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Review of *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, The Life of Mexico City*, By Barbara E. Mundy

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Barbara Mundy's much-anticipated book is beautiful on many levels. Putting to excellent use more than 70 color reproductions of sixteenth-century maps, codices, and featherwork, she documents both the "slow and irretrievable changes" (75) that Spanish conquest wrought on the great Aztec city of Tenochtitlan and the profoundly enduring pathways of its pre-Hispanic structures and inhabitants. Mundy recovers in splendid detail and lyrical prose how Mesoamericans rebuilt their damaged, occupied city in ways that are still evident in the physical, imagined, and lived spaces of modern Mexico City.

Three pillars support Mundy's view of the city: water, political authority, and human activity across the urban landscape. In Chapters 2 and 3, she emphasizes the importance of control over water for Tenochtitlan's governing elites and, indeed, for the city's very existence. Directed by a divinity to settle in the middle of salty Lake Tetzco, the Mexica originally depended on freshwater springs at Chapultepec, which early Mexica rulers siphoned with aqueducts. Other public works projects desalinated the lake's western side for agriculture, controlled the flow of water with canals, and managed flooding with dikes. These engineering feats were associated with particular rulers whose appearance in monumental images exhibited their taming of Chalchiuhtlicue, the female deity associated with water. Cosmic and political power was manifested, distributed, and reinforced by glittering public processions along the water's causeways, literally and symbolically linking the

ruler to different areas of the city and to farther flung parts of the empire. This section of Mundy's book is reminiscent, with a different emphasis, of David Carrasco's work on sacrifice and the pre-Hispanic city.

Chapters 4 and 5 show that neither Mesoamerican lifeways, the built environment, nor Mexica rulership in Tenochtitlan were destroyed by Spanish conquest. Political power continued to be closely tied to control over water. Records from the Spanish *cabildo* and courts, along with pictorial documents like the remarkable mid-century *Mapa de Santa Cruz* lead Mundy to focus on the re-centered seat of Mexica governance, the southwest quadrant of San Juan Moyotlan. Spanish attempts to erase the Aztec city from memory, concentrated in the form and activities of the Franciscans' Moyotlan convent analyzed in Chapter 6, failed. Mesoamerican historical memory persisted and was geo-referenced in the city's place names as outlined in Chapter 7: of *tlaxilacalli* neighborhoods with their overlapping spatial and social meanings, of buildings and streets and today's metro stops, and in the variable names of the city itself. Catholic and imperial processions continued to distribute cosmic and political power around the city, and a new royal palace (*tecpan*) built to overlook the city's largest marketplace was the site of both Mexica governance and popular protest as drought, disease, and colonial rule eroded the social compact (Chapter 8).

This is a theoretically elegant book, relying especially on Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre (and also, it would seem, Jane Jacobs) to tack back and forth between maps and meaning, buildings and location, and a street-level view of "spatial practice" (10–12). Mundy emphasizes movement of people, goods, water, and cosmic forces. One senses that she most wants to bring the non-elite and quotidian to life, a difficult task best accomplished in her description of the marketplace in Chapter 4, court disputes and the 1564 attack against the *tecpan* in Chapter 8, and her own wanderings through modern Mexico City.

With the attentiveness of her discipline to image, color, and materiality, Mundy has also written a first-rate political and environmental history that charts the shaping of this lacustrine city from the first Chapultepec aqueduct built under Chimalpopoca (a.1376–1395) to its repair, commissioned in even more desperate times by Antonio Valeriano (a.1573–1599), detailed in Chapter 9. By the time of this Mexica noble's governorship, the city was at the beginning of a 400-year-long, "agonizing *desagüe*" (210) caused, in part, by Europeans' imperialistic mismanagement of the lake, which has been charted from a different perspective by Vera Candiani. If Mexican architect Alberto Kalach can dream of Lake Tetzoco's restoration in a *ciudad futura* for Mexico City, Barbara Mundy shows us the Mesoamerican foundations—historical, structural, intellectual, and cultural—upon which such a vision is built.