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Dancing the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of Conquest by Paul A Scolieri (review)

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y literatura, desde una perspectiva crítica y analítica, como para aquellos que busquen reevaluar el papel activo y transformador de ciertas mujeres que reclaman, a ambas orillas del Atlántico, reinscribir sus voces y sus miradas dentro de una historia dominada casi en su totalidad por un punto de vista masculino.

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Scolieri, Paul A. *Dancing the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of Conquest.* Austin: U of Texas P, 2013. Pp. 205. ISBN 978-0-292-74492-9.

In this insightful and beautifully illustrated study titled *Dancing the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of Conquest*, Paul Scolieri appeals to readers interested in the conquest of the Aztecs, particularly, Aztec dancing, its meaning, and its role in representing the conquest. Through intriguing pictures and engaging phrases, such as “dancing the new world” and “the choreography of conquest” found on the book’s cover page and elsewhere in the text, Scolieri provokes curiosity as to the type of setting and portrayal of the conquest that this particular book presents. The exquisite cover art portrays the paradox of civilization committing barbaric acts against those commonly conceived as uncivilized, the Aztec people. In the first pages, the reader encounters an index of maps and images that tastefully vivify the text. By comprising this remarkable imagery and a wealth of detailed narratives, the book fulfills its title’s promise of presenting a choreography of the conquest.

The author begins the introduction by establishing the analytical tone of his book and then transitions swiftly to examine relevant stories and descriptions of early Aztec dances as portrayed by the chroniclers. This section also analyzes how chroniclers and missionaries often inserted their role in the annihilation of indigenous cultures and the birth of a new government into the accounts of indigenous embodied performance. Additionally, this section includes an extensive review of historical world events leading up to the conquest. Among these events, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain is described as an incident that helped “unify and expand the Spanish global empire” (5); although the unification of Spain was one of the underlying arguments for the expulsion of the Jews, the text could be revised to place such an argument within its historical dialogical context. Nonetheless, the introduction provides an accurate, rich, and useful encyclopedic background for terms such as *autos sacramentales*, *calpulli*, and *moros y cristianos* or staged reenactments of military battles between Moors and Christians.

The book’s first chapter is a succinct study of the *areito* dance and the chroniclers’ conceptualization of this dance as a practice of divination, a form of writing, and a means of political resistance; the chapter successfully sustains that the descriptions of the *areito* dance provided by the chroniclers’ first encounters sets the foundation for thinking about the concepts of indigenous dance and “Indians” until the twentieth century. To support this assertion, Scolieri lucidly examines prior relevant studies of *areito* dance. While the first chapter focuses on *areito* dance, the subsequent chapter offers a careful analysis of diverse Aztec dances; both chapters contain a well-organized set of references that trace back to some of the earliest writings about dance in the New World. In addition, chapter 2 identifies how these writings come from the conqueror’s perspective as opposed to the social realities, which the dancing attempts to represent.

Chapter 3 assesses the *Florentine Codex*, offering a meticulous synthesis of references concerning Aztec ritual dance, its origins, and its connection to Aztec mythology; by doing so, this chapter effectively supports that the main purpose of the *Florentine Codex* is to help missionaries identify how the natives could continue to perform their sacred rites after the conquest. To sustain this proposal, Scolieri also examines the methodology used to collect the information found in the *Florentine Codex*. This section describes in detail, and with accompanying drawings, the Aztec sacrificial dances presented in the *Florentine Codex*, including dances used to terrorize children prior to their sacrifice; the Aztecs believed children’s tears guaranteed future rains needed for

agriculture. The analysis of these dances and insightful interpretations provide a noteworthy foundation for researchers of Aztec dancing and worldview. This chapter, however, includes a reference to the Aztec empire as the “largest and wealthiest indigenous empire in the New World” (91). Although the Aztec empire could arguably have been the wealthiest in the New World, the Incas were a larger empire. Considering that the book focuses on dancing in New Spain and that this term is omnipresent in the text, it is possible to conceive that the term “New Spain” was meant to be used instead of “New World.” In general, the chapter is an accurate analysis of the *Florentine Codex*; it could be improved, however, by a revision of the terminology used.

The fourth chapter provides an eclectic examination of the massacre of the Festival of Toxcatl, including the accounts that attempt to excuse the attack, those that portray the massacre from the Aztec viewpoint, and existing engravings that depict the massacre as a performance. According to Scolieri, the Spanish conquest and Aztec notions of change and transformation are integrated in the occurrences of the massacre and its symbols of ritual dance, death, and falling. The book offers a wealth of information that includes diverse interpretations and colorful illustrations, which make for an interesting and enjoyable read.

Chapter 5 provides a noteworthy analysis of staged reenactments of military battles between Moors and Christians, church-sponsored feasts, and *autos sacramentales*. This chapter also contains a thorough examination of the impact of dancing in society, particularly in marriage, and explains that although matchmaking was the norm in Aztec society, exceptions were occasionally made when a young man promised his hand in marriage during a dance. The chapter compares Aztec dances with accounts of evangelistic dancing to sustain effectively that the accounts of conquistadors, colonial missionaries, chroniclers, and artists were often ambivalent, fictionalized, and even deceptive.

Overall, readers of this book will often find themselves enjoying the rich imagery and detailed narratives that present the written and visual representations of dance and dancers in the chronicles of the New World. This book does not require background knowledge of the conquest, and it should prove to be relevant to those interested in Aztec dancing, its meaning, and the role of embodied experience in the New World encounter.

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Vega, Carlos B. *Hombres y mujeres de América: Diccionario biográfico-genealógico de nuestros progenitores, siglos XVI–XIX*. Santa María: Janaway, 2012. Pp. 361. ISBN 978-1-596-41273-6.

Además de su actividad docente como profesor de lengua, literatura, historia y cultura hispánica en diferentes universidades de los Estados Unidos, Carlos B. Vega ha dedicado una buena parte de sus esfuerzos educativos a la producción de diccionarios y de libros de historia de acceso popular. Sus diccionarios cubren un variado espectro de temas que incluyen términos literarios y gramaticales, términos criminológicos y legales y terminología médica. Entre tanto, sus libros de historia están mayormente orientados a destacar las contribuciones de los españoles y de la cultura resultante desde su llegada al continente americano hasta nuestros días. El texto que aquí reseñamos, *Hombres y mujeres de América: Diccionario biográfico-genealógico de nuestros progenitores, siglos XVI–XIX*, oscila entre esas dos temáticas comunes al autor: es un diccionario genealógico y a la vez un compendio de breves reseñas de una cuantiosa cantidad de personas y personajes que vinieron de España a América durante los primeros trescientos años de la gesta peninsular.

Para la elaboración de este trabajo, en el cual indica que invirtió “muchos años” de consultas en el Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla, el autor parte de una premisa y una misión: intentar revertir la apreciación común de que en los tiempos de la conquista y la colonia no existía un sentido de unidad familiar entre los españoles emigrados a América, lo que propició la idea de que la población hispánica del nuevo continente “descansa sobre unos cimientos de deshonra e