Renaissance Codices: *The Relación de Michoacán*, *the Codex Mendoza*, and Indigenous Humanism in Sixteenth-Century New Spain

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Though the Renaissance has traditionally been conceptualized as solely a European event during which a renewed interest in Greco-Roman culture arose across Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, recent scholarship shows that the Renaissance was a global event.[1] Worldwide a rediscovery of the classical tradition coincided with the colonization and discovery of the Americas.[2] I argue that the influence of the Renaissance can be seen in the works produced by Spanish missionary linguists and chroniclers in sixteenth-century New Spain, the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza*. These two colonial codices were produced in the same decade depicting Mexica (or Aztec) and Purépecha culture respectively. Both the *Relación de Michoacan* and the *Codex Mendoza* are argued to have been commissioned by Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza, though the latter claim has recently been challenged.[3] However, even with a lack of evidence proving Mendoza's link to the *Codex Mendoza,* both codices were the most exhaustive ethnographic accounts of their respective peoples at the time (the Purépecha in the *Relación* and the Mexica in the *Mendoza*).[4] Given the temporal proximity of their completion, and their depictions and discussions of the pre-Hispanic cultures of their respective peoples,

[1] These works include those by anthropologist Walter D. Mignolo; historians Peter Burke, Luke Clossey, and Felipe Fernández-Armesto; and classicist David A. Lupher.

[2] Namely that of historians Lewis Hanke, J.H. Elliott, Serge Gruzinski, and Thomas James Dandelet.

[3] Historian Camila Townsend comments that there "is no documentary evidence to support" the notion that viceroy Mendoza commissioned the *Codex Mendoza* in Townsend, Camilla. *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 225.

[4] Art historian Manuel Aguilar-Moreno comments that "the *Codex Mendoza* is an almost unique ethnographic account, comparable in its importance only to the later *Florentine Codex*" in Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 270-271.

they warrant comparison. The validity of this comparison is further confirmed by historian Kevin Terraciano. In his introduction, he briefly compares the contents of the two codices and their tripartite structures, noting the lack of a title page or prologue for the *Codex Mendoza* and the utilization of the *Relación* in resolving territorial disputes in the Tzintzuntzán region. He later notes that the illustrations painted by indigenous artists in codices, including the *Relación* and the *Codex Mendoza*, were used as evidential support in legal disputes, and documented various episodes such as claims of land and abuses of power.[5] The *Mendoza* includes illustrations depicting a 'Council Hall', where legal cases would be heard and parties would be judged, depictions which imply an argument for the governmental capacity, and consequently the civility, of the Mexica.[6] By placing the depictions of cannibalism, human sacrifice, and education in the *Relacíon de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza* in the context of sixteenth-century Spanish accounts of New Spain such as those of Cortés, las Casas, Gómara, del Castillo, and the response of Chimalpahin, a Mexica intellectual, to Gómara's account, I argue that the Mexica and the Purépecha participated in and produced Renaissance debates and that these codices are Renaissance documents. By depicting their respective pre-Hispanic cultures through the painted illustrations and text in these two codices, as well as providing alternate depictions of colonial episodes featured in Spanish chronicles revolving around human sacrifice, cannibalism, and education, the Purépecha and the Mexica participated in the Renaissance humanist debates over the treatment of New World natives, as well as over the writing of historical narratives. Their accounts and depictions in these codices address many of the concerns, descriptions, and caricatures found in the accounts of Spanish chroniclers such as Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Cas-

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[5] Terraciano, "Introduction," 6. Cases of codices created to settle legal disputes include the *Codex Tepetlaoztoc* (or Kingsborough) and the *Codex Osuna*, created in
the 1550s and the 1560s.

[6] Daniela Bleichmar, "History in Pictures: Translating the *Codex Mendoza*." *Art History* 38, no. 4 (2015): 690.

tillo, and Francisco López de Gómara, the philosophical debate between Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and influence accounts of indigenous peoples by Renaissance humanists once the codices reached the New World.

This article engages modern scholarship in the fields of Anthropology, Art History, Philosophy, Linguistics, and, of course, History concerning the production of colonial codices in sixteenth-century New Spain and Renaissance Humanism. One problem in much of the literature on colonial codices is that they have not typically been conceptualized as Renaissance documents, but rather as colonial documents which were influenced in part by aspects of the Renaissance, with the importance of the latter quality treated as secondary.

On the one hand, classicists and historians have argued that Spanish chroniclers of the conquest were immersed in a Renaissance culture.[7] They emphasize the degree to which the Spanish were part of a larger European movement, but do not include the indigenous peoples colonized by the Spanish in their assessment of the Renaissance. On the other hand, historians and anthropologists have placed codices within the context of the Renaissance.[8] One historian argues that the European Renaissance and that of the indigenous peoples of New Spain, a movement which he refers to as the Indo-Mexican Renaissance, were separate events, thus simultaneously acknowledging the proper placement of classically educated indigenous scribes in the Renaissance movement but cutting them off from any dialogic engagement with Early Modern Europe. By contrast, an anthropologist sees codices primarily as colonial documents in which Spanish imperial repurposing of Greco-Roman ideals are seen in their manipulations of and superimpositions onto depictions of indigenous peoples and cultures in codices.[9] In a third approach, anthropologists and art historians

[7] David A. Lupher, *Romans in a New World: Classical Models in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006; Hanke, Lewis. *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959); J.H. Ellliott, "The Mental World of Hernán Cortés." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* vol.17 (1967): 41-58; Thomas James Dandelet, *The Renaissance of Empire in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[8] Historian Serge Gruzinski and anthropologist Walter D. Mignolo.

[9] Serge Gruzinski, *Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019)* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2001; Serge Gruzinski, *Painting the Conquest: The Mexican Indians and the European Renaissance* (Paris, France:

have argued that colonial codices were continuations of tradition. Here Mexican codices, as well as *lienzos*, are evidence of "alternative literacies," emphasizing the continuity of pre-Columbian indigenous pictographic traditions. On the other hand, colonial codices, such as the *Codex Mendoza* and the *Relación*, is Spanish ethnographic repurposing of a late medieval cultural encyclopedic tradition in which these manuscripts served as classifications of cultural customs including "history, gods and religion, burial customs, and the like."[10] Some historians have described the indigenous accounts of the conquest as part of a dialogue with Spanish accounts. Labeled as "contesting visions," or calling indigenous accounts of the conquest as those of the "vanquished" and Spanish interpretations as those of the "victors."[11] Finally, other historians argue for the influence of colonial codices on European accounts of the New World, employing a more global, transatlantic approach to the analysis of these colonial manuscripts.

One might argue that the two codices are not Renaissance documents, but rather colonial documents that were written at the time and therefore bare some coincidental references. Yet although the commissioning of these manuscripts served colonial purposes, the collaborative authorial process between friars and the Purépecha and the Mexica (respectively) not only included oral or pictographic cultures in the production of history, which was a deviation from Renaissance views on the supremacy of alphabetic textual tradition; but they also used the same episodes of the conquest, and aspects of indigenous cultures referred to in Spanish chronicles, as a means to respond and engage with Renaissance views of historical production and Spanish justifications, founded on Greco-Roman philosophy, for the mistreatment of the natives in the New World. It is this focus on the Purépecha and the Mexica as participants in and producers of the Renais-

Flammarion), 1992; Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 2003.

[10] John M.D. Pohl, "Mexican Codices, Maps, and Lienzos as Social Contracts" in *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press), 1994, 137-160; Elizabeth Hill Boone,"Pictorial Documents and Visual Thinking in Postconquest Mexico" in *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection), 1992, 149-193.

[11] Terraciano, Kevin, "Competing Memories of the Conquest of Mexico," In *Contested Visions in Spanish Colonial World* (Los Angeles, CA: Yale University Press), 2011, 55-77; Stuart B. Schwartz, *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahua Views of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's), 2000.

sance that is new about my approach.[12]

This article argues that the *Relación de Michoacan*, a sixteenth century codex detailing the history of the Purépecha) and the *Codex Mendoza*, another contemporaneous sixteenth century codex detailing the history of the Mexica, are Renaissance documents. They are Renaissance documents in part because they were the result of the Renaissance Humanist movement, an intellectual movement in which classical antiquity was studied not only for grammar and rhetoric, but also History and Moral Philosophy. These codices demonstrate how the Purépecha and the Mexica, with the help of Spanish friars, participated in and produced debate over the treatment of the natives and their status as human beings. This article answers how exactly the Purépecha and the Mexica participated in this Renaissance humanist debate concerning the treatment of the native and the barbarity or civility of their cultures, in their contributions to the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza*?

The Mental World of Sixteenth-Century Codices

Before any discussion of the two codices and their status as Renaissance documents, a general introduction is needed. The following clarifies the socio-political context in New Spain at the time these two manuscripts were commissioned and completed, including the relationship between friars and the indigenous, the Spanish chronicles that preceded these two codices, and previous depictions of the Purépecha and the Mexica in those accounts. Hernán Cortés mirrored the societal development of late medieval and early Renaissance Spain which was emerging from late medieval traditions, but was also revitalized by Italian humanism.[13] One probable tie to the Renaissance is his likely training in Latin grammar and law during his time at Salamanca between 1499 and 1501. These fields of study were heavily influenced by Italian humanism and scholars such as Antonio Nebrija. Cortés's knowledge of law is featured in his *Cartas de Relación* (Letters of Relation) to King Charles V of Spain, with his references to the

[12] This notion of the Purépecha and the Mexica as "producers" of the Renaissance was recommended by Dr. Kittiya Lee in response to an early draft of this article presented at Cal State LA's Annual Student Symposium on Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities held March 3, 2023.

[13] J.H. Elliott, "The Mental World of Hernán Cortés," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* Vol. 17 (1967): 42-55

Siete Partidas (Seven Documents or Certificates), the legal code of Castile written by Alfonso X.[14] These references make clearer Cortés's legal justifications for the conquest of Mexico in 1519-1521, which involved references to Aristotle and other Greco-Roman philosophers. What is particularly difficult to assess here, a difficulty present in many of the Spanish chronicles of this period, is the degree of familiarity Cortés and latter Spanish chroniclers and conquistadors actually had with Greco-Roman ideas. Bernal Díaz del Castillo frequently referenced Roman triumphs when describing Spanish conquests, yet Cortés's references are often more vague than this. Many of the aphorisms in his letters could be traced back to both Greco-Roman works, but could also be based on late medieval and even contemporary fiction such as *La Celestina*. These phrases are often the textual justifications for conquest. One telling example of this is Cortés's use of the phrase "if the laws had to be broken in order to reign, then broken they must be," one which derives from Euripides, but is later used by Cicero and Suetonius. The origin of Cortés's familiarity with this phrase is further complicated by the fact that the anecdote regarding his justification was well-known in Spain. The possible influence of Greco-Roman thinkers on Cortés, is later coupled with the influence of Franciscan missionaries, who Cortés initially pleads to join him in New Spain to facilitate the rule of indigenous, but whom Cortés later mimics in the criticisms of the pomp, avarice, and worldliness of the church in his fourth letter. Franciscan missionaries also seem to have increased his vision of empire to that of a global empire, mirroring the global vision of Franciscan conversion. Later in his life, Cortés was to befriend many humanists and, in retirement, even host discussions about humanist matters. Some of those he befriended include humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who may have been influenced by Cortés in his arguments for just war against the natives of the New World, and Francisco López de Gómara, Cortés's first biographer. Partially due to his facilitation of Franciscan influence in the New World, Franciscans would later reference him in their writings, including the codices they jointly authored with indigenous peoples, such as the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza*.

Thomas James Dandelet argues that the "ideology of conquest" utilized by Spanish chroniclers and philosophers, was

[14] Elliott, "The Mental World," 44.

the direct consequence of the "Imperial Renaissance" in Italy. However, what he does not mention is that indigenous authors also participated in this "Imperial Renaissance" through their collaborations with Spanish friars in the production and authorship of codices, such as the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza*. These manuscripts emphasized indigenous perspectives on a range of topics, many of which are either entirely absent in Spanish chronicles, or distorted in them.

The *Relación de Michoacán*, dates back as far as 1539 to when viceroy Antonio de Mendoza rode his horse from Mexico City to Michoacán. Small in size, it is an account of the Purépecha people, involving both its pre-Columbian past and the conquest. Most of what is known about the authorship of the manuscript comes from the prologue, in which the friar has shared that the text was formed by the oral contributions of indigenous noble informants.[15] No information is given regarding the artists of the painted illustrations, but art historian Angelica Afanador-Pujol has theorized that they were painted by four native artists who revised the images in collaboration with the friar. The friar in question has most recently been argued to have been Fray Jerónimo de Alcalá by historian J. Benedict Warren. In his article, Warren deduces that Alcalá was the author of the *Relación.*[16] Previous arguments were refuted through the confirmation of his status as a Franciscan, his residence in Tzintzuntzan in 1538, his friendship with Mendoza, and his knowledge of the Tarascan language.[17] In regards to its indigenous collaborators there were four artists that worked on the illustrations. Numerous others were used to gather the information that would form the narrative, or written portion, of the codex.

The *Codex Mendoza* was created in Mexico City around 1542, just three years after the earliest possible date for the commissioning of the *Relacíon*, and may have also been commissioned by Mendoza, hence its title.[18] It is an account of

[15] J. Benedict Warren, "Fray Jerónimo de Alcalá: Author of the *Relación de Michoacán*?" *The Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press) Vol. 27, no. 3 (Jan. 1971): 307-308.

[16] "Fray Jeronimo de Alcala: Author of the *Relación de Michoacán*?"

[17] Warren, "Fray," 316.

[18] The date of its production is still debated with new arguments, such as that of J. Gómez Tejada, quoted in Domenici (2019), placing the date of production at the "turn of the 1550s" (1547-52). Regardless, the temporal proximity and ethnographic characteristics still warrant a comparison of the *Relación* and the *Codex Mendoza*.

Mexica history and society which was likely made by several indigenous artists. This codex came together in five steps according to Bleichmar: (1) the pictorial recording of Mexica history with pages in between left blank; (2) the oral presentation of pictographs in Nahuatl; (3) the translation of the Nahuatl oral presentation into Spanish; (4) the writing of Spanish script next to the images, as well as the creation of a glossary; (5) and the correction of Spanish text and the addition of an appendix on the manuscript's construction.[19]

The modes of expression and, consequently, the historical accounts of Spanish chroniclers were quite different than those employed by the Purépecha and Mexica. Though the Purépecha were similar in many ways to surrounding tribes their culture was purely oral. This fact explains the absence of indigenous characters, glyphs, or pictographs in the *Relación de Michoacán*. Contrastingly, the Mexica had a pictographic writing system and therefore the presence of their mode of expression was facilitated in the collaborative authorial process of the *Codex Mendoza's* production. According to Elizabeth Hill Boone, these types of codices were a continuation of a late medieval cultural encyclopedic tradition in which the cultural customs of a foreign people were cataloged. These types of manuscripts were commonly commissioned throughout New Spain with their purposes ranging from the political to the historical. These episodes of commission often involved commentary from Spanish chroniclers, including Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and even King Charles V of Spain.[20]

Justifications for Conquest: Spanish Arguments for the Suppression of Indigenous Violence

Violent aspects of indigenous culture and rituals are prominent features in Spanish chronicles which imply an Aristotelian justification of slavery. However, these rituals are presented with more contextual information in the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza*. These rituals often involved human sacrifice and cannibalism. The superimposition of Spanish Catholic cultural values was justified in part because the indigenous peoples, including the Purépecha and the Mexica, were uncivilized

[19] Daniela Bleichmar. "History in Pictures: Translating the *Codex Mendoza*." *Art History* 38, no. 4 (2015): 682–684.
[20] Boone, "Pictorial Documents," 155-160.

in the eyes of the Spanish. Therefore, it is necessary to place both the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza* within the context of Spanish rhetoric regarding these aspects of indigenous culture.

King Charles V of Spain organized a debate at the Colegio de San Gregorio in Valladolid, between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. The Valladolid debate in 1552, was to settle the argument over whether the indigenous peoples of the New World had status as human beings. Las Casas, witnessed the horrendous treatment of the natives once he moved to the New World. Las Casas then caught up on the scholarly literature of the times, became a Dominican friar, and resolved to argue on behalf of indigneous peoples. In 1542, a year after the completion of the *Relación de Michoacán*, las Casas published the first edition of his *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias*, or *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. This was an episodic account which exaggerated the horrors committed by the Spanish and downplayed the agency of the indigenous. Las Casas's work temporarily gained the indigenous rights with the passage of the *Leyes Nuevas,* or New Laws*,* in 1542. In contrast, the Renaissance humanist who argued in favor of the mistreatment of the natives was Sepúlveda. His argument was that Spanish violence against the indigenous through forced conversion was justified if it suppressed indigenous episodes of human sacrifice, cannibalism, and other similar crimes, based on Aristotelian thought. Though the Valladolid debate did not change much (i.e. slavery, violence, and continued forced conversions) this Aristotelian justification of Spanish violence against the indigenous is implied in the accounts of conquistadors from this time period, particularly Bernál Díaz del Castillo's work.

Human Sacrifice

Human Sacrifice, a violent aspect present in the culture of many indigenous groups of the New World, was not only a prominent feature in the Spanish chronicles of the sixteenth-century, but also in the codices. In the *Relación*, an episode of human sacrifice is shown on the 27th illustration (Fig.1). However, it differs from Spanish accounts in numerous ways: (1) it is represented by image rather than text which is a practice much more common in indig-

enous culture whether through painted books, ceramics, or other visual art forms; (2) the sacrificed human, though at the center of the image, is arguably not the primary concern of the artist, but rather secondary to the context of social and political context of organized ritual; (3) sophisticated aspects, including garments, stances, and architecture, of Purépecha culture are emphasized.

Michoacán. Instead of exaggerating the interventive efforts of Franciscan friars, or justifying the conquest, the



Figure 1: Illustration no. 27 in the Relacion de Michoacan

Relacíon comes much closer to historical accuracy. For example, the last *cazonci*, or Purépecha ruler, was burned at the stake, without the intervention of a Franciscan for not revealing where the riches of the Purépecha were. The *Relación* in this way applied Renaissance views of the indigenous as equals to the Spanish, thus allowing their participation in the creation of their history in text and image. In this example, las Casas engages with Spanish accounts of Michoacán, but argues that a Franciscan intervened. This contrastingly emphasizes the barbarity of the Spanish and the concern of a friar.[21]

[21] Las Casas writes "When [conquistador Beltrán Nuño De Guzmán] finally fetched up in the province of Michoacán, some forty leagues from Mexico City and yet another are every bit as fertile and populous as Mexico itself, the lord of Michoacán cameo out in solemn procession with many of his people to welcome him and his men and offer them every kindness, showering them all the while with gifts. This lord had the reputation of being extremely wealthy and of having much gold and silver in his possession,

These passages which were critical of the Spanish execution of imperial power were later responded to by subsequent chroniclers creating a Renaissance dialogue which would continue throughout the sixteenth-century and even into the early seventeenth-century. Prior to the massacre at Cholula (a city in the state of Puebla, Mexico, east of Michoacán), the Spanish discovered that thousands of Cholula warriors were planning to ambush the Spanish in a surprise attack. After the Spanish found out about this plan, they massacred thousands of men. The Spanish conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo justified this massacre, similarly to that of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda.[22] In the passage "with threats he ordered

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and so the Spaniards seized him to hand over his treasures, proceeded to torture him in the fashion I will now describe. They put him in fetters and tied his hands to a plank which ran the full length of his body; they then lit a brazier [a stand with lighted coals] under the soles of his feet and had a lad with a hyssop [or wild shrub with twigs] filled with oil sprinkle them from time to time to ensure a nice even roasting. On one side of the hapless victim stood one tormentor holding an armed crossbow pointed at his heart, while on the other stood a second holding a wild dog which contantly snapped at him and which would have torn him to pieces in the twinkling of an eye. They went on torturing him in this way, trying to get him to reveal the whereabouts of the gold and silver until a Franciscan finally got wind of what was going on and came and released him, although the poor man later died of the injuries they had inflicted."

[22] Castillo writes "I cannot avoid calling to mind the prisons of thick wooden beams which we found in the city, which were full of Indians and boys being fattened so that they could be sacrificed and their flesh eaten. We broke open all these prisons, and Cortés ordered all the Indian prisoners that were confined within them to return to their native countries, and with threats he ordered the caciques and captains and priests of the city not to imprison any more Indians in that way, and not to eat human flesh. They promised not to do so, but what use were such promises? As they never kept them. Let us anticipate and say that these were the great cruelties that the Bishop of Chiapas, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, wrote about and never ceased talking about, asserting that for no reason whatever, or only for our pasttime and because we wanted to, we inflicted that punishment, and he even says it so artfully in his book that he would make those believe, who neither saw it themselves, nor know about it, that these and other cruelties about which he writes were true (as he states them) while it is altogether the reverse of true.[Blotted out in the original : I beg your Lorship's pardon for stating it so clearly.] It did not happen as he describes it. Let the monks of the order of Santo Domingo see what they can read in the book in which he has written it, and they will find to be very different the one from the other. I also wish to say that some good Franciscan monks, who were the first friars whom his Majesty sent to this New Spain after the conquest of Mexico, as I shall relate further on, went to Cholula to inform themselves and find out how and in what way that punishment was carried out, and for what reason, and the enquiry that they made was from the same priests and elders of the city, and after fully informing themselves from these very men, they found it to be neither more nor les tan

the caciques and captains and priests of the city not to imprison any more Indians in that way, and not to eat human flesh," we see Castillo discussing indigenous human sacrifice and the later failure to adhere to promises "not to do so" anymore as a justification for the actions of conquistadors. Castillo's depiction of Franciscans is also rather telling. Here he claims that the Franciscans who traveled to Cholula "to inform themselves" of the "punishment… carried out" found it to prove the falsity of las Casas's account.

Cannibalism

Art historian Angélica Afanador-Pujol posits that the contributions of indigenous artists and scribes in collaboration with Spanish friars helped shaped the ways in which European and colonial authorities imagined indigenous peoples.[23] She later argues that the pictorial depictions of cannibalism in the *Relacíon* were responses to visual renderings of cannibalism in other European sources. Afanador-Pujol makes no mention of the Renaissance as an important intellectual context for this larger discussion of indigenous culture. Depictions of indigenous cannibalism in European sources of the sixteenth-century were used to justify imperial expansion. Pointing to barbarous qualities were crucial for these justifications, such as those of Sepúlveda. What the Purépecha provide in their depiction of cannibalism in the *Relacíon* is an "indigenous intervention" in this larger Renaissance dialogue.[24] She later posits that European influence on indigenous contributors was transmitted through exposure to the large collections of books found in the libraries of new colleges in the Michoacán region.[25] She names depictions of cannibalism in a sixteenth-century edition of *Geography* by Roman polymath Ptolemy as a likely source of inspiration.[26]

Depictions of Education

The indigenous lack of education, or civility, was a crucial component in the arguments in favor of indigenous mistreat-

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what I have written down in this narrative, and not as [las Casas] had related it."

[23] Anjélica J. Afanador-Pujol, "Conquest, Reason, and Cannibalism in a Sixteenth-Century Mexican Manuscript." *The Art Bulletin* (New York, N.Y.) 104, no. 2 (2022): 49.

[24] Afanador-Pujol, "Conquest," 49.

[25] Such as the Colegio de Pátzcuaro and the Colegio de los Estudios Mayores in Tiripetío.

[26] Afanador-Pujol, "Conquest," 51.

ment made by Spanish chroniclers and humanists like Sepúlveda. However, depictions of indigenous education that combat these mischaracterizations can be found in the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza*.

Ethnohistorian Miguel León-Portilla discusses the response of Nahuas to the condemnation from friars regarding idolatrous aspects of Nahua, or Mexica, culture just after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, the capital city of the Mexica.[27] He quotes a response of the principal Nahua lords to the friars' condemnation.[28] This generational transfer of knowledge, education in other words, is also depicted in the *Codex Mendoza*. In Fig. 2, two teenage Mexica males can be seen choosing different educational routes: the one above choosing the route of a priestly education, and the lower choosing a more general education, which included military training.

Though their trajectories were initially quite independent of Spanish chronicles, the codices of the New World had a considerable influence on the accounts of the New World written by humanists. Thus, the codices were part of the Global Renaissance dialogue regarding indigenous peoples, not only in Spain, but also across Europe. One example of this positioning that warrants more scholarly attention is the degree to which the *Codex Mendoza* affected the depictions of the New World in the writings of French cosmographer André Thevet.[29] He wrote accounts of the New World, which referenced previous works including Spanish chronicles and codices, that were informed by his experience living there. This probable dialogue between European accounts of the New World and the *Codex Mendoza* were continued through Richard Hakluyt's and Samuel Purchas's respective periods of ownership of the document and its subsequent influence on their accounts.[30] Another, perhaps more influential episode, was the probable inadvertent influence of the *Codex Mendoza* on the writings of French humanist Michel de Montaigne, who was an ac-

[27] Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).
[28] León Portilla translates the passage as "But, our lords, there are those who guide us; they govern us, they carry us on their backs and instruct us how our gods must be worshipped…The experts, the knowers of speeches and orations, it is their obligation; they busy themselves day and night with the placing of the incense…Those who observe [read] the codices, those who recite [tell what they read]. Those who noisily turn the pages of illustrated manuscripts. Those who have possession of the black and red ink [wisdom] and of that which is pictured; they lead us, they guide us, they tell us the way."
[29] Thevet owned the codex and was geographer to King Henry II of France.
[30] Bleichmar, "History in Pictures," 692.



Figure 2: Illustration in Part 3 of the Codex Mendoza

quaintance of Thevet's and commented on indigenous culture in several of his essays late in his life.

As a result of this wider circulation of the *Codex Mendoza*, it is probable that Montaigne's depictions of indigenous peoples in his essays were influenced by his relationship with Thevet, and by extension the *Codex Mendoza*. In these episodes of the Global Renaissance dialogue concerning indigenous peoples, Montaigne discusses cannibalism and human sacrifice in indigenous culture with a more historically informed view than that of the Spanish conquistadors who had previously and contemporaneously assessed those aspects. In his essay "On Moderation", Montaigne contrasts Greek human sacrifice with that of the indigenous of the New World: "Amurath, when he conquered Isthmus sacrificed six hundred Greek youths for the soul of his father, so that their blood might serve as a propitiation, expiating the sins of that dead man."[31] Montaigne later elaborates on this broad *contextualization* of human sacrifice as part of religious practice in general.[32] This description of roasting bears a striking resemblance to las Casas' account of the burning of the last *cazonci* in Michoacán, though Montaigne's reference can be to any number of such instances found in Spanish or Portuguese chronicles.

[31] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays* (trans. M.A. Screech). (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 226-228

[32] Montaigne calls human sacrifice "a very ancient [notion] which was universally embraced by all religions, and which leads us to think that we can please Heaven and Nature by our murders and massacres… and in those new lands discovered in our own time… the practice is accepted virtually everywhere: all their idols are slaked with human blood, not without various examples of cruelty. Men are burned alive; when half -roasted they are withdrawn from the fire so that their hearts and entrails can be plucked out; others, even women, are flayed alive: their skin, all bloody serves as a cloak to mask others."

Indigenous manuscripts such as these codices also reached the hands of political personnel who were often familiar with rivaling depictions of indigenous peoples and customs and were thus part of a Renaissance dialogue. Hernán Cortés for example brought over codices and indigenous paintings back from New Spain. Serge Gruzinki argues that these episodes of familiarization with indigenous documents were evidence of a decontextualization from their socio-cultural contexts. Cortés described the indigenous authoring peoples as "Indians," demonstrating a neglect of ethnographic concern.[33] This neglect is strikingly more evident when compared to the collaboration between friars and indigenous peoples in the production of codices in sixteenth-century New Spain.

One complication in historiographical dialogue concerning this circulation of indigenous manuscripts in Europe concerns the degree to which their circulation was limited or manipulated by the Spanish. Gruzinski argues that the indigenous curiosities that Cortés and other conquistadors brought back to Spain were purposely selected for their depictions of idols. This is reflective of larger trends in European thought of the New World, such as those relevant to the Reformation.[34] Though this argument is certainly worth entertaining, Gruzinski does not account for the Spanish justifications for the burning of indigenous manuscripts. Nor does he account for the preservation of indigenous manuscripts in Spanish and other European collections. The estimation of high value implicit in the exchange of said manuscripts between political personnel in Early Modern Europe, such as is evident in the exchange between Thevet, Hakluyt, and Purchas.

Though the *Codex Mendoza*'s journey across Early Modern Europe is more demonstrative of this influence, the *Relación de Michoacán* was more subtle and perhaps more characteristic in its influence on Early Modern European accounts of the New World. The manuscript featuring the ethnographic documentation of and collaboration between Fray Jerónimo de Alcalá and his Purépecha collaborators was moved late in the sixteenth-century to the Real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo de El Escorial in Madrid, Spain, where it still resides.[35] According to J. Benedict Warren,

[40] Serge Gruzinski, *Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 27.

[33] Gruzinski, *Images at War*, 28-29.

[34] Angélica Jimena Afanador Pujól, *The Relación de Michoacán (1539-1541) and the Politics of Representation in Colonial Mexico*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 3.

the importance of the *Relación* had been recognized since its publication in 1869.[36] The story of its journey back to Spain is still quite murky, but the most convincing argument is that the manuscript was taken back to Mexico City by Mendoza in 1542. It was then used in Texcoco by Fray Toribio de Motolinía within a year after that, specifically the section on the death of the last *cazonci*, which would later be consulted by las Casas. It would reach the Escorial sometime in the seventeenth-century, and was later published in 1869, with no proof that it was consulted by any other chronicler after Motolinía around 1542.[37] Through its line of influence, first on Motolinía, then las Casas, and later the European accounts, the *Relación* also had a comparably probable impact on the Renaissance humanists of Early Modern Europe. Scholars such as Daniela Bleichmar have described much of this transatlantic movement as part of an effort to collect "curiosities", and therefore an extension of colonialism. Historian Jorge Canizares-Esguerra has argued that Mesoamerican books were valued for their historicity in both Europe and New Spain, which is supported by both the circulation of the *Codex Mendoza* and the influence of the *Relación* on subsequent accounts of Michoacán.[38] Bleichmar recurringly uses words like "curiosities" and "exotic" to describe the way Europeans viewed the *Codex Mendoza*, however she too details how the manuscript influenced various early modern histories and cosmographies. The manuscript was not only translated into other languages, but also "translated" into other spaces, or entered into other geographical and narrative contexts.[39]

This article has surveyed how both Spanish chroniclers and indigenous authors of codices participated in and produced Global Renaissance debates over aspects of indigenous cultures. Cortés, Gómara and Castillo were steeped in Renaissance culture, leaving many references and implied arguments in their accounts to be reassessed and placed within the context of the Renaissance by modern scholars. In both depictions of violence and educa-

[35] Warren, "Fray,"
[36] Warren, "Fray,"
[37] Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 94.
[38] Bleichmar, "History in Pictures," 692-694.

tion, the Spanish chroniclers and the indigenous authors provided contrasting explorations. The Spanish emphasized indigenous violence and withheld contextual information regarding its frequent social and political function. Education is nearly entirely absent in Spanish chronicles depicting indigenous groups but is prominent in the *Codex Mendoza*'s depictions of young Mexica men choosing between routes of education (militaristic or general).

All participants in the Renaissance, the ultimate receptions of the *Relación de Michoacan*, the *Codex Mendoza*, the *Brevísima Relación* of las Casas, and Castillo's *Historia Verdadera* varied back home in Spain. In an ironic turn of events, it was las Casas's account, filled with exaggerations of Spanish conduct and misrepresentations of the indigenous, that drove the reformation of indigenous treatment, albeit temporarily, in the New World with the issue of the *Leyes Nuevas* in 1542. It was the accounts of Francisco López de Gómara and Bernal Díaz del Castillo and other conquistadors, printed in mass throughout Spain, that created the myths and legends of the Spanish "conquest of Mexico" as a just war, arguing along the same Aristotelian lines as Sepúlveda. Ultimately, the *Relación de Michoacán* was likely less globally influential on the histories produced in Early Modern Europe than its counterpart, the *Codex Mendoza*, in part due to the latter's frequent travel between various European hands. In comparison to the popular Spanish chronicles of Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Francisco López de Gómara, and Bartolomé de las Casas, the codices received comparatively little attention, though they were arguably much more present in the Renaissance as a movement. They engaged with Renaissance debates over indigenous peoples and cultures, but also having been authored by friars and indigenous nobles who were educated in the humanist tradition brought over to New Spain. These texts have been approached textually as a continuation of a humanist tradition of language study involving grammars, religious doctrines, and dictionaries. Though the disparities of attention paid to these documents in relation to their Spanish chronicle counterparts is without question, I hope that this article will help, in some small part, to illuminate the role of the Purépecha and the Mexica in the Renaissance, as well as that of codices such as the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Codex Mendoza* as Renaissance documents.