonial period.

In another well-crafted essay, Leslie Offutt completes the short northern tour in "Women's Voices from the Frontier: San Esteban de Nueva Tlaxcala in the Late Eighteenth Century." Like Deeds, Offutt faces a severe shortage of documentation. "Only fourteen cases involving San Esteban women survive in Saltillo's municipal

archive" (p. 277) even for the relatively well documented late colonial period, 1780-1810. But she makes the best of the situation by providing us with a detailed analysis of six case studies, drawn from that available corpus of fourteen, and using them effectively to show how women played an important role in the attempt to preserve San Esteban's community integrity on the increasingly non-Indian northern frontier.

In the final essay, Frances Karttunen takes us back to the center with her fine "Rethinking Malinche," an examination of how each generation (and each ethnic group) has constructed their own Malinche/Marina/Malintzin over the years, with little concern for the real girl (and Karttunen makes a case for considering just how young she was when Cortes received her as a 'gift' in 1519). Karttunen continues this same tradition, but with the benefit of excellent scholarship to back up her own rethought Malinche. With deft linguistic detective work, she portrays Dona Marina as, first and foremost, an intelligent and sophisticated linguist in her own right, not a traitor nor a seductress but "a gifted woman in impossible circumstances carving out survival one day at a time" (p. 312).

The book ends with the "Concluding Remarks" of editors Stephanie Wood and Robert Haskett. Together with Schroeder's introduction, these reflections nicely frame the essays.[1] Wood and Haskett follow up an intelligent consideration of the contributions in the book with useful suggestions for new avenues of research on gender in colonial Mexico.

Who is the audience for this book? It will be useful for researchers, and for graduate students in particular, to have so many fine articles on different aspects of indigenous women's histories bound in one volume. The book, unfortunately, is rather less suited for use as a textbook, given its length and the complexity (for most undergraduates) of some of the arguments presented, but it should find a space in the hands of those who teach Latin American and/or Mexican history, and on most college library bookshelves. I suspect more than one of the individual essays will end up on reading lists as well.

Given the length of the book, it is uncharitable to consider what has been left out, but that consideration has never yet stopped a reviewer. In this ruthless spirit, I cannot help noting that the extensive coverage of central Mexico and lesser coverage of the other usual suspects, Oaxaca and the Maya regions, leaves little room for the north of Mexico and none at all for the west, the near north, or the east. Not a word here about Michoacan, Guerrero, the Otomi areas, the Bajio, Jalisco, Durango, Veracruz, the Huasteca, and so on. Take this not as a criticism, but as suggestion of areas that deserve more research and a greater presence in our understanding of how New Spain fit together in the early modern era. The same is all the more true when we look on a broader scale. By concentrating on Indian women in Mexico, the book adds depth to the already extensive coverage of indigenous life in Mesoamerica. May we dare to dream that one day we will have a reader for the history of women – or perhaps better, the history of gender – throughout early Latin America? Think of all the blanks that will have to be filled in before we reach that point: indigenous, black, mestizo, Spanish women in Central America, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, and so on, and so on.

As research and writing continues, we can look forward to moving some day from edited volumes such as the one under review, or Asuncion Lavrin's excellent and still inspiring *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), or the more recent collection edited by Lyman Johnson and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, *The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), to a new synthesis of colonial history, with women (and by the same token, men) of all backgrounds in their rightful place.

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NOTE

[1]. There are also signs of editorial disagreement in the first footnotes to each of these editorial contributions. Where Schroeder opens with along defense of her use of the term "Indian" rather than "indigenous" (p.331), the junior editors tersely note that they "are following Latin American usage by employing 'indigenous' (in lieu of Indian)" (p. 424). Schroeder's usage wins out in the title to the collection.

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