

great care over his career. The book is a powerful bequest to inheritors interested in using performance theory and/or critical ethnographic praxis as a mode of labor, as a means of sharpening one's critical attention, and as a method of enacting social justice.

—Renée Alexander Craft

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Dancing the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of Conquest. By Paul A. Scolieri.

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013; 227 pp.; illustrations. \$55.00 cloth.

Dancing in the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of Conquest examines, in illustrious detail, dozens of manuscripts, letters, codices, and other archival materials to demonstrate the central significance of dance in the 15th and 16th centuries. Author Paul A. Scolieri shows how the often-divergent accounts of dance in indigenous societies in the Americas reveal the complex biases and filters with which Spanish colonizers interpreted these performances. Perhaps more importantly, Scolieri also argues for the centrality of dance performance in the historiography of the Americas, where dance actively served as a system of organization, knowledge transference, and training; as a political forum; and as a way of expressing a cosmology and belief system.

As Scolieri attests, the book is more accurately about the archive itself, an unstable and contested collection of overlapping and often radically opposing accounts of mainly Aztec civilization recorded by chroniclers, missionaries, scribes, and artists over the 100 years following the European invasion. Ultimately, these accounts reveal more about the chroniclers and their own distorted lenses than they do about the actual performances they describe.

This is not to discount the events. For example, a reader would be hard-pressed to find a more thorough and accessible English-language account of the 1520 massacre at the Festival of Toxcatl, in which conquistador Pedro Alvarado ordered the brutal assassination of Mexica people engaged in a ceremonious dance. For some historians, this massacre represents the barbarity of conquest betrayal, epitomizing the violence of Spanish-Christian soldiers. For others, it is a pitiful story of La Noche Triste (the Sad Night), when the Spaniards, in retreat, were consequently driven out of Toxcatl, narrowly escaping their certain doom. Scolieri carefully unfolds each turn of events, comparing often-conflicting portrayals and analyzing them next to contemporary research. What we are left with, Scolieri argues, is a record that unequivocally confirms the significance of dance performance. Precisely at the crux of what appears to be a contradiction is the question of dance and its meaning, interpretation, and potential. Thus,



(mis)understandings of dance altered the course of events and the narrations that followed this enormously significant moment in the history of the Americas.

Each of the five chapters exposes the particular interests and biases of major chroniclers of the period (two of the chapters are dedicated to Friar Toribio de Benavente “Motolinia” and Friar Bernardino de Sahagún respectively). A notable example is the superb chapter, “On the areíto,” in which Scolieri assembles the written and pictorial descriptions of indigenous performances known as *areítos*. Areíto is an Arawak word that refers to a form of dance-drama, which included music, recited lyrics, role-playing, and in some cases acrobatics, that was performed in many parts of the Caribbean. The areítos were typically led by guides, or leaders, known as *tequina*, and incorporated instruments such as drums, gourds, and shells. Avid listeners of salsa, cumbia, bachata, and so on may find especially valuable the in-depth study of the areíto made familiar in, for example, the “Areíto of Anacoana.” First recorded in the 19th century, this song-poem tells the story of the legendary Taíno chief of Hispaniola that defied the Spanish in 1503, and was later made famous by classic *salseros* like Cheo Feliciano.

Yet, as the book argues, the areíto—and indigenous performance more broadly—exists in these records as principally an “invention” of Spanish chroniclers. In particular, Scolieri emphasizes what chroniclers attempted to dismiss or justify in indigenous belief systems: the multiple temporalities of death, sacrifice, and ancestral presence; and the ways translation led to both imperialist- and humanitarian- motivated distortions. In other respects, Scolieri adeptly points out what has been ignored by historians of this early record, as skewed as it may be. For instance, chroniclers noted how the areítos were a way of telling history “in the place of books” (35), served as “a mnemonic device of codified ‘laws’” (31), and were connected to thriving economies where dancers were paid in chocolate (cacao) beans and other gifted favors (36). Thus, while “inventions” may indeed recall a distorted Spanish worldview, Scolieri’s disquisition on the record gives us good reason to exhume the disfigured remains of this archive.

The result is that this book points to the need for further research to expand the frame of dance and the study of dancing bodies to a transdisciplinary discussion of performance studies, including its overlapping fields of anthropology, communications, history, cultural studies, political science, and philosophy. While certainly not the fault of this author or the book, we find ironically (and also predictably) that language and disciplinary structures repeat the fractured lenses of our own present day chronicles, once again writing upon history its distortions in ways that further obscure the significance of indigenous performance in the Americas.

Nevertheless, there are few books that discuss with such depth, detail, and clarity the archived accounts of Mesoamerican performance as this one. Moreover, the book is gorgeous and a pleasure to read, with a full-color glossy illustration center insert, elegant typeface, and a large page size. Scolieri’s careful sifting of these texts bring them into lively relief, alongside stunning illustrations of the codices, stone carvings, and other visual documentation. The appendix includes several excerpts of the chroniclers’ accounts and letters, another useful feature that makes this book ideal for any serious research and teaching, even at the undergraduate level. Author Paul Scolieri and the University of Texas Press deserve high praise for this truly extraordinary volume.

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