

“Late Arrivals: Seventeenth-Century Alternative Narratives of the ‘Spiritual Conquest’ of New Spain,” paper presented for *Crónicas de conquista*, Colonial Americas Studies Organization Conference, Quito, Ecuador, June 7, 2007.

This paper focuses on how the Mercedarian Francisco de Pareja (1620-1688) and the Jesuit Francisco de Florencia (1620-1695) rewrote the dominant narrative of the “spiritual conquest” of New Spain established by Franciscans in the sixteenth century. The Franciscans had aligned themselves with Hernán Cortés by presenting him as a providential portal through which the Christian gospel came to New Spain. By emphasizing the meeting between the conqueror and the first “Twelve” Franciscans in 1524, the grey friars justified their leading role in the foundation of the church in Mexico on an argument based upon antiquity. Hence when the Mercedarians and the Jesuits arrived many decades later, it appeared as though they were unqualified to resort to the same rhetoric employed by the Franciscans. But the need to correct the *descuido* (neglect) of the past forced the Mercedarians and the Jesuits to reinterpret the “spiritual conquest” in unique and controversial ways. Despite their late arrival, Pareja and Florencia still pointed to antiquity to demonstrate their role in the evangelization of the indigenous population. The former resorted to Bartolomé de Olmedo, the Mercedarian who had accompanied Cortés in the conquest, and the latter focused on his iconic cartography, placing more emphasis on miraculous images than the mendicant friars. Pareja and Florencia are but two examples of how the early evangelization of New Spain was remembered and represented in the Americas in the seventeenth century. Their visions of the initial stages of colonization are important for understanding the multiplicity of memories that Creole patriots formed in the mid-colonial period.