Unreadable books: early colonial Mexican documents in circulation

Abstract
This dissertation is about the unreading of the Americas: about the ways that the documents that describe American history have been hidden, obscured, and rendered illegible even as they have circulated throughout the Americas and across the Atlantic. Its objects of study are the multilingual (and multimodal) documents that were produced during the first century of Spanish presence in Mesoamerica, a period that can be loosely defined as 1521-1621. It begins from the premise that, thanks to their linguistic and material conditions, the documents produced during this period were largely unreadable when they began to re-circulate among historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It asks: in what ways were these unreadable books read, and by what mechanisms were they rendered readable?

To answer these questions, the dissertation focuses on the most innocuous of mechanisms: the processes by which texts have been replicated for circulation. Textual replication, from transcription to typesetting, photolithography, microfilming, and digitization, is a largely invisible mechanism that has long facilitated the relationship between historians and the primary sources of their scholarship. Today, in the face of large-scale digitization projects, we express concern about the limitations of these mediations: the errors introduced by transcription, or the detail lost through digitization. At the same time, we understand that in many cases it is only thanks to these mediations that these texts are accessible at all. Given these conditions, I find that differing values, and different technologies, shape the ways in which historical documents are made available to be read, and the kinds of information that is lost in transmission.

In this dissertation, I situate these contemporary anxieties, made urgent by the spread of digital technology, within a long history of textual reproduction. The first part of the dissertation focuses on transcription, which I define as the sequential replication of text across media. It moves chronologically through the contact zone of colonial Mexico, the libraries of nineteenth-century historians, and modern-day digitization projects. In doing so, it shows how the hands of copyists, collectors, librarians, and machines leave their mark on the page, and on the past. The second part of the dissertation turns to the production of photographic facsimiles through the use of photolithography, the Photostat, and digital photography. Rather than focusing on technological innovation, however, the two chapters in this part consider the role of photographic facsimiles in both enabling and working against institutional control over Mexico's historical record. It illustrates how both transcription and photographic replication have been used to construct collections, libraries, and sites of cultural heritage across the U.S.-Mexico border. It argues that it is through these mechanisms that affiliated communities have asserted control over historical memory.
Early colonial Mexico. 21 Followers. Papers. People. “Thinking and Writing the Altepetl in the Sixteenth Century: What and Who is Huexotzinco?” Bookmark. by Tania L García-Piña. 5. Early colonial Mexico, Spanish Colonial Justice System, Nahuatl Studies, Ethnohistory and Latin America's Indigenous Antiquities and Colonial Cultures. Building in the Shadow of Death: Monastery Construction and the Politics of Community Reconstitution in Sixteenth-Century Mexico. Indigenous and European Discursive Modes in Colonial Mexican Land Documents. Bookmark. Download. Book Review: Franciscan Spirituality and Mission in New Spain, 1524–1599: Conflict Beneath the Sycamore Tree (Luke 19:1–10) . Steven E. Turley . Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700. After a distinguished education and introduction into the life of the empire of New Spain in Mexico, Ixtlilxochitl was employed by the viceroy to write histories of the indigenous peoples in Mexico. Engaging with this history and delving deep into the resultant archives of this life’s work, Amber Brian addresses the question of how knowledge and history came to be crafted in this era. Brian takes the reader through not only the history of the archives itself, but explores how its inheritors played as crucial a role in shaping this indigenous history as the author. The archive helped inspire an The essays in this book, by contributors from Britain, the US, Brazil, India and Canada, explore new perspectives on translation in relation to post-colonial societies. The essay topics include: links between centre and margins in the intellectual domain; shifts in translation practice from colonial to post-colonial societies; translation and power relations among Indian languages; Brazilian cannibalistic theories of literary transfer. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.