Miniature Crafts and Their Makers: Palm Weaving in a Mexican Town (review)

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indigenous processing methods, into the larger colonial economy. Bauer's argument is fascinating as he demonstrates that the unique qualities of dried and soaked maize resisted mechanized milling until the latter stages of the nineteenth century, meaning that the pre-Columbian *metate* became a central tool in colonial life, and that women, as users of this technology, bore the responsibility for its integration into the hybrid colonial society.

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Miniature Crafts and Their Makers: Palm Weaving in a Mexican Town. By Katrin S. Flechsig. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004. Pp xv, 208. Tables. Illustrations. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. $45.00 cloth.

Handicrafts play a central role in the symbolism of Mexican national identity and the representation of folk traditions. In this social life of handicrafts account, Flechsig is concerned with the "'backstage' of craft production" rather than the more public tourism market. In this ethnography, she asks what has contributed to the miniaturization of Mexican handicrafts by looking at one commonly known type of object, hand-woven figurines. She resists the temptation to reduce her explanation to that of tradition, basing her conclusions on a combination of local oral history, archival research, and an examination of the local and global handicraft markets.

Set in the dusty, sleepy, and definitely non-tourist town of Chigmecatitlán, located near Puebla, Mexico, Mixtec Indians have woven palm fronds into items for utilitarian and decorative use for centuries. Flechsig learns that although weaving palm into mats, baskets, and hats is a pre-Columbian practice, the tradition of weaving palm into sculptures depicting daily and ritual life dates back to the early twentieth century. The trend towards miniaturization is even more recent, beginning in the mid-1960s. Flechsig argues that miniaturization is mediated through the commercial relations with outsiders, including foreign tourists and elite Mexicans. This social and economic relationship influences not only the shrinking of the figures but also what is considered authentic and how the residents of Chigmecatitlán innovate new designs. For Mexican tourists they represent national identity. For international tourists they symbolize authentic Mexico and indigenous crafts. Ironically, for the local Mixtec weavers themselves the finely crafted objects have commercial value but not high traditional or symbolic value.

In general this is an interesting and well-written ethnography of the place of production, the production processes, and marketing of small hand-woven palm figurines. Flechsig's study compliments the theoretical research of Néstor García Canclini, who has focused on the effects of modernization on traditional Mexican life. Flechsig provides a more detailed and locally situated discussion of how modern forms of capitalism affect small indigenous communities and how work in the global economic marketplace does not have to be at odds with community traditions, or in this case even have much to do with local tradition. She provides a good

case study, which illustrates how indigenous people can evaluate their economic situation and make the best of it. For readers unfamiliar with Mexican anthropological and folklore research, especially the theories of Victoria Novelo and Marta Turok, Flechsig provides a good introduction. In general, she draws on the past research of Mexican scholars and shows how the entrepreneurs and weavers in Chigmecatitlán have sophisticated explanations of why they weave and what the significance of palm weaving is to them.

Although the book provides interesting details about what the figures mean to the locals, comparing commercial, ritual, historic/traditional social and economic spheres, it does not discuss these meanings within a broader theoretical context. Furthermore, the sections on household economics, production, and vending are not well integrated with the rich and abundant scholarly literature addressing these topics. This omission is especially glaring with respect to the long history of ethnographic research in Mexico and Guatemala on handicraft production and marketing.

Locating this ethnography within broader anthropological theoretical traditions would help readers better understand the social and economic contexts in which these Mixtec weavers live and guide readers to what is significant about their situation, about life in a small indigenous Mexican town today. This is not to imply this ethnography is not interesting; Flechsig relates a good story about the place, the people, and their work. She makes frank statements about how fieldwork can dispel romantic notions about peoples and places. Her critical discussion of the process of historical memory provides insight into how things come to be conceived of as "authentic" and "traditional." For these reasons, the book will appeal to non-specialists and students interested in Mexico and handicrafts. Specialists working in these areas will also find this ethnography useful. The story of Chigmecatitlán, however, is not just about miniaturization and making handicrafts, it is about how indigenous Mexicans are struggling to live in a local economy that is impacted by the late-capitalist global system.

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Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint. By Paul J. Vanderwood. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Pp. xvi, 332. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $22.95 paper.

Paul Vanderwood's *Juan Soldado* charts an innovative course for analyzing popular religious beliefs in Mexico by exploring a form of devotion particular to Tijuana since 1938. His multi-faceted investigation revolves around the life of Juan Castillo Morales, a soldier that would come to be known as Juan Soldado after being publically executed for the rape and murder of eight-year-old Olga Camacho. The "circumstances" of Juan Soldado's alleged crime form the backdrop for exploring the "belief" of the community that began to worship him as a saint. Yet, Vanderwood acknowledges that separating these two objects of study is merely a method-