

communities. Norton also questions the disciplinary boxes into which scholars place animals. She suggests that, although they largely appear in social and ecological studies, animals need to form part of the ways cultural change is approached in religious studies, specifically in traditional narratives of the missionary theatre. Building upon a growing body of literature on early modern science, Norton also points to the multiple ways in which scholars have overlooked Indigenous contributions to natural history. In particular, she demonstrates how Spaniards such as Bernardino de Sahagún and Francisco Hernández relied heavily upon Indigenous knowledge keepers and other acculturated intellectuals for their own zoological knowledge.

Although Norton analyzes a wide range of Indigenous societies, some readers will be disappointed to know that she does not engage in cross-imperial comparisons between the Mexica and the Incas. Others will find fault with Norton's failure to adequately discuss the ways in which many of the Indigenous and European sources she used—such as Mesoamerican codices and handpress European books—were made from or bound in animal skins. Several readers will contest her claim that ideas “of human subjectivity and exceptionalism found in Genesis and other ancient texts reflected as much as caused livestock husbandry” (331). Early modern interpreters used ancient texts to justify a wide range of colonial practices that were not intended by their original writers.

Norton's book is a great read. The writing is highly accessible, the subject matter addresses important ecological and ethical questions of our times, and the illustrations—although in black and white—provide helpful visual reminders of the centrality of animals in colonial contexts. Readers will appreciate Norton's insistence on carefully distinguishing between Iberian and Indigenous concepts and the ways in which she connects the history of modern meat to the early modern period instead of the industrial revolution. Norton's book will be of interest to a wide range of scholars and students at all levels interested in animal, Latin American, Atlantic world, and colonialism studies.

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#### INDIGENOUS LEGAL CULTURES AND COLONIAL DISPOSSESSION

*Since Time Immemorial. Native Custom and Law in Colonial Mexico.* By Yanna Yannakakis.  
 Durham: Duke University Press. 2023. Pp. xviii, 318. \$28.95 paper.  
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This volume offers a historiographical survey and a specific contribution to an ambitious inquiry: how were the variegated notions of rightful property, family, and the social order in Central Mesoamerica shoehorned into operational categories for a bureaucratized colonial empire? There is a long-standing precedent of historiographical skepticism regarding documents wielded by Indigenous claimants as accurate representations

of pre-Columbian “laws,” whether origin narratives masquerading as testaments, or self-serving defenses of privilege; however, as the author observes (179), “since time immemorial” was a feint used in the absence of documentary proof. This work widens an analytical lens (11) to track potential Indigenous sources for colonial law, yielding three vistas. Part I (chapters 1–2) addresses a transatlantic historiography of custom, and Part III (chapters 5–7) presents innovative data on how colonial Indigenous authorities shored up claims based on customary rights. Together, they read as a stand-alone monograph.

Part II (chapters 3–4) attempts an interpretation of Zapotec and Nahuatl concepts across custom’s broad arch, but the lens clouds up here. Should we expect to find pre-Columbian paragons to Spain’s *Siete Partidas*—codified legal bodies with relative independence from the sociopolitical cultures of pre-Columbian polities? As for Nahuatl *tlamaniliztli* (custom), chapter 2 argues it was both a “body of pre-Hispanic law recorded in pictographic text” that, in an unfortunate depletion of evidence, was “likely destroyed” after conquest and also a reflection of the “normative order” (52). Existing evidence favors the latter, embodied in “moral” rhetoric, which this work locates in the early colonial Codex Mendoza, and in perhaps the most discussed Mexican inquisitorial case, which ensnared the polygynous don Carlos of Tetzco. However, whether one can neatly separate don Carlos’s dynastic self-regard from Nahua traditional custom and whether the Mendoza’s representation of pre-Columbian customs palatable to Spanish observers might be regarded as an impartial legalistic compendium both remain open questions.

Some of this work’s conceptual gambits stand on precarious ground. On the basis of an apparent misreading of Juan de Córdova’s grammar, chapter 2 argues (61) that “the term *quela* . . . has a wide range of meanings,” including “corn stalk,” “essence,” and a “grammatical function” (as nominalizer). This is inaccurate, as colonial Zapotec variants had unrelated terms that differed only slightly in pronunciation due to tone or stress (as known from contemporary languages), but appeared with similar spellings. Thus, the grapheme *quela* referred to near homophones that were different words, just as “a *record*” and “to *record*” are distinct in English. Moreover, evidence for a putatively crucial Zapotec notion rests on the mistranslation of a phrase occurring in a single 1661 case: *leo golaza*, as “old law.” The phrase is a version of the Valley Zapotec term (*xi*)*layò co-làça* (“the ancient land/earth”) which Córdova’s 1578 dictionary glossed as “in another, ancient time” (170r) without referring to “law.” In addition to usage in other texts, this case’s very claimant demonstrated that the Spanish term *ley* (law) was borrowed not as *leo*, but as *ley*, for she fluidly used the term *rey* (“king”; 254, n.87–88), showing that her Zapotec variant borrowed terms ending in /ej/ without sound changes. More importantly, “ancient times” is remarkably different from “old law.” Chapter 4 aptly notes how Zapotec actors strategically derided *china golaza* (ancient labor) as obligations related to idolatry, but omits a most spectacular use of *quela* (custom): as the designation for traditional ritual protocols that were not yet “ancient,” for they continued, despite Christian sanctions, into the early eighteenth century.

In contrast, Part III presents an admirable analysis of how Indigenous notions of land ownership and labor evolved in late colonial Oaxaca. Chapter 5 elucidates a transition to partnership contracts for Native polities such as Tlaxiaco, which introduced novel notions of liability. Chapter 6 is an enthralling exploration of communal reciprocity, and chapter 7 ably mines 83 references to *costumbre* (custom) in late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documentation, in which custom was redefined to support an egalitarian ethos for communal labor. In the end, this sprawling and somewhat uneven work will invite useful debates, and further inform inquiries plumbed by earlier comparative studies by Allan Greer, Brian Owensby, and others about resilient Indigenous legal cultures and troubling colonial (dis)possessions in the Americas.

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## HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS TEXT OF THE K'ICHE' PEOPLES

*The Title of Totonicapán. Transcription, Translation and Commentary.* By Allen J. Christenson. Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2022. Pp. xxiv, 412. Translation. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Maps. \$126.00 cloth; \$45.95 paper; \$37.95 eBook; \$19.00 30-day eBook rental.  
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The author and translator of this magnificent and careful edition has been an ethnologist in Guatemala for almost half a century, especially working at Momostenango (Highlands of Guatemala), which guarantees his experience in the historical and religious subject of the K'iche' peoples. But, in addition, Allen Christenson is an expert who possesses rare qualities in our time, even in the academic environment, such as empathy and humility in the face of the intellectual baggage of other cultures, and this is revealed throughout his work.

This work is the first complete translation of the manuscript of *The Title of Totonicapán* from K'iche' into English. In the words of the Christenson, *The Title of Totonicapán* is one of the most important historical documents of the K'iche' Maya; the translation was elaborated by Christenson from an ancient copy of the original manuscript found by Robert Carmack in 1973. The manuscript was composed around 1554, shortly after the conquest of the region in 1524, and is a later copy of an alphabetical land title in the K'iche' language completed by surviving K'iche' nobility. The title also bears the names of the descendants of the three K'iche' ruling lineages at the end, as signal of veracity. But the title was more than a weapon of legal negotiation during colonial times. In the beautiful foreword to this unique translation, Stephen Houston recalls how migration paths were of great importance to native AmSerican Indians: “[t]hey were thought vitally important, validating history by referring to a visible, treadable landscape, one that might be revisited and ritually venerated” (XVI). The edition of *The Title of Totonicapán* includes