

Noble David Cook

Reseña al libro de Wendy Kramer (coordinadora) y Jorge Luján Muñoz y Wendy Kramer (editores) *Libro Segundo del Cabildo de la ciudad de Santiago de la provincia de Guatemala comenzado a XXVII de mayo de MDXXX años.*

KRAMER, Wendy (coordinadora) y Jorge Luján Muñoz y Wendy Kramer, editores. *Libro Segundo del Cabildo de la ciudad de Santiago de la provincia de Guatemala comenzado a XXVII de mayo de MDXXX años.* La Antigua, Guatemala: CIRMA, 2018, 394 pp.

The libros de cabildo provide a wealth of information on the nature and operation of municipal councils, yet novice historians are sometimes unaware of the historiographical riches to be found. Those often overlooked records provide a synopsis of day to day actions of city officials and are available for any researcher trained to handle often difficult paleographic challenges facing investigators of the Spanish cities in the New World during the first two centuries. The range of topics presented, discussed and debated, oftentimes heatedly, is broad and provides insight into numerous topics, from the sale or rental of public land, to the supply of water and street sanitation, control of *carnicerías*, organization of critical defense in times of public unrest or foreign attacks, issues involving slaves and Amerindians and so forth. Frequency of these meetings varied, depending largely on city size. The format of the sessions followed a similar pattern, from an opening ceremony at the first meeting of the year when city officials were chosen, to the close of the day's session at the end of the allotted time. The structure of power is clearly visible as votes were recorded and individuals or families fell into a self-perpetuating routine. It must be noted that the quality and depth of detail is dependent on the interest and abilities of the secretaries or scribes who recorded the sessions. The researcher can certainly note over time advances and declines as one secretary was replaced by another.

City records were important to retain and steps were taken to protect them, hence their availability compared to other types of records that have been lost or destroyed. There is one caveat, the papers of the early "pueblos de indios," in the organized and forced congregaciones (reducciones), recorded in theory by the escribanos de indios for the most part have disappeared. For some important cities in Spanish America such as Lima and Quito whole series of the cabildo books have been

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published. In other cases such as the modest Spanish city Huamanga (modern Ayacucho) only the earliest records were printed in recent decades. In some cities the public records were destroyed by fire, floods, foreign attacks, thefts or uprisings. Their modern publication for future investigators of the past provide a guarantee they will not disappear

We are now fortunate to have in our hands the wonderful, indeed luxurious edition of the long “missing” libro segundo de la ciudad de Santiago, Guatemala, coordinated by Wendy Kramer along with Jorge Luján Muñoz. Similar to many other important Latin American documents, manuscripts, books and works of art that “disappeared” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this sought out manuscript magically reappeared decades later. Some remain to be found. In so many cases their disappearance was the desire of wealthy collectors and libraries in Europe and the United States. In the case of the Second and Third cabildo books of Santiago de Guatemala, it was Archer Milton Huntington, multi-millionaire founder of the Hispanic Society of America of New York City, founded in 1904, who purchased them along with numerous other texts in Leipzig, Germany from book and manuscript collector and dealer Karl Hiersemann.

Surprisingly the two volumes remained largely unknown in the Hispanic Society’s collections for more than a half century. The historiographical value and the history of their discovery and travels of the volumes from Guatemala to Europe and finally to New York City are meticulously presented by Christopher H. Lutz and Wendy Kramer in the book’s “Introducción” (xxxiv) and “Paradero de los Libros del Cabildo” (lxiv-xcviii). Their efforts to trace as best as possible the whereabouts of the volumes from 1524 to 1913 reads as a mystery novel. The authors point out the “disappearance” of books and manuscripts from Latin America in recent decades has been a constant challenge for the guardians of national patrimony. For a nuanced analysis of this critical issue see the related work by Wendy Kramer, W. George Lovell and Christopher H. Lutz, *Saqueo en el Archivo: el paradero de los tesoros documentales guatemaltecos* (La Antigua Guatemala: CIRMA, 2014).

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The core of the book is of course the second cabildo book, and here we have a professional transcription by Wendy Kramer with Edgar F. Chután Alvarado. An additional value of the book are the numerous facsimile folios that are of immediate value for anyone teaching or learning how to handle the paleographic challenges novice researchers too frequently face. There are also three excellent indices: onomástico, materias and geográfico, and an exhaustive bibliography. All in all, this is a major primary text that all research libraries should have.

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