

Reflection

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With the support and constructive feedback of my professor, Dr. Miriam Riggs, I wrote the essay “From Mexicas to Ancient Aztecs, Classical Nahuas, and Modern Indios/as: Early Modern Criollo/a Constructions and Understandings of Indigenous New Spain” during the Fall 2023 semester for my final project in History 356 (Culture and Identity in Latin America). I worked hard on the project thanks to the structured assignments, and obtained valuable feedback by going to office hours frequently. After taking various courses on Mexican History which focused on gender, nation-building, and visual culture during both the colonial and national periods, I was eager to work on my project with the sources I identified. At the same time, my sources and project pushed me to work on a time-period I did not previously know well, the Spanish Enlightenment, but which has blossomed into a new intellectual interest of mine.

I identified Cesare Vecellio’s three *Messicano* figures, Fray Francisco Javier de Clavijero’s “Abiti Messicani”, and Dr. Joseph Ignacio Heredia y Sarmiento’s “People of Ancient Mexico” in the digitized archival collection of the John Carter Brown Library in Spring 2022 for another class, but never used them in an assignment. However, the final project for History 356 was the perfect opportunity for me to use the visual primary sources because the topic was early nationalism and cultural objects. I was very eager to obtain a physical edited facsimile of Cesare Vecellio’s *Habiti antichi, et moderni di tutto il mondo* (1598) which I ordered through the Kellogg Library’s Inter-Library Loan service. Digitized editions of Clavijero’s *Storia antica del Messico* (1780) and a digitized copy of Heredia y Sarmiento’s *Sermon panegirico* (1803) were indispensable to me. In essence, I was able to better contextualize the visuals with the textual information located within the facsimile and digitized editions (in the original Latin and/or Spanish accompanied by English

or Spanish translations as well). Because the previous scholarship I read did not treat the visual primary sources extensively and focused more on the textual elements that the visuals accompanied, it was important to me to center the images in the research I produced. Given my visual sources my research question was: how did non-indigenous people imagine indigenous peoples within the Spanish colonial social order throughout the early modern period? Because the visuals were separated by considerable time since they were published, as well as distance, I decided to view them in the *long durée* history of a burgeoning Mexican nationalism (a *mentalité* itself) which spanned the colonial period across the Atlantic and formed the national periods (late 16th to early 19th century).

The secondary source scholarship within Mexican History and Spanish literary studies helped me make better sense of the visuals in order to argue that: by framing an elite passed based on Mexica antiquities, the Criollo intellectuals legitimized themselves as geopolitical, if not ethnic, heirs to an imagined grandiose Mexica past and leadership via cultural appropriation and knowledge production of the Mexica past that discredited surviving Indigenous Peoples or *macehualtin*. Many texts were either: held physically in the Kellogg Library stacks; accessible via JSTOR and EBSCO (ie. open access); or made available through Inter-Library Loan. The “free” digital journal articles provided via the library, especially Giorgio Riello’s “The World in a Book” (2019), Ann Rosalind Jones’s “Ethnographer’s Sketch, Sensational Engraving, Full-Length Portrait” (2011), and Eugenia Paulicelli’s “Mapping the World,” (2008) were crucial in developing my understanding of an ethnographic approach to the visuals. My work firmly relied on the seminal colonial Latin American intellectual studies of David A. Brading, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Peter B. Villella, and Anna Herron More. I, like previous scholars, consider, highlight, and affirm that

Criollo chronicles are archives themselves, (re)produce meta-narratives, and politicized epistemology within the Spanish empire during the Early Modern period.

As I continue finding new visual primary sources and situating my project in the deeper innovative historical research related to *casta* paintings during the 17th century (ie. Ilona Katzew and María Elena Martínez's scholarship), I hope to further develop my work at my doctoral program at UCLA where I have been admitted to work on Early Modern Mesoamerican History. It is also important to me to highlight the long-lasting impact and legacy of colonialism in Mexico which is self-evident in Mexican society today – especially among indigenous peoples like my family from Oaxaca, Mexico. My purpose here is merely to complicate and further refine our understanding of the past and varied human experience through the consideration of diverse perspectives.