THE NAHUA NEWSLETTER

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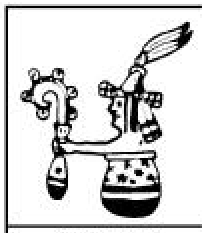

Quetzalcoatl

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NAHUA NEWSLETTER NEWS

Welcome to issue 36 of the Nahua Newsletter, now completing 18 years of publication in the service of researchers and students interested in the history, language, and culture of the Nahua and other indigenous groups in Middle America. In the pages that follow you will find news items, book reviews, announcements, a commentary on myth and history by Michael Smith, and a directory update. The purpose of the NN is to create a sense of community and common purpose among people with an interest in the peoples of this fascinating region of the world. We are open to any and all suggestions, so please do not hesitate to contact us if there is more that we can do to further these goals.

We now have over 400 subscribers in 15 countries and we continue to be able to publish without significant financial support from institutions. Costs of printing and mailing are covered by donations from readers, a formula that has succeeded for nearly two decades. We should all be proud that the NN is able to sustain itself solely by support from readers.

We are pleased to announce that all back issues of the NN are now available online. The project to archive back issues was begun several years ago and has involved the diligent work of a number of people. First, the oldest back issues had to be digitized by scanning. Then the scanned pages had to be carefully compared to the original text to eliminate errors that were inevitably introduced. Anthropology student Leslie Anderson scanned the pages and Mary Schwartz, a former anthropology student and now a staff member of the university's Writing Center, did the final editing. Issues posted on the NN Web site provide only the written text and do not include the illustrations found in the printed edition. The NN Webmaster, Richard Sutter of the Department of Anthropology of Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, has written an announcement about the completion of the project that appears below under "News Items." We will continue to publish the NN in hard copy and to mail it to subscribers. The Web edition will be our primary means of disseminating the information contained in past issues.

Interest in indigenous Middle America has exploded over the past 20 years and the NN has done its best to keep up with events and keep you informed about developments. If you would like to contribute financial support to our efforts, please send checks made out to "Nahua Newsletter" to the address printed below. All money goes to pay for printing and mailing costs and there are no other charges associated with publication of the NN. Funds are deposited in a designated Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne account, with printing and mailing handled through the university.

Equally important for the future health and usefulness of the NN is that you take the time to forward news, announcements, questions for readers, or any other items that would be of interest. Please use the NN to let everyone know what you have been up to, what you have published most recently, and what your views are on current controversies. We will gladly print material of interest to readers.

Please send all communications and donations to:

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[Illustrations have been removed in the version posted at http://www.ipfw.edu/soca/Nahua.htm]

NEWS ITEMS

1. A message from NN Webmaster Rick Sutter: "The initiative to code back issues 1-35 of the NN in html format and post them on the NN Web site is now completed. Beginning with issue number 36, we will post each issue as a page image file in pdf format. A benefit of this change will be the much shorter time required to make issues available on the Web. To view and print pdf files, readers will need to have the current version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on their computer. We will provide a link to download this free software on the NN homepage at http://www.ipfw.edu/soca/Nahua.htm. I hope that having online access to all previous issues of the NN will be useful to readers."

2. The following announcement of recent publications was sent to the NN by Keiko Yoneda. The first is a summary of her doctoral thesis in anthropology, "Cultura y cosmovisión chichimecas en el Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2," 2 vols., UNAM, México, 2002.

"El trabajo se basa en el Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2, un documento pictográfico producido en Cuauhtinchan, estado de Puebla, México, en el siglo XVI. Entre otros temas, el documento registra la migración de los chichimecas desde su partida de Chicomoztoc (lugar de origen con siete cuevas), hasta su asentamiento en las inmediaciones de la sierra Amozoc-Tepeaca (estado de Puebla, México) en el siglo XII.

"El objetivo central de la investigación giró en torno a las reflexiones acerca de los dos sistemas de subsistencia que conocían los chichimecas migrantes de Chicomoztoc a Chalollan, la caza y recolección, por un lado, y la agricultura, por otro, y acerca de su cosmovisión. Al observar la pintura de nuestro interés, se puede decir que los chichimecas cuauhtinchantlacas, los antepasados de los productores del documento llegaron de alguna parte del Norte de México. El sistema de subsistencia era fundamentalmente de caza y recolección, aunque tenían contactos con los agricultores sedentarios, y seguramente ellos mismos tenían la experiencia de haber practicado la agricultura en los periodos cuando se establecían en forma provisional en algunos lugares. En su cultura se observan la vestimenta de piel, el uso de arco y flecha en la caza, en la guerra, y al realizar algunos ritos de flechamiento; caza de venados a flechazos y con trampas, caza de conejos y liebres a garrotazos; y la domesticación de plantas y el aprovechamiento de las plantas no domesticadas. En el ámbito religioso se observa que estos chichimecas practicaban rituales en los cuales se incluyen: la preparación de ofrendas, el sacrificio de animales, el fuego nuevo, el flechamiento de cactáceos, el tlaquimilolli (envoltorio sagrado), la estructura sagrada techada de zacate, y el sacrificio humano dirigido a los astros como el Sol o el Venus. Al Sol le dedicaban el corazón humano, y al Venus le dedicaban la cabeza humana y de los animales. Estos rituales estaban asociados a la guerra o a la caza, y es probable que en algunos de ellos realizaban, asimismo, el pronóstico del combate o de la cacería, en vísperas de emprenderlos.

"En suma, en la religión de estos chichimecas se confluyen elementos reconocidos como propios de los cazadores recolectores — como el sacrificio de animales y el uso ritual del tlaquimilolli — y otros del complejo cultural del Norte de México, como el sacrificio humano asociado a la actividad guerrera y de cacería; asimismo conocían varios dioses del panteón mesoamericano, aparte de los dioses propiamente reconocidos como los númenes chichimecas. En total, se encontraron dibujados (o sugeridos por algún elemento asociado al numen) las siguientes deidades: (las diosas) Itzpapalotl, Chalchiuhtlicue, Xochiquetzal y Tzitzimitl; y (los dioses) Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, Ehecatl, Tonatiuh, Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, Huitzilopochtli, Otontecuhtli o Xiuhtecuhtli, Mixcoatl, Tlaloc y Xipetotec. Chicomoztoc era concebido como un lugar caliente, morada y lugar de origen de los chichimecas. Asimismo, como parte de la cosmovisión y elementos religiosos reconocidos como mesoamericanos, contamos con: Tlalocan, Tamoanchan, Chichihualcuauhco-Tonacacuauhtitlan-Xochatlapan (el lugar donde iban los recién nacidos y los niños muertos), cuatro rumbos cardinales, y los calendarios tonalpohualli y xiuhtlapohualli.

"En esta investigación hemos podido observar que varios rasgos culturales que ostentan los chichimecas registrados en el documento, provienen de la parte septentrional de México. Las investigaciones arqueológicas recientes sobre el Norte de México constatan una relación más estrecha de lo que había pensado hasta ahora, entre la parte septentrional de México con Mesoamérica. Consideramos que el Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2 conforma una de las fuentes que confirman esta relación.

"La tesis se encuentra en las siguientes bibliotecas de la UNAM en la Ciudad de México: la Biblioteca Central, la de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, y la del Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas. Se conserva, asimismo, en la Biblioteca Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán del CIESAS GOLFO (Xalapa, Veracruz)."

3. A second publication by Keiko Yoneda is "Los caminos de Chicomoztoc a Chalollan: Una migración chichimeca (siglo XII)" ["The Route from Chicomoztoc to Chalollan: A Twelfth-Century Migration of the Chicimecas"]. Journal of Intercultural Studies (Kansai University of Foreign Studies, Osaka, Japan) 29(2002):90-117.

From the abstract: "The study deals with Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2, a pictographic document of the sixteenth century, produced in Cuauhtinchan, state of Puebla, Mexico. The document registers the twelfth-century migration of the Chichimecas from Chicomoztoc (Seven Caves) to their settlement near the Amozoc-Tepeaca mountains.

"The paper is divided in two parts. Part one discusses economic, cultural, and religious meanings of the migration. Part two analyzes the place-name signs found in one of the sections of the Chichimecas' itinerary from Chicomoztoc to Chalollan (Cholula)."

4. Juan Manuel Pérez Zevallos and Luis Reyes García have recently published a work entitled La fundación de San Luis Tlaxialtemalco según los Títulos primordiales de San Gregorio Atlapulco, 1519-1606. México: Instituto Mora; Gobierno del Distrito Federal, Delegación Xochimilco, 2003. ISBN 970-684-081-8.

From the back cover: "A 400 años de su fundación, el pueblo de San Luis Tlaxialtemalco recupera los manuscritos indígenas coloniales que dan cuenta del proceso inicial en la conformación de su identidad colectiva, aquella que se ha ido edificando a lo largo de los siglos por innumerables generaciones.

"Al trascender los umbrales de una historia lineal, los Títulos primordiales que se presentan en esta edición deben ser leídos como una narración ancestral del proceso fundacional de una población que, en medio de los avatares y los cambios que supuso la conquista y la colonización española, decidió dejar a la posteridad su visión y su testimonio de las dificultades que sobrellevó para la construcción de su entorno social, político, cultural y espacial.

"Por supuesto, en los cuatro manuscritos que componen los Títulos primordiales se encuentran entreverados a contecimientos y mitos, por lo que no son sólo los hecho positivos los que sustentan la importancia de estos documentos. En efecto, en el primer manuscrito se hace alusión a la merced de tierra otorgada por Hernán Cortés en 1532 y su confirmación por el virrey Luis de Velasco en 1559.

"El segundo se refiere a los conflictos generados con los nuevos actores por el deslinde territorial. El tercero nos remite a la historia particular de esta área en el reacomodo político y territorial que supuso la política de congregaciones y narra el traslado de población hacia San Luis Tlaxialtemalco, donde 'con tristeza fueron a congregarse.' El cuarto y último manuscrito, conocido como los Anales de San Gregorio Atlapulco, contiene una crónica del largo proceso de la conquista, desde la llegada de los españoles hasta las inundaciones que se verificaron en la primera década del siglo XVII.

"Los documentos indígenas coloniales condensan, en ese sentido, una serie de referencias antropológicas e históricas. Gran parte de su grandeza radica en el pasado cultural que recrean y transmiten con su belleza pictórica, en la elocuencia narrativa, en la huella de la evangelización entre señores y macehuales, 'la gente que está dentro del agua.' Pero quizás la recuperación más encomiable de estos textos sea que los ancestros de los habitantes de San Luis Tlaxialtemalco han logrado pervivir en el ánimo de sus sucesores, definiendo para ellos un horizonte y un legado cultural que los actuales pobladores han rescatado.

"La función de estos documentos escritos en náuatl, reordenados, corregidos, traducidos y anotados por Luis Reyes y Juan Manuel Pérez Zevallos no puede ser contemplada por este pueblo de Xochimilco como la imagen en un espejo. Debe ser reinterpretada a la luz de una historia de cuatro siglos, del esfuerzo y de la experiencia de múltiples generaciones, cada una de las cuales han definido el perfil contemporáneo de San Luis Tlaxialtemalco."

5. Alan R. Sandstrom (Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne) and E. Hugo García Valencia (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia–Xalapa) are pleased to announce that their edited volume "Native American Peoples of the Gulf Coast of Mexico" has been accepted for publication by the University of Arizona Press. It will be part of the "Native Peoples of the Americas" series edited by Laurie Weinstein. Following is a table of contents:

Chapter 1 — "The Gulf Coast of Mexico as a Culture Area," by Alan R. Sandstrom

Chapter 2 — "The Cultural Mosaic of the Gulf Coast in the Pre-Hispanic Period," by Lorenzo Ochoa Salas and Olaf Jaime Riverón.

Chapter 3 — "Ethnohistory of Southern Veracruz," by Alfredo Delgado Calderón

Chapter 4 — "Ethnohistory of the Huasteca," by Juan Manuel Pérez Zevallos

Chapter 5 — "The American Mediterranean," by E. Hugo García Valencia

Chapter 6 — "The Chontal Maya of Tabasco," by Denise Fay Brown

Chapter 7 — "The Popoluca," by Félix Báez-Jorge and Félix Darío Báez Galván

Chapter 8 — "The Gulf Coast Nahua," by Ma. Teresa Rodríguez and Pablo Valderrama Rouy

Chapter 9 — "The Totonac," by Pablo Valderrama Rouy

Chapter 10 — "The Tepehua," by Carlos Guadalupe Heiras Rodríguez

Chapter 11 — "The Sierra Ñähñu (Otomí)," by James W. Dow

Chapter 12 — "The Huastec Maya," by Jesús Ruvalcaba Mercado

6. Terry Stocker writes: "I was a bit dismayed with an item from the November 2002 issue of the NN. Bobby Gonzales wrote to me to supposedly settle the issue over the term macana. He had read in NN 32:4 that the word is of Quechua origin but writes, 'Actually, macana is a Taino word from the Caribbean.'

"I am the one who started this by writing that I thought the word was of Nahuatl origin because the obsidian-lined sword is called macahuahuitl in that language. Thus, I wrote (NN 30:27-31) that macana might be a Spanish adaptation of the Nahuatl word. Subsequently, Paul Proulx wrote (NN 32:4) that macana was of Quechua origin. I do not care from which language the word originated but we need some substantiation of any proposition. With individuals writing from so many sources, we might hypothesize that macana is a very widespread archaic term. By parallel, 'club' is a very widespread term from Old Norse. Macana is in the Oxford English Dictionary, which states that the word is 'said by Humbolt to be Haitian.' It is defined as an ironwood club. At present, the etymology of macana remains unsolved.

"I am currently working on a book, "Is there Really a Man in the Moon?" which is an expansion of an article in Trickster and Ambivalence: Dance of Differentiation, edited by C. W. Spinks. That paper showcases the Aztecs as an example of how moon imagery can shift."

BOOK REVIEWS

El códice de Cholula: La exaltación testimonial de un linaje indio; Estudio, paleografía, traducción y notas. Francisco González-Hermosillo Adam and Luis Reyes García. México D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia; Gobierno del Estado de Puebla; CIESAS; Grupo Editorial Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2002. Pp. 155. ISBN 9701867300.

As the Nahua Newsletter itself shows, the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first has seen the publication of many books and articles devoted to the language and culture of the Nahuatl-speaking peoples of central Mexico. Of particular interest have been documents and codices produced by native peoples themselves, documents reflective of pre-Hispanic world views yet revealing of the politics, economics, and changing patterns of beliefs and social relationships of the colonial world. These texts constituted by words and images have provoked much debate: Who were the authors and artists? What were the roles of native scribes and leaders in their production? What about the influence of Spanish priests and political officials? Were they valid or legitimate histories of places and peoples? And finally, What were the relationships among past, present, and power in the creation of a variety of texts, ranging from that of the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950-82), widely known and acknowledged to contain information useful for understanding the pre-Hispanic Nahua world to a whole series of local histories, generally lesser known, named collectively the Techialoyan codices? The work under review here is quite similar to the Techialoyans and, like them, raises interesting questions about truth, validity, and historicity.

This beautiful work with analysis, paleography, and translation by ethnohistorians Francisco González-Hermosillo Adam and Luis Reyes García has been published in two sections. The first is a volume containing transcription, translation, and analysis of the codex. The second is a color reproduction of the two sides of the large amatl paper document that constitutes the codex, with keys to each side that are intended to direct readers to relevant translation and discussion of each section of this valuable document.

Mirroring the preoccupation of contemporary historians with the construction and history of the texts they analyze, the analytical section of the Códice de Cholula (Chapters 1 and 2, both by González-Hermosillo Adam) opens not with a description of the text but a discussion of the life and times of Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci. This Italian cum Spaniard fell in love with the culture and history of his new Mexican home and set about collecting documents relating especially to the indigenous population. He created a very large collection of priceless documents, a collection that would be scattered, owing to the serious legal problems of their avid collector.

Among the regions Boturini visited was the Puebla-Tlaxcala area where he located (and preserved or looted, depending on one's perspective), a variety of precious sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documents, among them the Matrícula de Huexotzinco and the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca. But he also uncovered a lesser-known treasure, the Códice de Cholula, which "sea prácticamente el único hallazgo registrado hasta ahora de su [Cholula's] escritura étnica en general. Paradójico destino de una ciudad que llegó a difundir sobre toda el área nuclear mesoamericana los cánones estilísticos en las historias pintadas" (p. 48).

This large document (measuring 112 x 166 cm), made of amate and consisting of many smaller rectangular pieces, was already in poor condition when found by Boturini, a condition which has only deteriorated more in subsequent years. Time, humidity, and handling have all contributed to difficulties in interpreting the document as some images and glosses have disappeared and others are extremely difficult to identify or read. Two copies of the obverse made after the original (which dates to sometime between 1586 and about 1650), one on European paper and the other on cotton, offer clues to the interpretation of material that is missing or difficult to decipher. The authors and copyists remain unknown (although Franciscans may well have been involved in the text's creation), but the issues preoccupying them, motivating them to write and draw, are clear: the history of leaders, Postclassic and early colonial; mapping the city and its surrounding area; and events relating to Cholula's role in the conquest. Especially important regarding the latter is the role of doña Maria Ylamateuhtli (p. 1) shown baptized in August of 1521 with her ten children, five male, five female, ancestors of the Cholulan noble line that dominated the leadership of the city and its region during the sixteenth century and perhaps later.

The third chapter of the volume, by Luis Reyes García, presents translation and discussion of the Nahuatl glosses. Intended to be read with the photographic copy of the document that accompanies the volume, Reyes García's translation and commentary offer a highly detailed analysis of names, titles, and toponyms and provides a wealth of information about the politics, administrative jurisdictions, society, and linguistic usages of the Cholula region in the early colonial era. The volume ends with several appendices detailing doña María Ylamateuhtli's descendants and the positions they held, the cabeceras and barrios in and around the city of Cholula (ca. 1548), the barrios of the city (ca. early 1560s), and the pueblos (or estancias) subject to Cholula in the period between 1653 and 1714, with information for each of the appendices coming from both the codex and other published or archival sources.

While this volume is likely of most interest to specialists concerned with the politics, culture, and language of central Mexico, especially those who focus on the ethnohistory of the Puebla-Tlaxcala region, teachers could make use of this primary source and its analysis with advanced undergraduate or graduate students to discuss the history of colonial document production in central Mexico. The codex and its analysis speak to the difficulties of interpreting the meanings and significance of such texts and could usefully be discussed in combination with scholarly works such as Writing without Words edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter D. Mignolo, or Transcending Conquest by Stephanie Wood, both of which offer multiple perspectives on the vexing questions of historical truth and validity. But González-Hermosillo probably best describes the overall significance of the codex and this publication when he states that "el documento en su conjunto ha constituido un invaluable aporte al conocimiento de la temprana recomposición de poderes étnicos del antiguo reino sagrado convertido en posesión española" (p. 89).

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Boone, Elizabeth Hill, and Walter D. Mignolo, eds. 1994. Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes. Durham: Duke University Press.

Sahagún, Bernardino de. 1950-82. Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain. Translated and edited by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. Monographs of the School of American Research, no.14. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah.

Wood, Stephanie. 2003. Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Susan Kellogg
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Dioses, héroes y demonios: Avatares en la mitología mesoamericana. By Félix Baéz-Jorge. Serie Estudios. Xalapa: Editora de Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz-Llave, 2002. Pp 170.

Es ampliamente conocida la trayectoria del maestro Félix Báez-Jorge por los caminos y misterios del simbolismo y el pensamiento religioso mesoamericano. Ahora comparte con nosotros un resultado más de sus reflexiones, contribución sin duda también valiosa.

El libro se integra por cinco ensayos, en los que se estudia, como bien lo dice el título, a distintos dioses, héroes y demonios de la mitología mesoamericana: Quetzalcoátl, Tezcatlipoca, Homshuk, Kauymalí y los hombres negros de los tzeltales y tzotziles. Como señala el autor, los diferentes textos tienen en el pensamiento mítico y el simbolismo la trama que los anuda y los une. En el desarrollo de sus argumentos, demuestra su amplio conocimiento de la etnología de Mesoamérica, recurriendo a los investigaciones realizadas por los más destacados etnólogos en los distintos continentes.

Cada uno de los ensayos inicia con una revisión de las principales referencias bibliográficas acerca de la materia en cuestión, las citas de fuentes y la discusión respecto a lo que los distintos estudiosos han aportado al debate, para después aportar sus puntos de vista, de manera sintética pero clara y bien argumentada. Desde mi punto de vista es éste uno de los aportes fundamentales del libro, puesto que el lector interesado puede recurrir al aparato crítico presentado para encontrar en él una rica fuente de consulta.

En el desarrollo de sus planteamientos, Báez-Jorge se apoya en el análisis comparativo de los datos presentados. Comparación entre divinidades del Viejo y el Nuevo mundo, entre el imaginario de la España medieval y la cosmovisión mesoamericana, entre personajes de las mitologías americanas — como en el caso de Kuaymalí y otros héroes culturales presentes en el continente americano — entre versiones de un mismo mito. En fin, en todo el libro predominan las reflexiones comparativas que evidencian un amplio conocimiento de las fuentes históricas y de la etnología comparada. Aparecen datos que remiten tanto a la mirada de los cronistas del siglo XVI, como a la cosmovisión de los grupos indígenas contemporáneos y las interpretaciones más recientes en torno a ello. El autor considera fundamental el análisis histórico para establecer el origen y dirección de los aportes culturales, así como la síntesis resultante de las distintas concepciones que entraron en contacto en la conformación del pensamiento religioso mesoamericano. Es en este sentido que se interesa por responder a determinadas interrogantes suscitadas por los paralelismos culturales.

En estos ensayos el autor parte de la idea de que el estudio de las cosmovisiones implica necesariamente el tema de las mentalidades, las cuales deben ser analizadas como resultantes de estructuras sociales que se mueven en un marco temporal "de larga duración," atendiendo a los planteamientos de Fernand Braudel. El estudio del pensamiento religioso mesoamericano se concreta en base al conocimiento de los rasgos de su continuidad recurrente. La cosmovisión indígena es al mismo tiempo pasado y presente, sus raíces se fincan en un antiguo sustrato cultural y en el pasado colonial, pero constituye parte de la formación social contemporánea, marcada por contradicciones sociales y un violento proceso de desintegración etnocultural.

Una de los intereses centrales del libro es mostrar que en la cosmovisión precolombina el Bien y el Mal no fueron concebidos en términos de absolutos éticos, sino expresiones contingentes cuyo sentido positivo o negativo se articulaba al contexto dentro del cual se desarrollan las conductas; es decir, en el pensamiento religioso mesoamericano se expresaba un dualismo que era consecuente con el politeísmo, de acuerdo con los planteamientos de Alfredo López Austin. Este dualismo se expresaba en una oposición necesaria y creativa, no irreductible como para el cristianismo. Buscando asideros simbólicos y lingüísticos, la catequesis colonial se fundamentó en la conceptualización del Mal como una amenaza entronizada del Otro. El autor argumenta que en lugar de catalogar a sus dioses en comportamientos morales antitéticos, los indios americanos los concebían como entidades con neutralidad moral, al mismo tiempo malévolas y benévolas. Deidades que se imaginaban actuando como parte de una continuidad entre lo sagrado y lo profano, la vida y la muerte, el cielo y la tierra y en fin, la bondad y la maldad.

El autor reitera anteriores planteamientos en los que sostiene que todo pensamiento religioso expresa integración de diferentes tradiciones culturales. En Mesoamérica se funden las formas religiosas arcaicas de las regiones del altiplano y de la costa con las hierofanías procedentes de Aridoamérica; en el cristianismo medieval se integraron tradiciones religiosas de los más diversos orígenes.

Las referencias a la demonología y al paganismo fueron el eje a partir del cual se desarrollaron las primeras comparaciones entre deidades del panteón mesoamericano y los númenes del Viejo Mundo. En uno de los ensayos, el autor nos remite al ejercicio analógico realizado por distintos frailes, evangelizadores y cronistas. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, refiriéndose a las divinidades de los aztecas, consideraba que aún durante las labores evangelizadoras, el Diablo no había muerto y esperaba la oportunidad para volver a reinar en su antiguo señorío. Comparaba a las deidades aztecas con los dioses clásicos: a Huitzilopochtli con Marte y Hércules, a Tezcatlipoca con Júpiter, a Tlazoltéotl con Venus, a Tláloc con Neptuno. Atendiendo a las funciones atribuidas a las divinidades, la fuerza generadora de Ceres lo llevó a equipararla con Chicomecóatl la diosa de los mantenimientos, la fuerza y belicosidad de Hércules le sugirió a Huitzilopochtli. Pero no solamente fue Sahagún quien trazó este tipo de correlaciones: Fray Diego Durán equiparó a Toci con Cibeles y a Ometochtli con Baco. Fray Juan de Torquemada también realizó este tipo de comparaciones, argumentando que las religiones indígenas fueron producto de la intervención demoniaca.

Más tarde, las reflexiones de Francisco Javier Clavijero determinarían un cambio de orientación, y serían, según la apreciación de Báez Jorge, el cimiento de la moderna historiografía del

México prehispánico. Clavijero contribuyó a la erradicación de las interpretaciones de corte sobrenatural, orientándose hacia la reivindicación de la condición del hombre americano, sustento posterior de la idea criolla sobre la nación. El autor incluye una cita de la Historia Antigua de México, en la que Clavijero enaltece la condición de los dioses americanos: los mexicanos, dice, honraban virtudes como el valor a través de Huitzilopochtli, y la castidad, la justicia y la prudencia a través de Quetzalcóatl.

En su interés por comprender la naturaleza del mal en la cosmovisión mesoamericana, en el segundo ensayo del libro, el autor indaga en las concepciones maya y nahua, recurriendo a la consulta de diferentes cronistas y estudiosos. Argumenta que como resultado de la catequesis se facilitó la identificación entre Satanás y Tezcatlipoca, identificación que se facilitaría a partir de una serie de analogías formales, por ejemplo sus atributos de metamorfosis, nigromancia, omnividencia, omnipresencia y autocreación, entre otros. Analiza la iconografía de Tezcatlipoca en comparación con la figura del Diablo cristiano, mostrando su manejo de una amplia bibliografía que remite a pensadores clásicos, cronistas, historiadores y antropólogos americanos y europeos. Expone que la concepción de Tezcatlipoca y la de Satán comparten una serie de rasgos significativos: ambos se identificaban con la oscuridad, la luna, la muerte, el mundo subterráneo y el aire. El atributo de la seducción también es compartido por ambas figuras, así como su extraordinaria capacidad de metamorfosis.

La interpretación cristiana de la mitología mesoamericana se enfocaría a presentar a Tezcatlipoca como el embaucador que engaña a Quetzalcoatl, la representación del Bien. El autor concluye que las semejanzas formales entre las imágenes de Tezcatlipoca y Satán fueron de enorme importancia para sustentar el arquetipo de la identidad lucifernia atribuida a la deidad mexica; fue éste un ejercicio de interpretación teológica de total correspondencia con la mentalidad medieval. De ahí que la destrucción del culto a Tezcatlipoca se convirtió en una de las tareas principales de la catequización.

En otro de los ensayos publicados en este volumen, se presenta el análisis simbólico de Kauymalí, uno de los personajes más importantes de la mitología huichol. El autor apunta que su interés es el de explicar lo que él llama la "condición polisémica" de este personaje, su papel en la configuración de la identidad étnica de los huicholes, y su relación con otros héroes civilizatorios de las mitologías americanas. Se trata de un personaje mitológico a quien se atribuye el origen de gran parte de sus instituciones culturales y de su patrimonio material y espiritual. Kauymalí es un héroe civilizador que es al mismo tiempo instaurador de leyes y bufón, personaje contradictorio a un tiempo bienhechor y embustero, creador adjunto que secunda a los dioses en sus actos creacionistas.

Éstas y otras características aproximan a Kauymalí a la función que cumple el trickster en la mitología de los indios americanos y en la de otros grupos étnicos de África, Australia y Polinesia. El autor documenta esta afirmación citando una serie de ejemplos relativos a la mitología de distintos grupos étnicos de Norteamérica y América del Sur. Analiza la condición simbólica compleja de Kuaymalí en la estructuración ideacional de la identidad étnica de los huicholes: su imagen se refiere a todos los momentos del ciclo de vida humano, pero no tiene una condición estrictamente humana, puede ser lobo, pino, remolino o venado. Transita de lo divino a lo humano, de lo humano a lo animal, del cielo a la tierra, de la vida a la muerte, de la bondad a la maldad, de la tragedia a la comedia, de lo sagrado a lo profano. Es un chamán arquetípico, creador adjunto y notable embaucador, guía en las peregrinación de los marakame hacia Wirikuta y presente en las oraciones chamánicas y en el aparato ceremonial.

Baéz-Jorge señala que esta compleja condición simbólica articulada a su presencia total en el tiempo mítico determina su operación como una especie de alter-ego colectivo. Incorpora una cita de Zingg donde éste refiere que Kauymalí: "Como pícaro y embaucador que causa gracia, es una proyección ideal de los huicholes, que también son pícaros y simpáticos... les encanta que se les llame a ellos "diabólicos," en el sentido de excesivamente traviesos" (pp. 131-32). A lo largo de este ensayo, el autor se propone evidenciar ciertos paralelismos entre las mitologías de los pueblos de Sudamérica, Norteamérica y México. Las razones de estas convergencias, señala, deben buscarse en la historia cultural del continente en tanto estas enormes áreas eran parte de un mismo substrato en tiempos prehistóricos. El estudio de este personaje mítico en particular, concluye, es fundamental para entender la cosmovisión de los huicholes, los núcleos de su compleja configuración cultural, así como su percepción del largo y conflictivo proceso de resistencia que han enfrentado.

En el último de los ensayos publicados en este libro, Báez-Jorge aborda el tema de la pigmentación oscura de las imágenes asociadas con el Mal en diferentes cosmovisiones mesoamericanas, a partir de la revisión de registros etnográficos referentes a los tzotziles, tzeltales, zoque-popolucas y totonacas. Propone una explicación que se sustenta en los antecedentes míticos y simbólicos presentes en la ideología judeo-cristiana, así como en la tradición religiosa mesoamericana y en determinantes sociales configuradas a partir del proceso colonial. Para ello se apoya en una cuidadosa revisión de los datos etnográficos recabados por reconocidos investigadores como Gary Gossen, Sara Blafer, Ulrich Köler, Calixta Guiteras, William Holland, Eugenio Maurer, Carlo Antonio Castro, George Foster, Alain Ichon, entre otros. Explora también la asociación del Diablo con el color negro presente en la tradición cristiana, para concluir que "en tanto punto dialéctico de encuentro, la figura polisémica y sincrética del Diablo (asociada reiteradamente al color negro) concilió las concepciones mesoamericana y eurocristiana en torno al origen y significado del Mal" (p. 168). En la visión de los grupos étnicos referidos, el Diablo es imaginado como un ser sobrehumano, y su identificación con los negros y los ladinos remite al papel que éstos han desempeñado en el proceso de dominación política y social que se prolonga hasta nuestros días.

En este libro brevemente comentado se abordan pues una gama de asuntos de sumo interés para nuestro conocimiento de la mitología mesoamericana. Se desarrolla desde un enfoque que advierte sin tregua que al estudiar los sistemas simbólicos es fundamental considerar sus determinantes sociales, pero recordando que los símbolos son instrumentos de primer orden para conocer verdades implícitas de la naturaleza humana, aquellos planos más profundos y trascendentes de la experiencia.

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[The copy of NN 36 that was sent out by mail contained an error that we are correcting in the Web archive. The review of Dioses, héroes y demonios: Avatares en la mitología mesoamericana by Félix Baéz-Jorge was mistakenly attributed to María Rodríguez-Shadow. The review was written by María Teresa Rodríguez. She is research professor (titular A) at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS), Unidad Golfo, Xalapa, Veracruz. We sincerely regret this editorial error.]

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Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History. By Victor Montejo.
Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. Pp. xiv+287. $29.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-8061-3171-3 (cloth).

Victor Montejo's recent book, Voices from Exile, further advances his professional project of providing the Maya with a voice in academic literature. Montejo is a Maya himself, who relies on his own story as well as those of collaborators, friends, and family, to give the reader direct (or near-direct) access to the words and thoughts of the Guatemalan Maya.

Montejo contrasts his understanding of the plight of these people to that advanced by U.S., Canadian, and European anthropologists and historians by stressing his "personal experience" which "goes far beyond the usual participant observation that is the sine qua non of anthropological fieldwork" (p. 13). I think it would be difficult to find an anthropologist researching indigenous issues who would not be thrilled with Montejo's project. Questioning the motives of foreign and Western anthropologists who study "the other" is a long-established tradition in the social sciences. A growing body of literature recording local people's descriptions and analyses of their own cultures and histories may provide balance. Montejo proposes a "more helpful and engaging anthropology" based on "collaboration between Mayas and Mayanists" (p. 18). This volume may in fact illustrate this model of anthropology as Montejo proceeds to intermingle his own testimonies and those of his collaborators with findings of foreign Mayanists who have conducted prior research in Guatemala (he cites over 100 of them!).

Montejo's motives are clear. He advocates cultural revitalization and the construction of a new Maya project for the Guatemalan people based on his synthesis of all of these materials and voices. In short, he transcends a simple presentation of the voice of the Guatemalan Maya, taking this material forward to the proposal of "constructing a pluralistic and democratic national culture for all Guatemalans" (p. 183).

After two introductory chapters which serve to situate Montejo's research project in time and space, both personally and theoretically, he begins to paint a picture of the horror of state terrorism in Guatemala. Chapter 3 describes the escalation of violence in the Kuchumatan Highlands between the late 1970s and mid 1980s. Montejo provides a vivid, first-hand account of army actions during the first week of 1982, leaving this reader with a clearer idea of some of the strategies used for the development of state terrorism. Montejo is not shy to place the blame, for the massacres he describes squarely at the door of Guatemalan presidents Lucas Garcia and later Rios Montt.

Chapter 4 focuses in on the relationship between the military and the guerrillas. Montejo uses the period of July to August 1982 to exemplify how quickly highland Guatemala became rife with fear and panic. Maya men were forcibly recruited into either the army or local so-called "civil patrols" (euphemistically, government informants). Any who resisted were considered guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers and hence "disappeared," meaning that they suffered torture, incarceration, or death. These measures accelerated the process of politicization of individuals and communities of the region as they found themselves at an impasse, unable to choose to remain neutral. Montejo details the dissolution of community and even family solidarity, the disintegration of local structures of power, and the emergence of an environment of fear and distrust in the face of the army's violent repressive measures, often applied randomly across the region.

The horrors of the events in the region are brought into focus at the level of the individual Maya man in Chapter 5. The testimony of Hultaxh, a Guatemalan Maya soldier, includes the context for the decision that led him to join the army. His story is terrible and, to this reader, unsettling, owing to the details of his experiences. But it explains the motivations of hundreds of thousands of Guatemalan Maya who fled into exile.

The migration of the Guatemalan Maya and their experiences in refugee camps in Mexico are described in Chapters 6 and 7. Here Montejo begins to rely less on testimonials. Instead he concentrates on reconstructing the history of the camps in Chiapas, Campeche, and Quintana Roo, and the emergence of NGOs that were set up to intervene in the management of the sites and to protect the rights of the inhabitants (e.g., COMAR, CCPP, UNHCR, and CEAR). In these chapters, the voice of the Maya becomes weaker or muted as the author synthesizes material from other published sources and provides simple descriptions of the refugee camps.

In the next three chapters, Montejo develops his theory of Mayanness, the culture of resistance which emerged in the refugee camps, and Maya cultural revitalization. According to his interpretation, the refugee experience effectively changed the Guatemalan Maya in exile. Upon their return and reentry into Guatemalan society, it transformed them into politicized agents ready for the construction of the new Maya project (p. 204). In this section, Montejo shows some inconsistency, as he vacillates between a celebration of the diversity of Maya cultures and languages and a political project that considers the Guatemalan Maya culture to be uniform in some essential way.

To this reader, Montejo seems in fact to be describing an ongoing process that began two decades ago: the blurring of boundaries among the distinct Maya groups. He describes some of the refugee camp experiences which were to contribute to a fusion of cultural and linguistic tropes from different Maya groups by identifying mechanisms which emerged to accelerate this process. Endogamy, practiced among some of the Maya groups in their home communities, was violated in the refugee camps and couples of mixed culture and language emerged whose children would have divided Maya affiliations and loyalties. This new generation would logically be more inclined to see the similarities of the cultures. Then, Montejo describes the exchange of knowledge and skills, particularly relating to cottage industries such as weaving, and states that: "Because of this sharing and borrowing, innovations and changes in Maya patterns of weaving among the Kuchumatan women will become evident in the future" (p. 155). Textile and clothing designs have been important markers of difference among Maya communities in the past. Innovation in designs may now mark new groups and identities. Finally, in Chapter 10, Montejo provides examples of the continuance of oral traditions in the new setting of the refugee camp where recent historical events and new knowledge are encoded in song and poetry that will be passed on to individuals living together, at once forming and reproducing a new hybrid Maya oral tradition.

In sum, many of the refugee camps in Mexico cosettled Maya people from diverse cultures of Guatemala. Then, upon their return to Guatemala, most were unable to reestablish themselves in their communities of origin, and instead have had to construct new settlements often populated by Maya people of diverse origins. Montejo expects that these individuals and communities will take the lead in the development of a "greater underlying Maya tradition that gives them a Maya identity" (p. 204).

A debate about the new national project for Guatemala has emerged, which contrasts a view of reconstruction based on cultural revitalization (Mayanist movement) with a popular movement focused more on structural and class issues; see Kay Warren's Indigenous Movements and their Critics (Princeton University Press, 1998), for a complete discussion of these movements. The Mayanist movement emerges as a product of the damage and destruction caused to Maya communities in Guatemala by a state-run ethnocide project. That is to say, as evidenced by the testimonies in this book, a salient goal of the state project was to eliminate the Maya and their culture by perpetrating violent acts on Maya individuals, families, and community institutions.

It should not come as a surprise to us, therefore, that the Mayanist movement is primarily concerned with the recuperation and reestablishment of the Maya culture in the broad sense, which includes religious, political, and social institutions. Inasmuch as the Yucatec Maya zone is comparable to highland Guatemala, the results of my own research would compel me to ask Montejo to consider how, in a complex society, the institutions cited provide the blueprint for highly stratified societies. Social structural issues can become salient within Maya communities, especially if Ladino populations are diminishing or absent from these places. Some Maya individuals may strive to control social, political, and ritual resources, separate themselves from the rest, and form local elites. In such a context, internal power struggles would surface and some, but not all, Maya voices would be heard.

Montejo's book provides us the voice of a Maya Guatemalan, and it is a very strong voice. To this reader, it speaks of a determination to overcome the lamentable legacy of the colonial and recent violent past, and to move ahead towards the construction of a unified Mayan and Guatemalan project. The main weakness of this book is the confusion caused as the author attempts to present a single Maya voice of experience, while at the same time recognizing the multiplicity of Maya cultures, languages, and experiences, which implies many Maya voices. Victor Montejo's recent article entitled "The Multiplicity of Mayan Voices" that appears in Kay Warren and Jean Jackson's edited volume, Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation and the State in Latin America (University of Texas Press, 2002), indicates to this reader that he is addressing this dilemma. A possible resolution to this seeming contradiction would be for Montejo to place less credence in the existence in some remote past of a single Maya mother culture, and to focus on the recent shared experience (i.e., victimization) of the Guatemalan Maya, which arguably provides the basis on which to build the desired new pan-Maya identity. Montejo is clearly his own prototype — one of those Maya individuals who experienced

> "…major transformations [that] can be summarized as follows: the refugees have become politicized as they have questioned their social relations… they have grown proud and conscious of their Mayanness and their cultural ethnicity; they have developed a better understanding of the politics of national life and the relations to the ladino culture as another component of the Guatemalan nation; the refugees' worldview has been expanded during

> their exile; …and finally, there is interest among the more politicized refugees in understanding their relationship to a greater underlying Maya tradition that gives them a Maya identity" (p. 204).

In order for this idea not to be discounted as a romantic and idealistic notion of (and for) the Maya of Guatemala, it will be important for Montejo to move forward quickly, seeking out and working with these new Maya in the construction of the pluralistic and democratic Guatemala he envisions. Certainly, the legacy of suspicion, distrust, violence, and state terrorism that has affected all Guatemalan Mayas to some degree, represents a daunting challenge to this unifying initiative, one that is at least as worrying as the preexisting cultural or linguistic divisions.

In Voices from Exile, Montejo has spoken to us using our own language and conventions, and he has brought us closer to understanding the motives and challenges of a new project for Guatemala and its people. For this we should be grateful and supportive as he takes a leadership role in this momentous undertaking.

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The Aztecs. By Michael E. Smith. The Peoples of America Series. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996. Pp. xiv+361. ISBN 1-55786-496-9 (cloth).

The Aztecs. 2nd ed. By Michael E. Smith. The Peoples of America Series. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. Pp. xiv+367. $ 27.95 (paper). ISBN 0-631-23016-5 (paper).

Michael E. Smith explains in the preface that a major goal behind writing the first edition of The Aztecs was to provide a synthesis of relevant technical reports and professional journal entries and present the Aztec sociocultural system to a broad audience of curious readers. In addition to summarizing the work, this review will comment on the author's attempt to illustrate clearly the emergence, growth, and conquest of Aztec civilization for an audience of professionals as well as interested laypersons. The review begins with a brief summary of the first edition and concludes with commentary on the changes in the second edition; page citations refer to the first edition of the text unless otherwise noted.

A significant focus of the first chapter is the archaeological paradigm adopted by Smith as a Mesoamerican archaeologist. The author is critical of what he terms "monumental archaeology" — the excavation of grand monuments (e.g., pyramids, tombs, palaces, etc.) to comprehend past sociocultural systems. He argues that such an approach is limited in scope, and instead favors "social archaeology" — a research strategy that approaches the material remains of past peoples from the vantage that "the everyday actions of ordinary people are important parts of any culture" (p. 5). Accordingly, Smith values the excavations of peasant houses and other aspects of commoner life outside of Tenochtitlan as significant in the reconstruction of Aztec civilization. This holistic approach, Smith contends, "Brings the Aztec people — commoners as well as lords — into the light of modern knowledge" (p. 6). Moreover, the author fervently upholds the scientific method of investigation, "We must consider the origin and nature of the evidence, we must apply rigorous methods to its study, and we must report the evidence and our methods objectively so that others may judge our interpretation on their merit" (p. 14). Smith blends ethnohistory (including native, Spanish, and colonial-administrative documents) with archaeology to generate an exhaustive depiction of Aztec society and culture.

The general focus of the second chapter is the emergence of Aztec civilization. Guided by the premise that the Aztecs are the result of a rich cultural heritage in central Mexico, Smith presents a brief review of the relevant populations in Mesoamerica prior to the emergence of the Aztec empire (p. 31). He also comments on the Aztlan migrations, and the growth of the Aztec city-states. The chapter closes with a presentation of the development and achievements of the Triple Alliance. The author discusses the chain of political leaders and the consolidation of political power behind the ruling Mexica ethnic group, articulates several provisions of the Aztec political code, and describes the many military campaigns undertaken to expand the empire.

The third chapter contains a detailed focus on demography, diet and nutritional status, and systems of farming in both rural and urban areas. This presentation covers the broad social continuum, ranging from peasant life in the urban centers and countryside to powerful lords residing in the cities and country estates. The majority of the information in the fourth chapter describes Aztec artisans and their wares. Smith identifies two types of craft industries in the complex Aztec economy, utilitarian goods (e.g., obsidian blades, pottery, cotton textiles, etc.) produced by part-time artisans working in their homes and selling their products in the marketplace, and luxury items (e.g., featherworking, goldsmithing, lapidary production, etc.) fashioned in the workshops of full-time artists working directly for elite patrons (p. 85).

Chapter 5 describes the "merchants, markets, and money" in Aztec society. Smith utilizes both Spanish documents and material evidence from several excavations to represent the highly integrated market system, the complex network of merchants, and the precisely detailed monetary system utilized by the Aztecs in the valley of Mexico. The author states that these economic institutions and practices bound the Aztec empire into a complex, "single economic, social, and cultural unit" (p. 132).

Social organization and family dynamics are the general subjects of the sixth chapter. Based on ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence, Smith elucidates many features and institutions of Aztec social life: birth and childhood, formal education, marriage, gender roles, death, class divisions, rural and urban life, enslavement, and social mobility, to name a few. The author employs an interesting and effective tactic to describe the elite Aztec lifestyle. He examines the palaces of four nobles to illustrate the social variation among members of the noble class and to clarify activities associated with each level of the hierarchy of the nobility. Chapter 7 is exciting and thorough in its coverage of the general topic of politics. It focuses on jurisdictional rights, imperialist tactics and motives, and the expanding realm of control under the Triple Alliance. The nucleus of the city-state, the dynamic bureaucracy, hereditary succession, dynastic rule, and relations among city-states all receive attention. Smith takes the opportunity to focus on the disagreements among scholars over the nature of Aztec governance. There are several arguments presented to support the proposition that the Aztecs were not imperialistic, including the absence of a standing army, the policy of leaving conquered kings in office, the sparsity of fortresses and garrisons, and the failure to build a sound infrastructure of roads and cities. However, the counterargument is that the Aztec Empire did not execute direct control but rather exhibited hegemonic or indirect control over those conquered regions, using a combination of force and persuasion to gain compliance by client kings (pp. 173-74).

Chapter 8 is a brief description of urbanism in Aztec society. Smith reviews new evidence concerning smaller Aztec cities and discusses the more traditional information on the imperial capital. The chapter opens and closes with an entertaining, fictional depiction of a visit to an Aztec city. The description is easily comprehensible and permits the reader to visualize urban Aztec life prior to the Spanish conquest. Other topics addressed include urban planning and layout, and the influence of religion and cosmology in the construction of an Aztec city.

Under the general heading "Creation, Sacrifice, and the Gods," Smith begins the ninth chapter with a summary of four Aztec myths of creation to illustrate some of the fundamental concepts of Aztec belief regarding their ancestry and the origin of the universe. The author provides a detailed description of the Aztec gods and their attendant priests, focusing particularly on historical background, and major theological and metaphysical concepts. This section is followed by a concise description of human blood offerings in Aztec society, highlighting the spiritual, symbolic, and social significance. The primary site of human sacrifices in Tenochtitlan, Smith contends, was the huge temple-pyramid known as the Templo Mayor. In addition to describing this structure in detail, the author addresses the arrangement and sociocultural significance of the Sacred Precinct, a walled, holy city in the heart of Tenochtitlan. Smith closes this chapter on Aztec religion by mentioning several public ceremonies (e.g., monthly ceremonies, New Fire ceremony, and the ballgame) and elucidating many of the private domestic rituals.

In Chapter 10, Smith examines the intellectual and aesthetic aspects of Aztec society and culture, particularly writing, calendars and astronomy, medicine, and art in its various forms. A clear account of the papermaking process and the Mesoamerican background to the Aztec writing system precedes a detailed explanation of the pictographic, ideographic, and phonetic glyphs incorporated into this complex communication system. This interesting section is followed by an account of the three types of calendrical systems and the well-developed body of astronomical knowledge exhibited by the Aztecs. The chapter closes on the topics of medicine, art, literature, poetry, music, and dance.

The eleventh chapter captures the "final glory and destruction" of the Aztec Empire. Smith provides a detailed description of the events surrounding the arrival of Cortes and the subsequent Spanish conquest over the Aztec Empire in the sixteenth century. He then describes how an alliance of between five hundred Spaniards and tens of thousands of natives (with the unintended aid of devastating epidemics) defeated the Aztec empire. The chapter concludes with a description of the Nahuas under Spanish rule, focusing on such institutions of control as the encomienda and the church. The final chapter is entitled "The Aztec Legacy Today" and highlights the influential interplay of three distinct cultural systems in contemporary Mexico: Aztec, Spanish colonialism, and modern industrial society. The author closes on a pedagogical note: "With growing problems of ethnic conflict in the world today, the Aztecs provide an example of how states have dealt with issues of economic and political domination and ethnic interaction" (p. 301).

In sum, the first edition of The Aztecs is a wonderfully written book that displays clarity and richness of detail. Smith draws upon the many primary resources, his own research, and the scholarship of colleagues to convey to a wide audience the emergence, development, and destruction of the Aztec Empire. As he states in the preface of the book, the author aims to synthesize all relevant technical knowledge into a comprehensive introduction to the Aztec sociocultural system, and he has certainly attained this goal.

In addition to praise, a review must include constructive criticism. To begin, an accompanying map illustrating the Aztlan migrations would have complemented the textual description of these events, and helped to clarify early shifts of population that contributed significantly to the eventual rise of the Aztec Empire. A second point of criticism focuses on the logic of Smith's discussion in Chapter 11 regarding the dynamic relationship between population growth and the intensification of production. The author writes:

> "Population growth stimulated the growth of markets, commerce, and craft production, but economic prosperity, in turn, encouraged people to have larger families. Demographic

> growth was a major factor pushing the expansion of cities, city-states, and the empire, which furthered the evolution of religion and intellectual life. The most immediate and direct effect of the Aztec population explosion was the intensification of agriculture (p. 275).

In the first sentence, the author suggests that the causal relationship between population size and the degree of production is highly complex and reciprocal. A larger population necessitates an intensification of the mode of production to maintain the population, but at the same time, a population cannot grow effectively without the means to do so. Smith then goes on to claim that "the most immediate and direct effect of the Aztec population explosion was the intensification of agriculture." Smith's description of the relationship between "the Aztec population explosion" and the "intensification of agriculture" lacks some clarity. The first sentence hints at a relationship of mutual causality, while the last sentence reflects a more linear cause and effect.

I would like to close by highlighting major changes made in the second edition; all citations from this point forward refer to the second edition. One significant change is the increased attention to specific Aztec archaeological sites. Smith employs data yielded from excavations at two large twin-star pyramids (Teopanzolco and Tenayuca) to illustrate further the emergence and growth of city-states during the Early Aztec Period (p. 39). A second example of this increased attention to recent advances in archaeology is the inclusion of three sites (Oztuma, Malinalco, and Cuauhtocho) to support his explanation of Aztec imperial fortresses and cities (p. 165). One last example is a brief presentation of two "monumental archaeological" sites (Coatetelco and Calixtlahuaca) to illustrate the composition of a provincial Aztec city (pp. 177-80).

Another significant change between editions is the reorganization and expansion of the discussion of religion. Smith adds several notes on the great abundance of death symbols in everyday life, affirming that there was a "close, symbolic link between death and fertility, between the bones of the dead and the health of the living" (p. 206). The author utilizes archaeological evidence from a series of burials over several sites to ground Duran's first-hand account of Aztec funerary and burial practices. In addition to these valuable updates in the discussion of religion, discussion of the Aztec conception of time is a welcome addition in the second edition. Smith contends that the individuals in Aztec society conceived of time to progress both cyclically and lineally, a series of cycles over time carefully tracked by priests and astronomers (pp. 252-53). One last addition worth mentioning is an expanded description of areas outside of the Valley of Mexico during the last century of the Aztec Empire. Utilizing data from several sites, the author claims that the Late Postclassic period was remarkable for the high levels of communication and interaction that linked polities and peoples in all corners of Mesoamerica. It was during this period that long-distance commercial trade reached its peak and an unprecedented level of stylistic communication and sharing was evident (p. 270). Smith suggests that Aztec civilization was just one sociocultural system among many in Late Postclassic Mesoamerica. These updates and the small revisions of the text and notes serve to make the second edition an outstanding description of Aztec civilization.

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Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico. By Stephanie G. Wood. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. Pp. xii+212. $34.95 (cloth). ISBN: 0-8061-3486-0 (cloth).

Let's face it, attempting to uncover or reconstruct a pre-conquest and early post-conquest Mesoamerican mind — meanings, beliefs, rationalizations, sentiments, and all the other stuff of thought — is a daunting and unending enterprise. Uncovering mind is difficult enough with live informants. Yet such is the work and labor of ethnohistorians, often assisted by folklorists, historians, archaeologists, linguists, ethnographers, paleographers, and philologists. Results sometimes are of the idols-behind-altars variety, in which the goal is to locate and objectify the true nature of the pre-Columbian behind the historical and contemporary. A related and familiar quest involves questions of the death of Mesoamerican civilization. This quest and the related search for bst civilizations make for powerful tropes among Western scholars and their audiences and has dominated much scholarly study.

In contrast, the work of ethnohistorians such as Miguel León-Portilla, while providing a resounding "No" to the death question, provide sophisticated analyses of extant Mesoamerican documents to explore the thought of the culture's intelligentsia, priests, poets, and kings. The titles of two of León-Portilla's best-known works indicate this direction: Aztec Thought and Culture and Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya. However, the question remains, Who is to "represent" Mesoamerica's cultures?

Stephanie Wood in this well-illustrated ethnohistorical study of many lesser known Nahua documents seeks to unravel local indigenous perspectives on the Spanish invasion and subsequent colonization of Mexico. Wood wants to reveal the views and reactions of local people in Nahua communities of central Mexico, in contrast to the views of elites derived from better known codices and histories. While her focus is on the Nahua of central Mexico, she draws comparative insights from the work in other areas of Mesoamerica, Peru, and elsewhere in the Americas. How was the invader and colonizer depicted and what does this tell us about local reactions? Wood hopes to "highlight the diversity in native response to the invasion and occupation of American territory" while honoring the "indigenous people of New Spain as individuals and groups who negotiated, mediated, and exchanged with the invading culture in complex and sometimes subtle ways..." (p. x). Further, Wood seeks to "open a new dialogue that incorporates greater consideration for the neglected but striking presence of indigenous identities and memories in Mexican history" (p. xi). Wood makes clear the complexity of the situation — that things are not all of a piece — with local reactions varying from place to place and temporally. Firm conclusions are difficult to make.

The major sources for studies of this sort are native and Spanish manuscripts located in various national and local archives. The general types of documents include the codices, histories, genealogies, and teachings, which include myths, rituals, poetry, hymns, prose, and more, all well known to readers of the Nahua Newsletter. Included are the well-known early documents such as the Códice Florentino and Códices Matritenses and somewhat later ones such as the Anales de Cuauhtitlán. The study of these early, post-conquest documents are typically supplemented with other sources written by the conquerors and members of their entourages. Many of these are Eurocentric and of limited use in Wood's project. In any case, her major sources are the lesser-known indigenous manuscripts from the pueblos. Among prior investigators of these documents, Wood is most indebted to the work and guidance of James Lockhart and the New Philology movement in Nahua studies.

In Chapter 1, "Rereading the Invasion," Wood provides a brief summary of the Eurocentric conquest perspective and a somewhat longer summary of previous efforts by scholars to "elevate indigenous perspectives" (p. 5) before moving on to demarcate and define her planned inquiry. She is quite aware of the problems of interpretation given the background and cultural circumstances and consequences of the invasion, conquest, and colonization, asking Is it possible to locate a pure or truly indigenous view of the conquest? Her view is well informed and cognizant of how complex the situations were and that native identities were shifting: "Many of the earliest mestizos... were raised by indigenous parents (often mothers) inside the indigenous milieu and continued to hold outlooks that were essentially indigenous... in the evolving, negotiated, political sense of the term" (p. 9). This is a realistic perspective and one which she demonstrates in a number of ways throughout her book. Identity and its construction are key elements in Wood's exploration of indigenous perspectives through early post-conquest documents. Also key, and a bit thorny, is the so-called "evolving, negotiated" aspect of the problem. These are difficult issues given the data available.

Specifically, Wood turns to manuscripts written in the native language (usually Nahuatl) and to pictorials. The pictorials refers to two types of codices, lienzos and mapas. Written manuscripts include the annals and the Títulos primordiales. Manuscripts such as these provide local perspectives on political issues of various kinds, aspects of local world views, histories, and other concerns, again at the provincial level. As Wood notes (p. 13), attention to interpretation of these local perspectives, in contrast to those of the elites and the invaders, will aid in historical reconstruction by including those voices typically excluded from the grand views of Western history. This should lead to a better understanding of change and persistence in native forms in the face of the differential expression of Spanish domination in Mesoamerica and elsewhere. However, compounding the problem of interpretation is the problem of attending to the context in which the manuscripts were produced, addressing the question of the intended audience (local, a high court, the Spanish monarch?), whether written under the supervision of an ecclesiastic, and so on.

The close examination of the documents provides a well-grounded reexamination and reconsideration of long-held views attributed to the conquered peoples by Eurocentric scholars and writers. Wood's approach aims for a more nuanced and differentiated interpretation of many accepted viewpoints. One such viewpoint, and one to which she returns many times, is the notion that the Aztecs and other Nahuas saw the Spanish as "gods." Another considers the question of whether the conquest was always seen as conquest or interpreted in the same way by the native peoples. Wood also cautions not to assume that every place and at all times in the Americas did native peoples hold the view of a people conquered by an imperialist power. Her concern here also cautions contemporary indigenous writers not to assume identical or similar concerns by their counterparts in the late-sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries (p. 19).

In Chapter 2, Wood begins a survey of various portraits of the Spanish found in the native codices, including the mapas: the Spaniard as invader, ecclesiastics, civic and economic figures, followed by native views of Spanish material culture. Fortunately this and Wood's other chapters are well illustrated with numerous examples. What she finds in the codices is a lack of evidence of any conception of the Spanish as divinities. Ecclesiastics are usually shown in a positive manner in the pictorials, although individual distinguishing characteristics are absent. She also finds the annals provide more detail on the comings and goings of ecclesiastics, especially friars and secular priests due to a greater frequency of contact at the community level. Attention to civil and economic figures such as viceroys, are given particular attention in the codices. Certain viceroys — Mendoza and Velasco — appear with greater regularity, Wood finds, because their edicts "better served the interests of the indigenous communities" (p. 43). In addition to viceroys, corregidores, alcaldes, mayores, and certain classes of judges are often depicted because of their intermediary roles between the royal government and indigenous communities. Encomenderos, in contrast, when appearing in the mapas are depicted with less than the best intentions.

Wood is fascinated with certain elements of Spanish material culture. The horse — or "people bearing deer," as some Nahua called them — was of particular interest. In short order, the natives began efforts to acquire them as individuals and for communities. Since riding a horse was seen as an activity associated with higher status, local caciques were particularly interested in their acquisition. European style clothing, headgear, shoes, and so on (physical advantages aside) were also desired by those seeking to copy the Spanish in dress and status. Change in some elements of clothing was encouraged by priests for the sake of modesty. The curule chair was another item desired by caciques because of its association with Spanish power holders. Interestingly, European-style coats of arms were very attractive and desirous to the Nahuas. Overall, documents reveal efforts by individuals and local communities to use and incorporate many elements of foreign material culture as they continued efforts to improve their circumstances in the face of colonization and shifting power relations.

Wood's discussion of Spanish material culture adoption by the native peoples has a point beyond the obvious issue of acculturation. This "transfer of material culture," she writes, is "testimony of the [native's] ability to make the foreign comprehensible..." (p. 59). Unfortunately, Wood's coverage of Spanish material culture does not always make clear how her discussion is to be linked to specific local-level responses. Of course, Wood's additional point concerning portraits by native author-artists weaving the "newcomers into their tapestry of the world fairly seamlessly" is of more general significance for her project. She also notes, returning to the "Spanish as gods" theme, that "[t]hey were portrayed not as deities or monsters but as human beings" (p. 59).

With Chapter 3, Wood directly engages the contested "Ajusco" narrative. León-Portilla regards it as an "invented narrative," according to Wood (p. 62). Wood, however, has reason to believe otherwise. Coming from Santo Tomás Ajusco, it forms part of the community's official history and is often read at public celebrations today. Wood notes that current versions of the document do date from 1710 when it was translated into Spanish from Nahuatl, but she contents it is derived from earlier versions with the original having had a pictorial form and the story being eventually written down in Nahuatl. The details of this argument are the domain of experts and cannot be engaged here.

The Ajusco narrative is a first-person account of a Señor Tecpanecatl, probably an indigenous noble or lord, with the narrative beginning in the early sixteenth century. The document was approved in 1710 by a colonial Spanish judge to legitimize Ajusco's founding in 1531. It is not at all clear who this person is, but his name suggests an "early temporal form" to Wood (p. 65). Wood's purpose is to extract an evolutionary record of "indigenous perspectives over time and to provide a key to referencing other manuscripts..." (p. 64). Additionally, her unraveling of this manuscript will provide how the community of Ajusco "embraces as critical elements of the Spanish invasion and its legacy" (p. 64).

Wood organizes her analysis of the manuscript into a series of categories: invasion-era figures, hunger for gold, rape, executions, prophecy, pueblo territorial units, and official approval. In each case, Wood works through the narrative sorting out what indicates early forms (sixteenth century) from later ones either by language, nomenclature, historical events and clues, and customs. In the end, however, Wood is not certain of the narrative's age. Nevertheless, the "human drama it captures is moving" and rather than exhibiting a form of anti-hegemonic discourse, "it is a blatant and caustic expression of fear, pain, and disapproval" (p. 76). It does not call for insurrection against the invaders and tyrants, but "counsels caution and pragmatism" (p. 76) to insure the survival of the community. Wood notes that such accounts counter in some ways what contemporary anti-imperialists seek from indigenous accounts and again underscores the nuanced, differential responses by native peoples to the Spanish invasion and presence.

From Ajusco's form of accommodation, Wood moves on to Tlaxcala's well-known case of alliance with the Spanish. In Chapter 4, Wood considers the Mapa de Cuauhtlantzinco, a lesser-known document associated with a town named San Juan Cuauhtlantzinco in Puebla. Like the nearby Tlaxcalans, the people of Cuauhtlantzinco allied themselves early on with the invading Spanish. The mapa consists of 33 oil paintings on European paper. Its date, after consideration of linguistic and ethnohistorical evidence, Wood contends to be mid to late seventeenth century (pp. 78-81). Wood considers the authorship, relationships to other mapas, lienzos, and documents, the Tlaxcalan tradition, the prominence given to indigenous caciques, pro-colonial sentiments, responses to Catholic missionization, and political agendas. Again, Wood's examination of this mapa reveals the nuances in the messages contained. However, much of it still remains in the "possible" category due to various uncertainties. At a minimum, the Mapa de Cuauhtlantzinco reveals a people's complex activities surrounding their cooperation with and acceptance of the Spanish as allies, pride in eventual conversion to Catholicism, efforts to protect elite status and landholdings, and the winning of special deference considerations from their Spanish overlords.

In Chapter 5, Wood turns to other indigenous-language documents, the Títulos primordiales, as a source of popular memory concerning the invasion and subsequent colonization. These were written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although establishing precise authorship and dates is elusive. Despite these and other problems, Wood finds the Títulos informative and worthy of close study. They are a source of vital information on a community's territory and sometimes private holdings. They appear to have been written and rewritten for local purposes, though sometimes used in litigation in higher courts. But they also contain oral histories and often considerable detail on specific local events dating from pre-contact times to the contemporary. One motivation, Wood suggest, for writing and keeping these Títulos (beyond strictly boundary issues) was to "portray the increasing size and strength — and the concomitant autonomy — of the altepetl..." (p. 111).

Wood focuses on Títulos from three towns in the Toluca valley, but cites other studies supportive of her argument. Her discussion covers the invasion and subjugation, congregación programs, religious developments, and attitudes towards the Spanish. Depictions of the conquest, for example, are found to resemble little those written by the Spanish with the kinds of details usually found in those versions missing from the Títulos. Sometimes references to the conquest are "oblique," vague, or even matter of fact (p. 115). Wood suggests such absences of detail in part had to do with local impacts and repercussions coming later in time. The acts of local caciques and cacicas are typically given more attention than their Spanish overlords. Important Spanish figures, such as Cortés as marqués, are given attention when their roles relate to local significant issues and events. One especially interesting example recorded in the Títulos concerns how attempts to create congregaciones were initially met with resistance only to be followed by satisfaction with the resulting "stronger, more settled, more populous town" (p. 121). Credit for such successes was commonly given to local native leaders rather than the Spanish officials and expressed in the manner of traditional, Mesoamerican logic.

Changes brought by the Spanish in the realm of religion are given considerable attention in the Títulos, especially in reference to churches, patron saints, beliefs, and practices — at the local level — and seemingly always with an emphasis on local issues and roles played by local persons. Wood notes that the authors of the Títulos do not express any desire for a return to pre-Christian times, yet anti-Spanish expressions are made concerning land and other resources. Such expressions are directed to the Spanish and mestizos "who might penetrate the community's protective shield" (p. 133) for purposes of acquiring local lands. Many Títulos "reveal a sense of urgency..." (p. 135).

In her final chapter, Wood pulls together the wide array of materials, pictorials, and texts centered around several themes. This entails returning to questions of what conclusions can be drawn concerning native views on the impact of invasion and subsequent developments on their lives. As to the question of whether or not the invaders were seen as gods by the natives, Wood's answer is that, basically, some did and some did not. But the situation is actually not that clear-cut and the conditional "perhaps" appears again and again in her discussion. As she notes, "it would be helpful to have more records from the contact period" to assist in sorting out "this murky issue" (p. 136). Wood is aware there can be no simple answers here, and in her brief examination of indigenous conceptions of the divine it is clear that native concepts are more flexible than Western Christian ones. Initially, some natives thought of the Spanish as divine or semi-divine in Mesoamerican terms but as familiarity grew, there was little doubt they were mere human beings.

Another favorite theme in Wood's study concerns "the other other," covered initially in Chapter 2. Basically, did the natives regard the Spanish just as the Spanish regarded them? At this juncture, Wood is correct in turning to native concepts (rather than European-based ones) in approaching this tricky issue. Given that they were ethnocentric, as are all people to some degree, exactly how were these newly arrived invaders conceptualized? More and more questions follow from this, but Wood can supply few firm answers and notes that "a larger investigation" of these questions is needed (p. 140).

Wood finds that the provincial codices express a perception of indigenous self as conqueror in recounting the long history of migrations, settlements, and wars. Even when the Spanish invasion is noted in the documents, native rulers are often depicted as key figures in the storyline.

What has Wood's analysis contributed to discussions of "hybridity issues," another of the themes she pursues? In this arena, the author seeks to chart a course through the thorny debate, often politicized, between those who abhor cultural hybridization and those who see it as "fertile ground for innovation and creativity" (p. 144). As she also notes, "Hybridity can multiply and double back on itself in mind-boggling ways" (p. 145). Wood refers to how parts of the European metanarrative were utilized by native writers for their own purposes to enhance their own heritage and identity or that of their communities. Hybridity in the mapas and other native documents reflected this negotiated, changing native viewpoint.

Wood's concluding section, "The Worn-out Welcome," points to increasing disenchantment with the shifting social and political order in New Spain. As reflected in the Títulos, by the seventeenth century distrust of and disillusionment with the Spanish was on the rise among the caciques. In part, this was due to their lost of power and prestige, but together with the increased pressure on native-held lands and resources due to population growth and the intrusions of outsiders, the days of good relations with Spanish settlers were on the wane.

Transcending Conquest is a well-researched, tightly edited work, and is up to the high standards expected from the University of Oklahoma Press. The placement of much of the detail and debate in 33 pages of notes, leaving the body of the book to 149 pages is of considerable help in allowing for a smoother narrative. The use of numerous illustrations in a work such as this is also a plus. There is a some lack of integration of what often reads like stand-alone articles, a situation noted by Wood about this book being "in a certain way a collection of thematically related essays..." (p. 21). The repeated discussion of some themes, where less would be more, may be the result of trying to tie the chapters together. There is some obvious stretch in getting the most from manuscripts where numerous and continuing questions abound, yet Wood is clearly aware where interpretation is problematic and certainty lacking. These are minor criticisms and Wood's major goals of demonstrating and exploring local indigenous perspectives and emphasizing the diversity of those perspectives around a series of themes are achieved. The work's appeal will be largely among specialists, although Wood's message has a wider applicability and reception beyond that of a scholarly work.

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The Códice de Santa María Asunción: Facsimile and Commentary; Households and Lands in Sixteenth-Century Tepetlaoztoc. By Barbara J. Williams and H. R. Harvey. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997. Pp. xii+410. $300.00 (cloth). ISBN 087480-522-8 (cloth).

A pesar de la diversidad étnica y de los numerosos grupos que habitaron dentro de Mesoamérica, con frecuencia se habla de mayas y aztecas como si hubieran sido los únicos habitantes de esa superárea cultural. Se reconoce a los mayas por su impresionante desarrollo cultural y a los segundos, porque eran quienes ocupaban el principal centro de poder al momento de la Conquista española. Ciertamente, no se pueden escatimar sus logros pero tampoco se puede reducir la historia de Mesoamérica a lo que le aconteció a esas dos grandes familias lingüísticas y, si bien existen lagunas acerca de ciertos aspectos sociales o culturales de su desarrollo, en la actualidad tenemos un panorama bastante preciso de su vida y obras. Sobre otros grupos como los mixtecos, zapotecos, otomíes o totonacos hay algo de literatura que trata acerca de algunas de sus manifestaciones particulares aunque son mucho menos conocidos que los dos mencionados. De varios grupos más sabemos poco y de muchos otros nada, excepto las menciones de sus nombres registrados por algunos de los cronistas o conquistadores. Lo importante es que, a pesar de que se conoce la enorme diversidad que existía antes de la conquista y que ha permanecido hasta hoy día, quizá la mayoría de los estudios que se han emprendido acerca de casi todos los grupos agrícolas mesoamericanos, tienen como referencia obligada lo que esos dos grupos hicieron o dejaron de hacer. Es decir, se infiere que los patrones nahuas existentes en cuanto a organización social, sistemas de pagar y recolectar el tributo, formas de gobierno, panteón de deidades, tenencia de la tierra, cosmogonía, etcétera, con algunas pequeñas variaciones, eran más o menos similares entre los demás pobladores mesoamericanos.

Investigaciones recientes basadas en la búsqueda de nueva información nos han aportado una visión más certera acerca de las similitudes y particularidades de los pobladores de Mesoamérica. Por ellas sabemos que si compartían rasgos de una matriz cultural como pueden ser la alimentación básica y los sistemas de numeración, las características culturales de cada grupo como la lengua, posición política y patrones de cultivo los hacían peculiares y únicos. Esta diversidad se repetía incluso dentro de un mismo señorío ya fuera por las características ecológicas imperantes en su territorio, por su posición de sujeto o señorío o bien por su diversidad étnica y lingüística.

La falta de investigaciones acerca de estos grupos se debe a que hay pocos datos acerca de ellos, sea porque se perdieron o porque no se han encontrado, pero también a la falta de persistencia o de interés por parte de los estudiosos. A lo anterior, se debe añadir que en la mayoría de los casos, las investigaciones se han hecho con base en la documentación que nos dejaron y que es obra o está impregnada del punto de vista de los conquistadores. Aún en el caso de los códices, los estudios iniciales tomaban muy en cuenta las glosas en español, que a veces se convertían en la guía de la "lectura" del contenido del documento y que luego se pensaba en traducir al náhuatl para, finalmente, hacer una traducción libre al español a partir de los fonemas nahuas. Es muy otro el caso que nos ocupa.

Hoy día, gracias al estudio de numerosas personas y escuelas, podemos aseverar sin lugar a dudas que los variados registros de los nahuas del Altiplano con el que se toparon los conquistadores en el siglo XVI, conformaban un sistema de registros sistematizados, que quizá se encontraba en una etapa de transición. Gracias al esfuerzo de muchos investigadores, cuyos enfoques y posiciones teóricas difieren entre sí, se han desentrañado los principios de este sistema no occidental de lectura escritura. En este campo, el estudio del Códice de Santa María Asunción marca un gran paso adelante en la comprensión del mismo porque esclarece las bases y las relaciones entre un censo de población, las notaciones para medir y ubicar los contornos de las parcelas que poseían esas unidades domésticas y el tributo que pagaban de acuerdo a la superficie que controlaban y a la calidad de la tierra. Enseguida veremos cómo y por qué.

En una edición facsimilar muy hermosa, profusamente ilustrada, se editó El Códice de Santa María Asunción, misma que se acompaña de un estudio completo, erudito y expuesto con sencillez para que cualquier estudioso o interesado entienda su contenido, su lógica y la relación entre las partes. Sus autores, Barbara J. Williams y H. R. Harvey, llevan ya varios años investigando en la región y el tema, de manera que contamos con una serie de escritos que dan cuenta de sus avances, problemas a los que se enfrentaron en esa trayectoria, sus logros y también sus tropiezos (véase bibliografía al final, y sobre todo la que acompaña a la edición mencionada). Igual de importante es que manejan la bibliografía acerca o relacionada con el tema con gran maestría y profundo conocimiento, tanto la de carácter histórico como la contemporánea, época en la que además han hecho trabajo de campo, por ejemplo, para descifrar o comparar la tipología de suelos que manejan los campesinos contemporáneos con relación a la complejidad de la clasificación que aparece en el códice que, nos dicen, se trata de un "caso único [de complejidad] en el Nuevo Mundo," con sólo una analogía de China en el siglo V antes de Cristo (p. 30; Williams 1980:60). Al conjuntar el trabajo de archivo (en este caso alrededor del contenido del códice) con la etnografía, marcan un camino metodológico que si bien — se ha repetido muchas veces — es la esencia y la fortaleza de la etnohistoria, pocas veces se lleva a cabo con tal claridad de objetivos o se logran resultados tan importantes como este.

Luego de un breve prefacio, en la primera parte, "El Códice" (pp. 1-19) se describen las características principales del documento: se compara con otras fuentes, se nos explica por qué y para qué fue hecho, se establece la situación geográfica del pueblo, se explican los temas de los que trata su contenido y, en fin, también se exponen los problemas principales a que se enfrentaron los investigadores en el desarrollo de su trabajo. En la misma sección se hace la descripción física del códice: tamaño, conservación, posibles pérdidas, tinta, marcas de agua, foliación, etcétera. Como se puede ver, esta parte contiene muchos detalles que resultan de interés pero también funcionan como aportes al conocimiento de la cultura india del Altiplano.

En la parte II, "Contenido glífico y convenciones de escritura en el Códice Asunción" (pp. 21-53), los autores analizan el contenido y nos ilustran con diversas explicaciones que nos ayudan a entenderlo. Además de la identificación del censo propiamente dicho en que se puede ver la composición familiar, resaltan para mí tres aspectos: uno acerca de las medidas de los predios, cuyo dibujo no corresponde a su verdadero contorno, pero que una vez descifrado el código (aclaración que se debe anotar a favor de los autores) se tiene el polígono exacto, la figura del predio, el sentido de su ubicación (Williams 1979: fig. 6) y, en consecuencia, el área precisa de cada uno, así como el tipo de suelo, aspecto para cuya clarificación exploraron el contenido silábico, ideográfico y etnográfico tanto de ésta como de otras fuentes similares (Williams 1980:54). Hay que recordar que el tributo prehispánico se correspondía con la calidad de la tierra y que quienes mejores tierras tenían (regadío o secano, por ejemplo) pagaban más tributo.

El segundo aspecto por resaltar es la relación entre los dos registros agrarios, uno con las medidas lineales o contorno del predio y el otro con las medidas cuadradas. Establecer esta relación debe haberles costado a los autores largas horas de lecturas, trabajo y reflexión; como se desprende de los trabajos previos que ambos autores hicieron tanto de este códice como de un registro similar: el Códice Vergara (Williams 1980:52; Harvey 1979) pero a fin de cuentas es notoria la comprensión del

texto; la sencillez con la que la presentan es la mejor prueba de ello, porque queda al alcance de cualquier estudioso. A mí me parece que esta es una aportación clave del estudio. Nótese la diferencia entre la conclusión de sus estudios en 1979. Entonces decían: "Catastros agrarios verdaderos necesariamente deben haberse basado en datos del milcocoli: quizá impresiones erróneas de propiedades nativas y de la configuración del escenario aborigen han resultado a causa de que lo que se ha llamado mapas catastrales no son mapas en lo absoluto" (Williams 1979:15).
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El tercer aspecto de importancia es haber establecido la relación entre estos tres registros catastrales, el censo, el pago de tributo y la clave entre posesión de tierra, composición familiar y calidad de tierra, que en una sociedad agrícola tributaria nos aporta diversos elementos que tienen que ver con características generales de la sociedad nahua como la organización social, la tenencia de la tierra, la producción agrícola y la composición familiar. En suma, lo que nos presentan es la organización territorial y tributaria (p. 50) del señorío de Tepetlaoztoc. Según Perla Valle — estudiosa del Códice de Tepetlaozatoc o Códice Kinsgborough, documento que debe leerse a la par que El Códice Vergara y El Códice de Santa María Asunción — este señorío era uno de "los más destacados del imperio texcocano, con derecho a concurrir al palacio de Nezahualcoyotl" (Valle 1994:46). Estos tres documentos fueron elaborados de acuerdo a la tradición pictográfica de Texcoco (Williams 1979; Harvey 1979), a raíz de los alegatos del pueblo de Tepetlaoztoc, representado por los indios nobles, en contra de los excesos que de tributo les cobraba su encomendero "particularmente cruel y codicioso," el factor Gonzalo de Salazar y su hijo, heredero de la encomienda, Juan Velázquez de Salazar (Williams 1979; Harvey 1979; Valle 1994:13).

La parte III (pp. 55-66) aborda, entre otras cuestiones, las glosas añadidas en náhuatl que se refieren a los límites de las tierras del tlaxilacalli. Para dar una idea de la importancia tanto del documento como de su desciframiento, los autores del estudio concluyen que "El perímetro territorial demarcado en el título de tierras, aparentemente, fue un instrumento eficaz en los siglos posteriores ya que los límites del barrio [contemporáneo] corresponden a los del tlaxilacalli en el siglo dieciséis" (p. 64). Aún hay más, nos dicen los autores:

> "Desde la perspectiva de la comunidad actual de Asunción Cuauhtepoztla, el retorno del códice al dominio público ha resultado en un enriquecimiento de su herencia cultural, porque recrea a los grupos domésticos de sus ancestros, quienes ocuparon la misma tierra. Desde la perspectiva de los etnohistoriadores, el Códice de Santa María Asunción suministra una oportunidad única para profundizar nuestro entendimiento del panorama cultural del siglo XVI acerca de la vida y la tierra y nos nutre con un aprecio mucho más profundo de los logros de la cultura nahua del Acolhuacan" (p. 66).

Solo me queda añadir a esta observación que, en efecto, un documento de esta naturaleza guarda una especial importancia que sólo puede ser totalmente apreciada cuando se ha descifrado de una manera tan completa como el estudio que acompaña a su facsimilar, pues de otra forma se puede apreciar su estilo, su estética, su arte pero no su contenido profundo que nos dice ya explicado, ahora sí, muchos de los logros de la cultura nahua del Acolhuacan antes de la Conquista.

En la parte IV que, junto con la bibliografía, ocupa el resto del libro, se reproduce el Códice de Santa María Asunción, sus glosas y transcripción, mismo que se acompaña de notas profusas, esquemas y comparaciones con otras lecturas, lo cual ayuda sobremanera para entender el contenido del Códice. Uno de los aspectos que surgirán para las polémicas posteriores es que en este estudio se afirma que los tlaxilacalli, es decir, la gente del común, tenía tierras de por sí, mientras que otros estudiosos de la cuestión agraria como Hildeberto Martínez Martínez (1994) y Luis Reyes García

(1997) afirman lo contrario. Ello se puede deber a que, como dice Alonso de Zurita, en cada provincia existían grandes variaciones en cuanto a la tenencia de la tierra o a que en el caso del Altiplano existía dicha forma de posesión. Dada la fecha de este códice, es probable que en efecto se trata de una herencia prehispánica, aunque también cabe la posibilidad de hasta qué punto los franciscanos habían alterado ya el sistema agrario. Quede pues como una duda.

Para terminar, debo decir que la sola publicación del Códice es en sí una aportación importante para el pueblo y la academia, pues al igual que los originales de muchos otros documentos de este tipo, el acceso a ese tipo de documentos es sumamente restringido sin importar el acervo en dónde se encuentre. Sin embargo, publicarlo y hacerlo entendible para casi cualquier persona, es ir más allá de la sola lectura y desciframiento. Es ir más allá que traducir un texto de un idioma a otro, aunque esto fuera hacerlo del nahua escrito con caracteres latinos al inglés o al español. Es sumergirse en una cultura y tratar de pensar con la lógica de otra, es atrapar una forma de pensar y luego exponer sus axiomas a otra totalmente diferente. Esto es lo que han logrado Barbara Williams y H. R. Harvey. Así que bienvenidas publicaciones de este tipo y enhorabuena para sus autores.

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COMMENTARY

"Comments on the Historicity of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, Tollan, and the Toltecs"
by

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Can we believe Aztec historical accounts about Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, Tollan, and other Toltec phenomena? The fascinating and important recent exchange in the Nahua Newsletter between H. B. Nicholson and Michel Graulich focused on this question. Stimulated partly by this debate and partly by a recent invitation to contribute an essay to an edited volume on Tula and Chichén Itzá (Smith n.d.), I have taken a new look at Aztec and Maya native historical traditions within the context of comparative oral histories from around the world. This exercise suggests that conquest-period native historical accounts are unlikely to preserve reliable information about events from the Early Postclassic period. Surviving accounts of the Toltecs, the Itzas (prior to Mayapan), Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, Tula, and Chichén Itzá all belong more to the realm of myth than history. In the spirit of encouraging discussion and debate, I offer a summary here of my views on early Aztec native history; a more complete version of which, including discussion of the Maya Chilam Balam accounts, will be published in Smith (n.d.).

I have long thought that Mesoamericanists have been far too credulous in their acceptance of native historical sources; this is an example of what historian David Fischer (1970:58-61) calls "the fallacy of misplaced literalism." Aztec native history was an oral genre that employed painted books as mnemonic devices to aid the historian or scribe in their recitation (Calnek 1978; Nicholson 1971). Although few of the painted history books that survive predate the Spanish conquest, we know that pre-conquest polities kept some form of written historical records to verify the legitimacy of their kings (Boone 2000; Hassig 2001; Nicholson 1971).

During the early colonial period, local communities produced painted historical codices (Boone 2000) in order to prove their antiquity and legitimacy in Spanish courts (Leibsohn 1994; Wood 1998). The need for painted histories was so great that at least one "codex-on-demand" workshop was set up to provide ancient titles for central Mexican communities; many of these survive today as the so-called "Techialoyan codices" (Noguez 1999a, b; Wood 1989). In conjunction with the production of painted histories, oral accounts and painted chronicles were transcribed into Spanish and Nahuatl prose. As Susan Gillespie's (1989) research has shown, many of these "historical" accounts mixed up historical and mythical events and persons in order to make sense out of the colonial context of New Spain.

Most scholars agree that the historical reliability of Aztec native historical accounts declines as one moves farther back into the past (Boone 2000; Davies 1977, 1980; Nicholson 1971). Aztec historical traditions tend to begin with the Toltecs and Tollan, then move on to migrations from Aztlan, which are in turn followed by specific dynastic histories of individual polities (most abundantly, the Mexica of Tenochtitlan). There are two opinions on the historicity of the early episodes among scholars who take a serious, historiographic approach to the topic. One group of scholars assumes that useful historical information can be gleaned for events that presumably occurred many centuries (sometimes even a millennium) prior to the Spanish conquest; these scholars are willing to produce "historical" accounts of Tula, Tollan, and Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (Davies 1977; Nicholson 2001, 2002; Prem 1999). The other group takes a more critical attitude toward the earlier portions of native history, and concludes that events of the Early Postclassic period are so far removed from the time of production of the surviving accounts that they are outside of the realm of credible historical reconstruction (Gillespie 1989; Graulich 1988, 2002; Smith 1984, 1992; 2003:30-31).

How can we decide which of these two perspectives is most appropriate and valid? Comparative data from other parts of the world can help here; this material suggests that the Toltecs are simply too far back in time to be valid historical figures. A large number of African states had oral historical traditions virtually identical in outline to the Aztec histories. As reviewed by Joseph Miller (1980), these traditions typically begin with creation myths, followed by origin myths, and then "transferal myths" (accounts of migrations to a group's homeland). These events are recorded as occurring unrealistically far back in the past. In the Aztec histories, the Toltec stories are the creation or origin myths and the Aztlan stories are the transferal myths. In the African cases, the migration legends are followed by more recent dynastic and ethnic history, just as the Aztlan stories are followed by similar events in central Mexico.

David Henige (1974) compares accounts — particularly king lists — from around the Old World to derive historiographic principles of interpretation. In some traditions, there is a "telescoping" of events such that long sequences are compressed into a short time frame. Far more common than this, however, is the "lengthening" of traditions by a variety of processes. A number of these processes clearly occurred in the Aztec native traditions, including euhemerism (interpreting myths as historical accounts, as in the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl account), outright fabrication (likely in the aftermath of Itzcoatl's infamous burning of the history books), and genealogical parasitism, the attachment of recent dynasties to ancient dynasties in order to increase their prestige (the alleged Toltec origins of Aztec and other Postclassic Mesoamerica dynasties). Throughout Africa, and in many other areas, the arrival of colonial rule with the accompanying loss of local sovereignty resulted in the rapid creation of lengthy historical records to help establish local legitimacy — for benefit of the conquerors — through reference to great antiquity. The Aztec native histories fit right into the patterns identified by Henige (1974; 1982), Miller (1980), and others (e.g., Hemmingsen 1995; Vansina 1985).[1]

Henige (1974:190-191) concludes that in most cases, oral political history does not preserve reliable chronological information for more than a century prior to the transcription of the oral tradition. The political nature of dynastic oral histories is the force most responsible for this situation. Oral traditions "are primarily seen and used as political symbols, and like the whole array of political symbolism, they serve specific purposes at particular times — primarily purposes of legitimation. In these circumstances the content of oral traditions continually underwent modification as necessity required" (Henige 1974:6). An interesting comparative case is the Sumerian King List. Thorkild Jacobsen (1939) conducted a detailed historiographic analysis to reconstruct early political history from this fragmentary and contradictory source, but later scholars have shown the document to be full of ideological and propagandistic elements deriving from its specific context of production long after the time of the kings listed (Finkelstein 1979:59-63; Kuhrt 1995:30-31; Michalowski 1983). In Michalowski's words, "Since the King List is not a reflection of real events but is, rather, a depiction of an idea of reality, the text should forever be banished from reconstruction of early Mesopotamian history" (Michalowski 1983:243). I offer a similar recommendation for the pre-Aztlan episodes in Aztec native history (and perhaps for the Aztlan story too; see note 1). On the other hand, more recent native history (from the thirteenth or fourteenth century forward) is much more credible and can be used to reconstruct aspects of political history with some confidence (Boone 2000; Davies 1973, 1980; Nicholson 1971; Noguez 1996[1978]).[2]

Given what we know about the context and production of native histories in Central Mexico, and the results of comparative research by Henige and others, it simply not tenable to maintain that these traditions can provide historical information on Tula and the Toltecs. Yet many Mesoamericanists continue to apply historical sequences from the Aztec native histories to Tula (Coe and Koontz 2002:154-55; Mastache, et al. 2002:74-75,104,303; Nicholson 2002; Prem 1999). The creation of an objective record of actual historical events with precise chronological accuracy was not a goal of the indigenous historical traditions nor of their colonial inscription. Rather, pre-Hispanic native historical traditions served to legitimize peoples and dynasties, and to glorify the accomplishments of kings and ancestors (Boone 2000; Hassig 2001; Marcus 1992; Nicholson 1971). After the Spanish conquest, the target of these ideological efforts changed from the native nobility to the Spanish administration, and a new ideological purpose was added to historical accounts— making sense of a colonial world turned upside down by the Spanish conquest (Gillespie 1989; Hassig 2001; Wood 1998).

Notes

1. In another work, Henige (1982:90-96) focuses more attention on migration stories. He points out that immigration from elsewhere is a nearly universal component of origin myths throughout the world (the Aztlan story is one of his examples). Although I have argued for the historicity of the Aztlan migrations in several works (Smith 1984, 1992; 2003:30-31), I now admit to much greater uncertainty. Two recent developments are responsible for this change of heart: the comparative material discussed here, and the results of recent linguistic research that pushes the initial arrival of Nahuatl in the Valley of Mexico back to ca A.D. 500 (Kaufman 2001) in place of the Postclassic arrival date that I rely upon in the works cited above. These new linguistic data furnish one of the bases for Beekman and Christensen's (2003) new model for the migration of Nahuatl speakers into central Mexico. Jane Hill's (2001) iconoclastic model (that Nahuatl originated in central Mexico) is not widely accepted, however (John Justeson, personal communication). See also Christensen (1997).

2. Chronological distance and political context were not the only two factors that produced mythologized accounts of the Aztec past. Recent revisionist scholarship has shattered another old chestnut of Aztec history — the notion that Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin hesitated to attack Cortés because he interpreted the Spaniard as the god Quetzalcoatl whose return had been foretold by a series of omens and auguries (Fernández-Armesto 1992; Gillespie 1989:173-207; Restall 2003:112-16; Townsend 2003). In this case the faulty interpretation was deliberately constructed by collaborating native elites and Franciscan friars in the early colonial period in order to provide the former with an explanation for the cataclysm of the Spanish conquest and the latter with support for the notion that the conquest was preordained by God in order to bring Christianity to the New World.

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ILLUSTRATIONS IN THIS ISSUE

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