



# **The Relación de Michoacán (1539-1541) and the Politics of Representation in Colonial Mexico (Recovering Languages and Literacies of the Americas)**

*Angélica Jimena Afanador-Pujol*

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The *Relación de Michoacán* (1539–1541) is one of the earliest surviving illustrated manuscripts from colonial Mexico. Commissioned by the Spanish viceroy Antonio de Mendoza, the *Relación* was produced by a Franciscan friar together with indigenous noble informants and anonymous native artists who created its forty-four illustrations. To this day, the *Relación* remains the primary source for studying the pre-Columbian practices and history of the people known as Tarascans or P'urhépecha. However, much remains to be said about how the *Relación*'s colonial setting shaped its final form.

By looking at the *Relación* in its colonial context, this study reveals how it presented the indigenous collaborators a unique opportunity to shape European perceptions of them while settling conflicting agendas, outshining competing ethnic groups, and carving a place for themselves in the new colonial society. Through archival research and careful visual analysis, Angélica Afanador-Pujol provides a new and fascinating account that situates the manuscript's images within the colonial conflicts that engulfed the indigenous collaborators. These conflicts ranged from disputes over political posts among indigenous factions to labor and land disputes against Spanish newcomers. Afanador-Pujol explores how these tensions are physically expressed in the manuscript's production and in its many contradictions between text and images, as well as in numerous emendations to the images. By studying representations of justice, landscape, conquest narratives, and genealogy within the *Relación*, Afanador-Pujol clearly demonstrates the visual construction of identity, its malleability, and its political possibilities.

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