and as a result 4) humans must have been there earlier than we once thought.

Slam dunk, right? Well, not so fast. What about cultigens? We know that peoples in northern South America and Trinidad were growing various domesticates such as corn and peppers between at least 7,000–8,000 years ago. These and many others (e. g., cassava) were later brought by native groups into the Caribbean islands beginning with the Archaic Age ca. 5,000–4,000 years ago and were a major part of native subsistence strategies. In fact, in general there are very few islands around the world that were colonized successfully without some form of food production to ensure long-term survivability.

This is a major issue that Siegel glosses over: why are not these domesticates found? It is true that some plants are just not good pollen producers, or that some soil contexts are not conducive to the preservation of botanical remains. But in their cores they report only a few instances of maize, and these are all found in sequences contemporaneous with the archaeological record. In addition, they make the argument that while fires can start naturally, it is highly unlikely this would happen during hydric periods. What I would say in response is that even during climatic regimes that are generally wetter or mesic, it is not going to rain every day. There will still be seasonal fluctuations and periods of drought and insolation where natural fires can more easily start. This would essentially leave a similar pattern of charcoal distribution in cores that is indistinguishable from anthropogenic processes.

We must ultimately ask the question: can the paleoenvironmental evidence recovered by Siegel et al. be unequivocally assigned to human intervention? The answer is an unequivocal "no" for the simple reason that there are still so many natural ways in which the evidence may *not* be human, not to mention the dearth of evidence for introduced cultigens that one would expect shortly after human arrival in an island region rife with agricultural proficiency.

Siegel et al. should be commended for their accomplishments. But his assumption *a priori* – that these environmental changes are the result of humans without considering the alternative – has etched a black mark on an otherwise useful and essential volume for archaeologists working in the Caribbean.

Scott M. Fitzpatrick

**Sparks, Garry, Frauke Sachse,** and **Sergio Romero** (eds.): The Americas' First Theologies. Early Sources of Post-Contact Indigenous Religion. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 324 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-067830-2. Price: £ 64.00

The possibilities for directly accessing and researching 16th-century ethnohistorical sources in Mesoamerican languages has changed tremendously in the past 25 years, as a growing group of younger ethnohistorians, trained in one or several of the indigenous languages of Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, have made a number of sources available in English and/or Spanish translations, often accompanied by valuable introductions, notes, and comments. These publications have allowed historians and other researchers to better understand not only the Spanish conquest but also the dynamic early colonial period, from the perspective of the indigenous peoples involved. While a great deal of focus has been on the surviving Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican culture traits in these sources, e. g., in terms of mythology and religion as well as various sociopolitical and economic aspects, there has been less explicit interest in examining under which circumstances, and under influence of which colonial Christian sources, the native authors composed and wrote their texts.

The present volume, by Garry Sparks, and with contributions by Frauke Sachse and Sergio Romero, opens a new chapter in our reading and understanding of an important group of highland Maya 16th-century documents, such as the well-known the "Popol Wuj," the "Title of Totonicapán" and lesser known sources like the "Xpantzay cartularies." As part of a larger on-going translation process, "The Americas' First Theologies," thus, offers translations of a selection of sections from the first volume of the Dominican friar Domingo de Vico's "Theologia Indorum" (1553/1554), a massive two-volume theological treatise written in K'iche' Maya, "to this day longest single piece of literature written in any native American language" (7) comprising a total of some 900 pages. Why this immensely important work has not been translated and formed an essential part of past ethnohistorical studies of the corpus of early post-conquest highland Maya documents before now is truly hard to understand. Thus, Sparks and colleagues convincingly show how Vico's text was read and used, implicitly or explicitly, by various indigenous authors in the second half of the 16th century. In this sense, the volume represents a key to understand these sources in a new intertextual perspective. Not only did colonial highland Maya read the "Theologia" (which was also translated into Kaqchikel and Tz'utujil) but we also learn how Vico was deeply inspired by references to "Maya practices and narratives … based on his direct conversation and ethnographic study among the Maya" (32). Vico integrated elements of native daily life that would make sense in a highland Maya setting, substituting them for items that derived from a European-Near Eastern context, using, for example, quetzal and cotinga feathers, jade, obsidian, chili, and cacao as examples of God's creation and symbols of wealth (55), sapote trees instead of apple trees in Paradise (124 f.), just as the cosmogony is expressed partly by metaphors rooted in Maya ideas of creation (57). Following the methods of the Dominicans, Vico went quite far to adjust the biblical accounts, Catholic folklore, and doctrinal theology in order to make them relevant to the Maya, as when using expressions like *q'anal raxal* "yellowness, greenness" (wealth and abundance) for "earthly Paradise" and "beatitudes," which had for centuries been used in

Maya ritual discourse, and is even attested in Classic period hieroglyphic texts. In addition, Vico extensively employed the traditional Maya poetics reserved for ritual and ceremonial occasions, including different kinds of parallelisms, thus creating what Sparks calls a "Mayanized Catholicism" (21). Yet, there also several examples of how Vico sought to alter Maya religious concepts, thus the underworld realm of Xib'alb'a was converted into an image of hell, following a pattern among the mendicant authors to align the Mesoamerican underworld (which originally had multiple and complementary meanings) with the biblical place of eternal suffering. Worth mentioning is also the explicit introduction of a Euro-Christian multilayered model of the cosmos with nine heavenly layers (120 f., 222 f.). The "Theologia," in other words, was written for Maya readers, not for Vico's fellow members of the order, such as Sahagún's "Historia General" and Diego de Landa's "Relación," both of which were conceptualized partly as compilations of heathen practices that should be extirpated.

The volume is organized in three main sections, following an introduction which contains a useful description of the intellectual background and divide between the Dominicans and Franciscans, and how this affected their approach to the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica and their most effective conversion. Section 1 introduces Domingo de Vico, his background in the Salamancan school and the intellectual humanism promoted also by Las Casas, as well as to some of his K'iche' Maya collaborators, including Diego Reynoso, who also worked on the "Popol Wuj." Having arrived to Guatemala in 1544, Vico's work spanned an intensive ten-year period, being killed by Ch'ol Maya during an expedition to the lowlands in 1555. Next, the twelve translated chapters of "Theologia" constitute the major part of the section. Section 2 provides translations of two other important works by Dominicans that have gone unnoticed, a selection of the *coplas* (hymns) by Friar Luis de Cáncer, written in Q'eqchi' Maya, and a "Doctrina Cristiana" in K'iche' by Friar Damián Delgado. Both texts are shown to have a relationship with Vico's "Theologia," and they both contain several references to objects, animals and plants foreign to a European context, once again suggesting an interest in communicating with the Maya on – and in – their own terms. Section 3 contains eight excerpts from K'iche' and Kaqchikel texts from the mid-16th century that further illustrate the intertextual relationship to the "Theologia." For example, we are shown that although the authors of the "Popol Wuj" were acting against the wishes of Vico, they, in fact, were influenced by the "Theologia," and there are several examples of phrases that are repeated in the "Popol Wuj," which was written in the years just after Vico finished his first volume. Other Maya scribes opted for an "autonomous Mayanizations of a Christianity" (24), drawing on "both biblical and Maya cosmogonic stories" (216). For example, the K'iche' scribes rewrote their ancient migration narratives, so to merge the mythical place of origin, Tulan and the first K'iche' clans, with Babylon and the Israelites.

Turning to a few points of critique, the way Vico's text is re-structured and reproduced, the "strophic presentation" should have been (better) explained: How do the translators and editors get from the original text to the visually pleasing poetic layout? For the uninitiated it is difficult to follow this process, which so fundamentally alters the arrangement of the source. A surprising error occurs twice, when it is stated that the Classic Maya had a logographic writing system (92, 206), when it is, of course, a logophonetic script. Dealing with many of the same aspects of a hybrid, colonial production of images and texts, a reference to Ana Diaz' edited volume "Cielos e inframundos. Una revisión de las cosmologías mesoamericanas" (México 2015) is unfortunately absent. A final editing and checking of the manuscript would have been welcome, since there are several missing words, typos, etc. Finally, it may be that the authors and publisher have reserved a title for a future full translation that will highlight Vico's name as well as the title of his *opus magnum*, but it does seem odd that neither appears in the title of the present work. However, these minor deficiencies should in no way defer any researcher or institution involved in the study of early colonial Mesoamerica or the history of religion from acquiring a copy of "The Americas' First Theologies". Hopefully the book will also be read and reflected upon by scholars who tend to view 16th-century sources mainly as a window to the religion and mythology of the pre-Columbian past. As shown by Sparks, Sachse, and Romero these "windows" were already in the 1550 s a result of the intense intercultural exchange of language, ideas, and beliefs that occurred immediately after the conquest. As Sparks states: "Highland Maya leaders 'corrected' and further contextualized it [Christianity] from their own perspective for their own highly local constituencies" (218). While we wait for the full translation of Vico's "Theologia," we should welcome this important contribution to the field, which will be seminal to any future discussion of 16th-century highland Maya literature.

Jesper Nielsen

**Steffen, Oliver:** Level Up Religion. Einführung in die religionswissenschaftliche Digitalspielforschung. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2017. 380 pp. ISBN 978-3-17-032513-5. (Religionswissenschaft heute, 11) Preis: € 45,00

Die deutschsprachige Religionswissenschaft ist in ihrer Gesamtheit weniger dafür bekannt, sich übermäßig mit den allerneusten technischen Entwicklungen im Bereich von Medien zu beschäftigen. Doch auch an dieser Disziplin gehen Prozesse der Gegenwart nicht spurlos vorbei. Immer wieder flackert der Wille auf, sich mit moderner Medienkultur auseinanderzusetzen. Die Analyse von Schnittmengen zwischen beispielsweise Film