THE NAHUA NEWSLETTER

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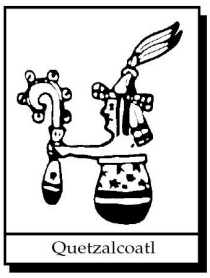

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NAHUA NEWSLETTER NEWS

Welcome to issue 49 of the *Nahua Newsletter*. The *NN* is published twice a year, in the fall and spring, to facilitate communication among scholars, students, and anyone interested in the culture, history, and language of the Nahua people and other indigenous groups of Middle America. This issue is our second online-only release of the *NN*. We hope that it continues to serve readers in the same way that the print copy did for the past 24 years.

In this issue you will find news items, book reviews, an essay by Frederic Hicks on the concept of *barrio* in Aztec Mexico, and a summary overview of contemporary Nahua culture written for the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) at Yale University. For those unfamiliar with HRAF, it is a database of more than a million pages reproduced from books and articles and indexed at the paragraph level, covering about 400 of the world's approximately 6,000 cultures. Indexing is based on the *Outline of Cultural Materials* and the *Outline of World Cultures* thesauri developed since the 1930s by George Peter Murdock and colleagues. HRAF indexers today continue the work by adding new cultures and ethnic groups, and amplifying the collections of cultures already covered. Eventually the entire HRAF database will be Web accessible to those affiliated with institutions that have licensed the resource. Both the predecessor printed and microfiche HRAF collections and the Web-based *eHRAF World Cultures* (with its companion database, *eHRAF Archaeology*) are essential tools for systematic cross-cultural comparative studies. Documentation on the ancient and contemporary Nahua has been expanded for eHRAF, with a release date scheduled for August 2010.

Your editor has been invited to write the summary of contemporary Nahua culture for eHRAF, and Professor Frances Berdan of California State University San Bernardino has contributed the summary on the ancient Nahua. A draft of the contemporary Nahua cultural summary appears in the Comments section of this issue, with the expectation that it will elicit suggestions for improvement from readers. Because the summary is meant to be useful to experts and non-experts alike, it is difficult to know just what to include and exclude for a group as diverse as the Nahua. Kindly forward any editorial suggestions to the e-mail address below.

As mentioned in *NN* no. 48, we are compiling a list of e-mail addresses of those who wish to be notified when a new issue is posted on the *NN* Web site. Please contact the editor, at the address below, if you would like to have your name added to the notification list. The Web site at www.nahuanewsletter.org provides free access to all back issues of the *NN* for readers' convenience.

http://www.nahuanewsletter.org/nnarchive/newsletters/Nahua49.pdf

Publishing online has considerably reduced costs associated with printing and mailing, although we still have ongoing expenses in maintaining the Web site. Our finances are stable right now but donations are always welcome to insure that we can continue to produce and distribute the *NN*. All donations go towards production and there are no administrative charges. We have a special *NN* account at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne where all funds are deposited.

The *NN* is designed as an open forum for its readers. Please participate by sending announcements, questions, calls for cooperation, statements about your current interests and research projects, ideas and insights, news of recent publications, promotions, or retirements, and anything else that would be of interest to your colleagues. The newsletter is read by people in 15 different countries (and perhaps more now that we are online). It is an excellent way to get your name out among people with similar interests.

Please send all communications or donations (checks made out to *Nahua Newsletter*) to:

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NEWS ITEMS

1. John Bierhorst writes to include the following news item:

"In December 2009 the University of Texas Libraries and University of Texas Press launched a website to go with the publication of the book *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain: The Codex Romances de los Señores de la Nueva Espana* (June 2009). The address is www.utdigital.org (or simply utdi.org), and it is free to the public. It has the entire book with many additional features including a facsimile of the Nahuatl codex, a normative transcription (searchable), audio of the drum cadences, and a map showing the "geography" of the *Romances.* Also included are the *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs*, *A Nahuatl-English Dictionary and Concordance to the Cantares Mexicanos*, an essay on corpus linguistics as it pertains to the *Romances* /Cantares, and links to other Nahuatl websites."

2. Following is the description of a new book by Alessandro Lupo on Nahua of the Sierra Norte de Puebla. The book, written in Italian, is entitled *Il mais nella croce: Pratiche e dinamiche nel Messico indigeno*. Roma: Centro d'Informazione e Stampa Universitaria (CISU), 2009. Pp. xxii+345. ISBN 978-88-7975-447-7 (paper).

"Il mais di quattro colori che da qualche anno orna le croci esibite in processione dagli indigeni della Sierra di Puebla è uno fra i più recenti esempi dei processidi trasformazione, fusione, adattamento e invenzione che si sono innescati tra le religioni amerindiane e il Cristianesimo fin dal primo, violento contatto coloniale nel '500. Partendo dai materiali etnografici raccolti negli ultimi tre decenni in alcune comunità del Messico indigeno, questo volume affronta alcuni degli aspettipiù tipici e originali delle concezioni e delle pratiche religiose sorte dalla contesa tra le spinte acculturative degli evangelizzatori e la radicata vitalità della tradizione autoctona: le idee intorno alla natura composita e mutevole della persona, alle sue capacità di agire magicamente a distanza e alle insidie che ne minacciano l'integrità; la continuità tra le diverse forme di vita (uomini, animali e piante); le caratteristiche e gli spazi in cui operano le entità extraumane e i rapporti che esse intrattengono con gli umani; le forme e gli originali impieghi — anche performativi — delle preghiere che questi ultimi rivolgono loro, nonché l'importanza euristica di simili testi rituali; l'ambivalenza delle rappresentazioni delle principali figure del mondo extraumano, come la Terra, a un tempo datrice di ogni nutrimento e avida predatrice di corpi e "ombre"; la contiguità tra le pratiche rituali e l'attività terapeutica tradizionale e i fraintendimenti tra questa e la medicina scientifica.

"Trasversale a tutte queste tematiche, quella delle dinamiche che incessantemente animano la sfera religiosa, vero fulcro del discorso identitario degli e sugli indigeni, i quali stanno finalmente approssimandosi alla conquista di forme di autonomia troppo a lungo negate. Esemplare a questo riguardo è il caso delle straordinarie innovazioni introdotte dal progetto della *Pastorale indigena* — cui è dedicata un'ampia parte conclusiva — capace di accogliere nella pratica ufficiale della liturgia cattolica molti elementi, selezionati e reinterpretati, dell'antico passato "pagano," così come di inventare simboli affatto nuovi, come le croci di mais.

"*Alessandro Lupo* insegna Etnologia presso la Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia della *Sapienza Università di Roma*. Dirige la *Missione Etnologica Italiana in Messico*, di cui fa parte dal 1979, svolgendo ricerche tra i Huave dell'Istmo di Tehuantepec e i Nahua della Sierra di Puebla. Tra le sue opere: *I tre cardini della vita: Anime, corpo*, *infermità tra i Nahua della Sierra di Puebla (1989)*, *La Tierra nos escucha: La cosmología de los nahuas de la Sierra a través de las súplicas rituales (1995)*, *La cultura plurale: Riflessioni su dialoghi e silenzi in Mesoamerica* (1998), *Gli Aztechi tra passato e presente: Grandezza e vitalità di una civiltà messicana* (2006)."

3. Jaime Lara writes to alert readers that his book *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico*, covering mid-16th century illustrated texts, Bible translations in Nahuatl, and religious syncretism, has been published by the University of Notre Dame Press (2008). Readers can find more information at http://undpress.nd.edu/book/P01229/.

From the publisher's Web site: "*Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico* is a cultural history of the missionary enterprise in sixteenth-century Mexico, seen primarily through the work of Catholic missionaries and the native populations, principally the Aztecs. Also known as the Mexica or Nahuas, speakers of the Nahuatl tongue, these Mesoamerican people inhabited the central plateau around Lake Texcoco and the sacred metropolis of Tenochtitlan, the site of present-day Mexico City. It was their language that the mendicant missionaries adopted as the lingua franca of the evangelization enterprise.

"Conceived as a continuation of his earlier, well-received *City, Temple, Stage*, Jaime Lara's new work addresses the inculturation of Catholic sacraments and sacramentals into an Aztec worldview in visual and material terms. He argues that Catholic liturgy — similar in some ways to pre-Hispanic worship — effectively 'conquered' the religious imagination of its new Mesoamerican practitioners, thus creating the basis for a uniquely Mexican Catholicism. The sixteenth-century friars, in partnership with indigenous Christian converts, successfully translated the Christian message from an exclusively Eurocentric worldview to a system of symbols that made sense to the indigenous civilizations of Central Mexico. While Lara is interested in liturgical texts with novel or recycled metaphors, he is equally interested in visual texts such as neo-Christian architecture, mural painting, feather work, and religious images made from corn. These, he claims, were the sensorial bridges that allowed for a successful, if not wholly orthodox, inculturation of Christianity into the New World.

"Enriched by more than 280 color images and eleven appendices of translations from Latin and Nahuatl, Lara's study provides rich insights on the development of sacramental practice, popular piety, catechetical drama, and parish politics. Song, dance, flowers, and feathers — of utmost importance in the ancient religion of the Aztecs — were reworked in ingenious ways to serve the Christian cause. Human blood, too, found renewed importance in art and devotion when the indigenous religious leaders and the mendicant friars addressed the fundamental topic of the Man on the cross.

"An important work on worship, liturgy, and the visual imagination, *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico* is a vivid look at a unique cultural adaptation of Christianity. Jaime Lara is associate professor of Christian art and architecture and chair of the Program in Religion and the Arts at Yale University Divinity School and Yale Institute of Sacred Music. He is the author of *City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2004)."

4. Winston Crausaz writes to say: "My monograph on all aspects of the Pico de Orizaba came out in 1993 and I am still interested in anything and everything related to the mountain. I have been down there eleven times." See *Pico de Orizaba, or, Citlaltepetl: Geology, Archaeology, History, Natural History, and Mountaineering Routes; With Additional Material on the High Mexican Volcanoes*. Amherst, Ohio: Geopress International, 1993. Pp. xiii+594. Interested readers can contact the author at wcrausaz18@yahoo.com.

BOOK REVIEWS

Chocolate: Pathway to the Gods. By Meredith L. Dreiss and Sharon Edgar Greenhill. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008. ISBN 978081652464. $30.00 (cloth). Pp. xi+195, illustrations, map; accompanied by a DVD (ca. 51 min.).

Imagine a visit to a brilliantly curated museum of cacao, and you have captured the highly visual experience of *Chocolate: Pathway to the Gods*. The high-quality photographs, depicting ancient ceramics, architectural elements, monuments, murals and codices, are its raison d'être. The Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec and Aztec iconography depicted in this work leads the reader, under the thoughtful guidance of the authors, to a deeper understanding of the cultural role of this legendary plant and food.

Theobroma cacao was named by the 18th-century naturalist Carolus Linnaeus, who considered cacao the "food of the gods." Although cacao was late to be recognized by Europeans, archeological evidence suggests that it has been consumed since 1500 B.C. and enjoys a history as rich and frothy as the drink itself. The book opens with a discussion of chocolate and the supernatural realm and proceeds to inform the reader about the diverse and complex connections of chocolate and culture through a variety of lenses. Cacao emerges as an important element of ritual, economics, political power, and healing. It stands side by side with corn as a core iconic element of Mesoamerican culture.

In the book's six chapters the authors present rich visuals to support their general assertions about the role of cacao in culture and history, but they do not provide in-depth analysis of any single aspect of the subject (as Sophie Coe did in *America's First Cuisines* (1994); see this reviewer's comments on that work in *Nahua Newsletter* no. 20, November 1995). Instead, the authors offer a well-annotated overview derived from a broad collection of scholarly sources. In fact, Dreiss and Greenhill's thoughtful interpretation of the illustrations may be the most striking aspect of this work that would recommend it to the non-academic reader.

In the first chapter, "Chocolate and the Supernatural Realm: Food of the Gods," which concentrates on the substance's supernatural associations, the youthful cacao-corn deity depicted on a Mayan stone bowl (Figure 1.4) establishes the importance of cacao by pairing it iconographically as an equal with corn. Anthropomorphic figures are shown emerging from or transforming into cacao trees. The trees themselves, along with cacao balls (processed cacao), are used by the Maya as key components in depictions of deities.

The second chapter, "Chocolate and Ritual in Mesoamerica: Fertility, Life Cycles, and the Soul's Journey," connects the growth of cacao in its natural, moist, tropical habitats to sacred sinkholes and caves where the supernatural and natural worlds open to each other. Ancient ritual depictions, including those that show bleeding cacao pods, are connected to modern-day rituals, specifically the Fiesta de San Isidro Enrama in Comalcalco, Mexico, where cacao is offered as a tribute to the church's coffers.

The economic impact of the cacao bean (specifically, aspects of tribute and trade discussed in the chapter on "Power, Wealth, and Greed: The Seduction of Cacao") is the book's main contribution and its best-documented section. Figure 3.9 displays the amazing artistry and color palette of the ancient craftspeople that introduces modern readers to the merchant god as he approaches the cacao and maize plants. Figure 3.15, from the 16th-century Codex Mendoza chronicles a great array of tribute items, including sacks of cacao. Interestingly, cacao beans held such value that people were motivated to produce counterfeit beans (Figure 3.16), a process that must have required tremendous skill and time.

Chapter 4, "Serve Up the Chocolate: Drinks, Vessels, and Glyphs," again merges an account of the ancient vessels and ethnohistorical records with the practices of contemporary Mesoamerican peoples. The practice of calcifying beans of *Theobroma bicolor* (Figure 4.4) to create a foam-producing mixture is a fascinating glimpse into an ancient preparation ritual. A selection of serving pieces, all pure pleasure for the eye, is illustrated here. Figures 4.10 and 4.11 show vessels of great artistic value in wonderful condition. Figures 4.22, 4.23, 4.24, and 4.25 show four extraordinary serving vessels, ranging from a realistic, finely worked calabash bowl to an almost whimsical Mayan effigy deer vessel.

Chapters 5 and 6 ("The Healing Powers of Chocolate: Folk Medicine, Nutrition, and Pharmacology" and "Balancing the Cosmos: Chocolate's Role in Rainforest Ecology") inject a specific modern view that feels a bit disconnected to the earlier chapters. This discussion is clearly directed to a popular audience and relates closely to the accompanying DVD that was produced by the authors.

The book closes with Figure 6.13, another eye-popping statue of a cacao god with a split cacao pod growing from his naval. The pleasure derived from the book calls to mind the unadulterated joy of paging through a lavishly illustrated children's book. This sensual experience is only enhanced by its subject matter, cacao, which is both an intellectual intoxicant and sought-after libation for many humans, ancient and modern alike.

It is worth noting that the illustrations come from a wide variety of sources but credits indicate that Justin Kerr is responsible for many of the most spectacular photographs in this appealing book, particularly the roll-out photos, which take the iconography from vessels and present these visuals as beautifully detailed, mural-like scrolls. This book is quite a treat.

Barbara J. Petit
Atlanta, Georgia

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The Ways of the Water: A Reconstruction of Huastecan Nahua Society Through its Oral Tradition. By Anuschka van 't Hooft. Leiden: Leiden University Press. 2007. ISBN 978-90-8728-010-9 (paper).

This volume is part of a series entitled "Leiden Dissertations" initiated in 2006 to make recent doctoral dissertations from Leiden University available to specialists in the field as well as interested members of the public. The author is an ethnographer who works among Nahuatl speakers in the community of Xochiatipan in the state of Hidalgo in the southern Huasteca region. She recorded and carefully transcribed and translated into English a limited number of important oral narratives where water plays a critical role in the story. The work is a detailed interpretation of these narratives particularly as they relate to Nahua identity and world view. In the words of the author, "The aim is to analyze the interrelation between Huastecan Nahua socio-cultural reality and its literary produce in order to see how identity issues are presented and reconstructed through narratives dealing with water" (p. 18). As with any farming people, water is a key concern for Nahua of this region, and the substance is used by narrators to communicate important information to listeners about what it means to be Nahua in a world where mestizos are superordinate.

In the introduction, the author provides the now almost obligatory denial that ethnography can be scientific or approach objectivity: "objectivity as such does not exist in ethnographic studies and... each written product is framed by the author's conscious objective and a series of conscious and unconscious 'omissions and distortions'" (p. 21). Luckily for the reader once this bow to postmodern sensitivities is over, the author proceeds to present a systematic analysis of the texts based on empirical observations and interpretations thoroughly grounded in historical data. Any scientific analysis in any field of research involves selection of problem, approach, and data, and includes both omissions and distortions. What makes the analysis scientific is that it is testable by other researchers. Hooft grounds her interpretations in empirical evidence that can be contested or affirmed by others and thus, in my view, qualifies as good social science. An argument can be made that her selection of narrators was not based on scientific sampling or that she did not randomly sample the Nahua population to check her interpretations. However, these criticisms do not take into account the difficulties presented by ethnographic field research where laboratory conditions do not prevail. The answer to making ethnography more scientific is for anthropologists to engage in long-term research and to have other researchers work in the same area. By checking and rechecking conclusions in many different contexts, investigators can approach a degree of objectivity and produce findings that do qualify as scientific.

The work begins with a long narration by a Nahua man describing his community. Hooft shows how the narrator incorporates into his story elements that are important for Nahua identity. For example, she shows that the local community is the primary basis for identity, eclipsing Nahua ethnicity, Indianness, or the wider Huasteca region in which the community is located. People think of themselves primarily as inhabitants of Xochiatipan before they identify as Nahua or people from the Huasteca. Stories about community often include a history which, however hazy and lacking in specifics, legitimizes the locality and demonstrates people's rights to membership in the group. Associated with each settlement is a sacred mountain that is thought to be the repository of life-giving water. This concept is incorporated in the Nahuatl word for a community, which is *altepetl*, "water mountain." On a more micro level, people identify strongly with the specific locality of their

house as revealed by the practice of toponymy. In a practice they call *kaltocayotl*, the Nahua name each house compound, usually according to some geographic feature or abundance of some plant, and take on that name as their own. For example, a house compound called *tlalpani* ("highest point") will used as the surname by the inhabitants: Juan Hernández thus becomes "Juan Tlalpani." In sum, the way people are named reflects the topographic features of the village.

The description of the community recorded by the author stresses the common means people have of making a living, namely farming and occasional work as day laborers. Residents of the community are united in their reliance on corn cultivation and in their poverty. In more recent years, many males of the community (up to 25%) work in nearby towns and cities, sending or bringing back their earnings to their families. This practice of the remittance economy provides another common experience for village families. The village is further united in a round of ritual occasions, most of which follow the Catholic liturgical calendar. Even rituals marking a death have a communal character and involve village authorities. Belief in witchcraft among villagers links disease and death to a breakdown of harmonious relations within the community. The picture the narrator portrays of his well functioning and united community also touches on social organization. Each person is expected to be a contributing member to his or her family as well as to the community at large. All adults participate in the *faena,* the village-wide requirement that each household contribute work that benefits the community at large. There is a cargo system in which individuals occupy positions of responsibility to accomplish religious and civil tasks without compensation. Male members of the community gather every evening to discuss the problems, developments, and work projects of interest to inhabitants. In sum, the villagers themselves present a picture of their community as ideally a harmonious whole in which each individual plays his or her part. While villagers realize that they are poor and that they do not have the benefits of the city, they see themselves as free relative to their urban counterparts and they value what the local community can provide them.

The Nahua of Xochiatipan call oral narratives by the Spanish term *cuento* and they recognize three basic types: those of mythic stature that recount true or actual events in the ancient or recent past; those that recount actual events in the recent past that happened to someone; and those occurring at anytime, held to be anecdotal or fictional and told simply to entertain. Before proceeding with a water-related oral narrative Hooft provides some biographical details on the men who contributed the tales in her study, and discusses the contexts in which tales are normally told and the special circumstances under which she recorded them. This information is important in helping the reader evaluate the authenticity of the oral narratives and their place in the cultural life of the Nahua. The author's basic strategy for analyzing the tales is "primarily semantic" (p. 100). She carefully examines the meanings of words and phrases used by the narrators and places these meanings in the larger context of Nahua cultural understandings. The final step is to relate the tales to the larger domain of Nahua identity.

The author presents two major tales about water along with a number of shorter narratives that elaborate on this theme. The first, found widely throughout the Huasteca, is about the universal flood that preceded our current era. In this narrative a man and his helpers engaged in the arduous

work of clearing a patch of forest to create a milpa. When he returns the next morning he found all of the trees standing upright as if they had never been cut down. The man eventually learns that a rabbit appears at night and through his words restores the forest to its original state. When confronted, the rabbit informs the man that all of his work is for naught because a flood is about to happen that threatens to kill everyone and every thing on the earth. The rabbit advised the man immediately to build a large canoe so that he could save some of the people. As the farmer finished the canoe, it began to rain and the entire earth filled with water. When the water reached the sky the rabbit jumped off the boat and landed on the moon where its image remains to this day. Indigenous people throughout Mesoamerica see a rabbit in the full moon rather than the man's face or old woman carrying the bucket of European tradition. After the waters receded, survivors began to cook the meat of the dead animals. God took offense at this act and sent down several messengers to report back, all but one of which ignored God's command and stayed to enjoy the feast. Those that failed God became earth's carrion eaters such as vultures, while the loyal messenger was rewarded by being made into a hummingbird that lives off of the nectar of flowers.

Hooft points out the similarities between this tale and the biblical flood narrative, and there is no doubt that ideas brought by the Spaniards have been incorporated in the tale. However, she also points out the similarities to prehispanic tales recorded in the *Leyenda de los soles*, a work written in 1558 that documents precontact ideas about the five creations. The author concludes that contemporary Nahua religion is best looked at as a case of cultural continuity whereby new ideas brought by the Spaniards have been incorporated into an essentially prehispanic world view rather than being a syncretic blend of the two traditions. As an ethnographer who has worked among Huastecan Nahua for nearly 40 years, I fully agree with this conclusion. The fundamental core of Nahua world view remains largely intact despite, like any cultural system, having adapted to new circumstances over the past half-millennium. The list of deities venerated by contemporary Nahua overlaps significantly with those recorded in the 16th century and many practices such as pilgrimages to sacred mountains and caves, ritual paper cutting, or blood sacrifice continue to be followed. The acknowledgment of cultural continuity allows the author to use colonial texts to illuminate the current narrations that form the core of her work.

The author provides a number of interpretations of this tale that reveal something of Nahua world view and beliefs. There is no indication, for example, that God was intent on punishing human beings by sending the flood, as was evidently the case in the story of Noah recounted in the Bible. Instead, Nahua say that the flood washed or cleansed the earth, and that such rejuvenation was the reason for the catastrophe. The farmer was shown to be a good person by the diligence with which he worked and by the fact that he heeded the warning of the rabbit. Nighttime for the Nahua is often a time of mystery when humans can encounter beings from other dimensions. Thus, the rabbit restores the forest and meets the farmer in the middle of the night. The tale takes place during mythic time when people were capable of communicating with animals. Furthermore, the restoration of the forest after it was cut down signifies a stopping or reversal of time, a sign that a cataclysmic transformation from one world to another was about to happen. The power of words, an important belief among the Nahua, is affirmed by the rabbit's speech that restores the forest as well as convinces the farmer of the coming disaster. According to Hooft, the Nahua consider the rabbit to be a kind of trickster who is smart, and self-serving, and associated with previous ages and

cataclysmic transformations (pp. 134-38). The moon is likewise associated with time and so a rabbit in the moon signifies the modification of the normal flow of events and the imposition of the mythic element necessary for the flood tale to make its impact. The narration affirms Nahua beliefs about cyclical endings, the effects of polluting behavior on the earth, and the role of fire and smoke in introducing a new era. In a nod to Claude Levi-Strauss, the author asserts that the episode of cooking the dead animals represents the beginning of culture that separates human beings from nature (p. 149). Finally, the tale is told with enough ambiguity to allow multiple interpretations by Nahua listeners, making it a valuable adaptive tool for adjusting to the changing conditions of their lives.

A second series of oral narratives analyzed in the book tell the tale of creatures of the water who come to live in the neighborhood of Nahua communities. They fall from the sky or emerge from the water, taking up residence in a spring or cleft in the earth. They produce water and are therefore initially seen as beneficial to the people who take steps to insure that they are cared for. The specific type of creature varies according to region and narrator; sometimes it is a huge fresh-water shrimp, and others describe it is a fish or serpent. After a time, the creatures grow ever more enormous and the amount of water they produce threatens surrounding villages. The people must respond but are at a loss over what to do. Eventually a priest or bishop is called in and a Mass is held near the residence of the water monster. Thunder and lightning appear and the creature flies back to where it originated.

A key element in these narratives is that specific communities were threatened by the water creatures and that collective action led to a resolution of the crisis. Here we have an idealization of the Nahua village that faces a common threat with communal action. The tales also present a clear example of the Nahua idea that balance, harmony, and moderation are ideals in the relation between human beings and the natural forces around them. Nahua rituals never appeal for rain but are held to re-establish balance and to insure the right amount of the life-giving liquid. Too much of even a good thing leads to disaster. It is interesting that after the water beings are banished, their residences transform into reliable sources of water for the community, producing springs or waterfalls where the water never dries up. The problem in these tales occurred when creatures who belong in Apan, the water realm (or in the case of the water snake, to Iluikak, the sky) become displaced and come to occupy the earthly realm of human beings. It is this disorderliness that threatens the villages and only the power of Christianity sets things straight. Interestingly, in other Nahua villages of the region the mermaid (la *sirena*) and Saint John the Baptist (San Juan) play similar roles to the water creatures in these tales. The mermaid is a kind of liminal creature, part human and part fish, who lives in springs or pools and who threatens to flood communities. San Juan is conceived as an unpredictable figure who lives at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico and whose temper can flare and lead him to cause inundations.

As Hooft states it, "The telling of the tale [of the water creatures] expresses the concern to uphold the spatial balance between different realms and, consequently each living entity's attitudes and responsibilities" (p. 206). The tale serves as a vivid reminder of what can happen when disorder reigns. She further states, "If the universal flood establishes a new order for the whole cosmos, the events involving the water creatures renewed this order and placed the community at its center" (p.

207). The Nahua center their communities around the *altepetl* or "water mountain," and the creatures from the water realm provide additional sources of water upon which to base their local identity. In another tale recounted widely throughout the Huasteca, corn was released from the interior of a sacred mountain by lightning bolts loosed by San Juan. Here again is affirmation that the psychological and symbolic center of the community lies in maintaining its ordered relationship to its surroundings, and that this order itself is the source of nourishment and the focus of meaning of what it means to be Nahua.

The final chapter of the work deals with tales about the Lord and Lady of Water. In these narrations, a person comes into contact with one of these figures in a well, spring, or other body of water, and is forced either to stay in the water realm or find a substitute who will remain captive there. In an example of Nahua time compression, a person finds on returning to the earth's surface that a much longer time has passed than the person had experienced in the water. In such tales, a man returns home to discover his rifle has disintegrated from age, or that his family believed him to be long dead. In a reflection of Nahua concepts of center and periphery, the community or home of the protagonist is always portrayed as safe and protected, while the encounter with the Lord and Lady of the Water occurs at the dangerous periphery. The person captured by these water spirits is often a fisherman who injures fish without killing them, who catches more fish than he can possibly eat, or who breaks his marriage vows by giving his catch to his mistress instead of his wife. Such rash actions lead the water spirits to exact revenge, while the tales emphasize Nahua concepts of respect. It is disrespect for the water and its inhabitants that underlies each protagonist's misbehavior. The tales also establish a relationship between the human community and the environment. The Nahua are often in a delicate balance with their fragile environment and the tales reinforce behaviors that conserve resources and prevent overexploitation. These narratives illustrate balance and the reciprocal nature of human-nature interactions and stress the need to give back something for what the environment provides. They also emphasize the role of sacrifice in human interactions with the forces of nature.

This is a valuable work that provides important ethnographic information on Nahua who live in the Huasteca region whose culture has thus far been poorly documented. Because of the region's isolation and many other factors, the contemporary indigenous people of this part of Mexico are remarkable in the degree to which their practices are rooted in prehispanic culture. If there remains any doubt about the survival of the ancient religion in modern Mesoamerica, a glance at the cultures of the region should put them to rest. This work should be of interest to students of the Nahua as well as other Native Americans in Mexico. The analysis carefully avoids one of the pitfalls of this kind of research, namely the temptation to carry the symbolic analysis far beyond the actual data presented. Many ethnographers have fallen into this trap. The interpretations provided by Hooft are reasonable and thoroughly situated within the context of ethnohistorical and contemporary ethnographic understandings. The author's knowledge of the Nahuatl language is put to good use in clarifying some of the more difficult-to-understand passages. This work is an excellent example of the power of ethnography to bridge the gap between cultures and make a significant contribution to cross-cultural understanding.

The book is well written although it could have benefitted from closer editing to correct some uses of English that are a little off. For example, the word "lightning" throughout the text is often but not consistently spelled "lightening," and the author uses "hare" in place of the more common "rabbit." Also, the subtitle, "A Reconstruction of Huastecan Nahua Society Through it Oral Tradition" is misleading. The work does not reconstruct Nahua society but rather shows how oral narratives reflect Nahua cultural principles and understandings that are deeply held. The author denies that the Nahua-mestizo divide, so prevalent in the region, is the prime source of identity. She asserts instead that it is the local community and cosmological principles that command Nahua attention (as on p. 254). However, this conclusion, in my opinion, is overstated because divisions between Nahua and mestizo and Nahua or other indigenous groups can be understood to be a key factor in understanding why people are motivated in the first place to maintain cultural traditions in the face of overwhelming pressure to change. A final point is that, in my experience, it is not so much the community that serves as a focus of identity as a subarea within the community. I have been with villagers at great distances from home when they have been asked where they are from. They invariably answered with the name of the subarea rather than the name of the entire community. The subarea is largely occupied by kinsmen and a case could be made that it is the extended family that provides the most important focus of Nahua identity.

A more serious criticism can be leveled at the basic approach taken by the author. Along with many ethnographers working in different world areas, Hooft restricts her research focus to the meaning system of the people she is studying. There is nothing wrong with this approach per se, but any study restricted to meaning systems will always remain incomplete. The reason is that there is no necessary connection between meaning and actual behavior. Even if we had a complete understanding of Nahua meaning, that knowledge would not increase our chances of predicting or even explaining their behavior. Meaning systems are always flexible, often internally contradictory, and easily rationalized away as people rise to meet the day-to-day, pragmatic challenges that they constantly face. One of the great advantages of ethnographic research is that it can provide empirical data on meaning (the emic perspective) and on actual observable behavior (etic perspective). No account of a group can be complete unless information is provided from both an emic and etic perspective and systematically compared.

Hooft is to be congratulated on her analysis of Nahua oral narratives but the work would have been strengthened had she included observational data on how the Nahua actually behave around water. Do they avoid bathing at certain places or at certain times of the day? Do they curtail their fishing efforts so as not to offend the Lord of the Water? Do they leave offerings at the spring where water is obtained? How are children taught about water? What role does water play in actual ritual offerings? Of course, researchers should study what interests them and that is fine as far as it goes. However, until these types of questions are addressed and the behavioral component is accounted for, the research will never achieve the goal of explaining cultural similarities and differences.

These criticisms amount to quibbles and do not undermine the value of this work for helping us better understand Nahua culture. Anuschka Van 't Hooft has done an excellent job presenting her field data and interpretations in readable form and thoroughly situated in the context of published and unpublished work on the Nahua and related peoples. I recommend the book to *Nahua*

Newsletter readers and only hope that Hooft continues her research efforts in the Huasteca and inspires others to follow in her footsteps.

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COMMENTARY

Labor Squads, Noble Houses, and Other Things Called 'Barrios' in Aztec Mexico

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Barrio and Calpulli

The noble house, usually headed by a noble of lordly or *teuctli* rank, was a basic unit of social and economic organization in most of early 16th-century Mexico. The noble house held lands, which were worked by the labor of commoners, who delivered its produce to the lordly granaries, and gave personal service to the lord. Specialists gave products of their specialty, and women usually gave woven cloth. In return, commoner households were given lands of the house that they could work for their own subsistence, or for the market. The noble house included, besides the *teuctli*, lesser nobles, junior kin of the *teuctli* of less than lordly rank who often headed houses of their own, with their own plebeian work force. In the Valley of Mexico the noble houses were often overshadowed by the extensive royal domains and other enterprises of the Triple Alliance rulers, but they stood out more prominently in the Valleys of Puebla and Morelos.

Equally basic were the work squads, each of them usually composed of about 20 men — household heads — and five of these formed a larger squad of 100 men. These were mobilized through the state apparatus, headed by the ruler, or *tlahtoani*, for public works. This mobilization was called *coatequitl* in Nahuatl. Each squad was headed by an official who in the Valley of Puebla was called a *tecpanpixqui*, literally "guardian of a score of people," subordinate to a *macuiltecpanpixqui*, "guardian of five score of people" who was in charge of five squads of 20. In other parts they were called *tequitlahto*, which was probably the most common term in the Valley of Mexico, or sometimes *calpixqui* or *tepixqui*, and in Spanish "*mandones*," "*merinos*," "*mandoncillos*," or "*mayorales*." As Durán (1967, II:185) put it, "In some parts they´re called *tepixque*, in others *calpixque*, and in others *calpuleque*, "*y de otros mil maneras*," but here (Mexico City) we just call them "*merinos*." Charles Gibson (1956) referred to the whole body of labor thus mobilized as the *tlahtoani*'s "*llamamiento*." The sources indicate that these squad leaders were commoners, not nobles, with very few exceptions. The documentary sources are full of references to these labor squads, and Teresa Rojas (1979) has published an important analysis of them. Their

mobilization was not rare. There was a lot of work to be done under government direction, from cleaning the streets and weaving cloth to building palaces and temples or carving monuments.

These are just two of the institutions that writers in Spanish, ever since the 16th century, have often been calling "*barrios*." Those few who write about this material in English often adopt the word. But "*barrio*" is a very imprecise term. Motolinía (1971:205) referred to Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco as two "*barrios*" of the city of Mexico; Alvarado Tezozómoc (1975:484), among others, referred to the four "*barrios*" of Tenochtitlan; and Alfonso Caso (1954) located 68 "*barrios*" in ancient Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco. There is a "*barrio chino*" in San Francisco, a "*barrio latino*" in many U.S. cities, and in most Mexico City subway stations there is "*mapa del barrio*," which shows the immediate neighborhood around the station.

As if that wasn't bad enough, "*barrio*" is often used as a sort of mechanistic, automatic translation for the Nahuatl "*calpulli*." Now, if there is any word in Nahuatl that is just as imprecise as "*barrio*," it is "*calpulli*." As Luis Reyes has emphasized, that word can refer to a place, a migrating band, a labor squad, a small temple, an ethnic group or "tribe," a section of a town, or a Christian parish, as well as a noble house or "*casa de mayorazgo*" (Reyes García 1996), and Pedro Carrasco (1976, 1994) has stressed that the word can refer to any kind of social subdivision and to more than one level of segmentation. There is no such thing as "the" *calpulli*. It does not always mean the same thing, as anyone who works with archival sources quickly learns.

In fact, *calpulli* is if anything even more imprecise than "*barrio*." At least *barrio* always refers to some kind of territorial entity, usually a part of a larger place. Not so *calpulli*. If given its plural form (*calpoltin*) it refers to a group of people, such as the seven *calpoltin* who left the mythical Aztlán to settle the various places in central Mexico, or the *calpolleque* ("people of a calpulli") of Cuauhtinchan on whom the conquering Mexica imposed *teuctlis* "who took the lands of others and converted the people into *macehuallis*" (Martínez 1984:35). The house-by-house censuses from the Marquesado in Morelos start out (taking the one from Molotla) "*yzcate ce calpoltin chicuhnautlamantizquicate*" which Carrasco (1972) translates as "*Aquí están los de un calpulli; están divididos en nueve partes,*" and Hinz, et al. (1983), I think more accurately, as "*Hier sind die Bewohner einer Siedlung; neun Bezirke sind es*" ("Here are the people of one settlement, which is nine districts"). However, when each of the nine component "parts" are introduced, the heading is, for example, "*yzca yc oncalpolli atenpa*" ("Here is the second *calpolli*, Atempan").

There is a lot of regional variation in the terminology used for comparable entities in different parts of Aztec Mexico, and also, the Nahuatl language provides the individual speaker or writer with a certain degree of choice in the word to use. Which one he uses probably depends on which aspect of his subject he is thinking of. One cannot assume that a given Nahuatl word always means the same thing wherever it occurs, and I would recommend that one should not use the native word as the subject heading under which to group data. Doing so can lead one to see differences that don't exist, and to overlook differences that do exist. Yet not only have some of the most distinguished scholars of Mesoamerican history and anthropology done so, but I myself have done so in the past.

I want to say some things about the noble houses which I suspect are obscured by excessive preoccupation with the word *calpulli*, and then focus on the labor squads, because it strikes me that most general works on the Aztec don't seem to appreciate their importance, if they even mention them at all.

Noble Houses

The noble house, with its land, goods, and dependent labor, was probably the basic social unit in Aztec Mexico, although in the Valley of Mexico it was somewhat eclipsed by the huge royal establishments. In the Valley of Puebla it seems almost always to have been called a "*teccalli*," in the Valley of Mexico possibly a "*tecpan*," while in the Valley of Morelos, the 16th-century censuses call it a "*calpulli*."

The noble house had lands, some of which were worked for the lord, and others were given by the lord to the commoners, or *maceguales*, that were settled on his lands. These latter lands were referred to as "*calpullalli*," literally "lands of the calpulli," or "*del común*," since if a *macehualli* left the house for a better situation elsewhere, the lands reverted to the noble house, to be assigned to somebody else. They were, so to speak, the common lands of the lord's domain. The person who actually did the assigning, with the lord's approval, was called a "*tequitlahto*" in documents from the Cuernavaca-Yautepec region of Morelos, and a "*calpole*" (literally, "one who has a *calpolli*") in the Yecapixtla region of that state, although *tequitlahto* was also used there (Nuevos Docs. 1946:181,253). These overseers, or foremen, like the labor squad leaders, were normally if not always commoners. Some may have been cruel taskmasters, but in at least one account, the proceedings of a legal case from Tezoyuca in 1584, a dispute between the Indian "*gobernador y cacique*" and his Indian labor, the *tequitlahtos* took the side of the laborers (AGN-Tierras 1524). There are accounts, especially in the Morelos censuses, of strangers coming, asking to be settled there, and being given lands and assigned other tribute obligations. In this non-industrial, non-mechanized society, everything was done by labor, and the power or wealth of a noble was a function of how many *macehuales* he had.

It appears that in the Valley of Puebla, and especially in Tlaxcala, almost every commoner was the subject of one or another noble house, which in Tlaxcala would have been a dependency of one of the four (possibly more or less) *altepetl* that made up the Tlaxcala state (Martínez Baracs 2008:94). The same was probably true of the Valley of Morelos. In the Valley of Mexico, however, there were regions that did not have a resident noble house, but were under the direct control of one or another of the imperial houses and its *tlahtoani*. The region of Atenco, in Texcoco, was one of the regions that Nezahualcoyotl, in the early 15th century, kept for himself after distributing most of his realm to others (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1975-77, II:89-91). In the 16th century, the productive work in this area was directed by a non-noble *calpixqui*, aided by a staff of subordinate *calpixque*, as representative of the collectivity of nobles of the royal house of Texcoco (Hicks 1978).

Labor Squads

Now let us turn to the labor squads. There is no doubt that this institution was prehispanic. Durán (1967, I:116) describes a house or room in the palace where the *calpixque* gathered; they were like "*merinos o mandoncillos*" whose duty was to organize the people of their *barrios* for public works, such as cleaning the streets and the canals. Elsewhere (1967, II:313 [Ch. 41]) he tells us that all the people of the city, from the time they were children, were entered on the rolls of their *barrio*, led by "*centuriones, quincuagenarios, y cuadragenarios*," some in charge of 20 houses, others of 40, 50, or 100, who led them for public service, and he goes on to describe their mobilization to prepare the ceremonies connected with the funeral of king Tizoc in the late 15th century. The royal advisor Tlacaelel then called all the "*mandoncillos*" of the *barrios* to report with the material or the craftsmen needed to prepare for the inauguration of the new king Ahuitzotl (Durán 1967, II:324). Later, Tlacaelel, at the behest of king Moteuczoma II, called all the stoneworkers, 39 of them in all, to set about carving a giant statue of the king (Alvarado Tezozómoc 1975:662). When Tenochtitlan prepared for war, the squads were mobilized to prepare the supplies that the warriors would need (Alvarado Tezozómoc 1975:329-30).

There was quite likely a connection between the labor squads and the *telpochcalli*, or youth houses, as Rojas (1979:50-51) has tentatively suggested, and as is also suggested by Durán's statement, cited above, that people were entered on the rolls of their *barrio* as children. The Spanish eagerly embraced this structure, and made considerable use of it. Perla Valle (2006) describes its use in building the Spanish capital on the rubble of old Tenochtitlan, and calls it part of the booty that the Spanish gained from their conquest. In the Valley of Puebla, the viceregal Ordenanzas de Cuauhtinchan (in Reyes García 1978), issued in 1559, ordered the *macehuales* of that town to be organized into squads of 20 and 100 households, under the customary *centecpanpixque* and *macuiltecpanpixque*. Hildeberto Martínez (1984:102-105) describes the same system for Tepeaca. In the Valley of Mexico, the report of the "*visita*" of the *oidor* to Coyoacan in 1553 described the labor squads, under "*mandones*," whose duties were to gather up the people for public works and tribute payments (Carrasco and Monjarás-Ruiz 1976:23ff). These squad leaders were required to keep rosters of all the household heads of their squads. We have some of these rosters, composed in early colonial times, from Tlaxcala and Huexotzinco, listing all the *macehuallis* organized by work squad. The use of *coatequitl* by the Spanish began to decline very gradually after the New Laws of 1542 required that such labor be remunerated.

As one might expect, these squads were almost always called "*barrios*" in Spanish, and often "*calpules*" in Nahuatl, although in Tlaxcala, the larger ones were called "*tequitl*" (Padrones de Tlaxcala, in Rojas, et al. 1987). They have names which almost always are toponyms, so it has often been assumed that these were residential districts of towns. Although, as Rojas (1979:45) has said, "The squads grouped men who were tributaries of a certain jurisdiction (*barrio*, *pueblo*, *provincia*), but not the territories where the men lived. Accordingly, the squads or their multiples should not be considered territorial subdivisions, although at times they appear to be" (my translation). It would, of course, be odd indeed to find a series of residential districts each with exactly 20 households, as the squads of Huexotzinco had. In Tlaxcala, the number of households per squad was more varied, but it hovered around 20.

One of the best and clearest sources for the work squads is the pictorial Matrícula de Huexotzinco (Prem and Carrasco 1974). This document records all the Indians, nobles and commoners (11,328 in all), of the 24 sections of Huexotzinco and its subsidiary towns in the Valley of Puebla; Dyckerhoff and Prem (1976) have plotted their locations. Commoners and nobles are listed separately, and while nobles are grouped by the noble house (*teccalli*) to which they belonged, and all the nobles of that house are shown, the *macehuallis* who worked their fields and otherwise served them as part of the noble house are not recorded. Instead, the commoners, who are listed first, are grouped by their labor squads, one page for each *veintena* (20-man squad), with the squad leader shown prominently. These squads were sometimes called "*calpul*," and sometimes "*barrio*," depending apparently on the preference of the *tlacuilo* who painted the page.

As we have seen, when labor was drafted through this system, there was often a call for a particular kind of craft or other skill. In the Matrícula, individuals who had a particular specialty were identified in the roster by a glyph for that specialty. Many squads had no specialties, but of those that did, several different specialties were represented. There were no squads composed entirely of a single kind of specialist, but specialists could be identified and summoned when needed.

Sources from the Valley of Mexico make reference to what appear to be *barrios* of specialists of a given kind. Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1975-77, II: 85, 101) tells us that when Nezahualcoyotl took control of Texcoco after the defeat of the Tepanecs, he brought artisans of all kinds to the newly restructured city, and that each kind of *oficio* was to be by itself, the goldworkers in one *barrio*, the featherworkers in another, etc. Sahagún (1956, III; 1959, Book 9) describes a *barrio* of featherworkers and one of merchants. But what were these *barrios*? Were they workshops, meeting houses, rooms in the palace, labor squads, sections of marketplaces, or residential districts? In the Nahuatl version of Sahagún they are called "*petlame*," which Dibble and Anderson translate into English as "*calpulli*" (in the Spanish version they are called "*barrios*"), and they place their idols and hold their ceremonies in their *calpul* or *calpulco*, which they translate as "*calpulli* temple."

It seems possible that in a large metropolis such as Tenochtitlan or Texcoco, there could indeed be a sufficient number of specialists of a particular kind, and sufficient demand for their services, to form a whole squad, while in smaller cities like Huexotzinco there was not. It also seems possible that if featherworkers, goldworkers, and other practitioners of the elite crafts were brought in from other cities, they may indeed have been settled together in a special district.

As for the merchants, who formed caravans that traveled to distant regions to trade for exotic raw materials, they evidently were of high status, having extensive establishments, with storage facilities, meeting rooms, temples, and such. Sahagún and some others make them seem more like nobles than commoners. It is worth noting that in Tlaxcala, not all noble houses were called *teccalli*, which is literally "house of a *teuctli*." Some were called "*huehuecalli*" or "*yaotequihuacacalli*." And of course Durán and others have noted that deserving commoners could be ennobled, though it was somehow less than full nobility. I wonder if merchant communities did not fit in here somewhere. I am not ready to deal with this now, but I suspect that the higher social strata were more diverse and less rigid than they appear at first glance.

Another interesting thing about the Matrícula de Huexotzinco is that those commoners who were "*terrazgueros*," that is, who belonged to a particular noble house, are distinguished by a red dot over their head (when the document was drawn up, there was some dispute as to whether the *terrazgueros* of particular nobles should be included in the labor drafts, so they were identified so they could be taken out if necessary). But as Andrea Martínez Baracs, among others, have noted, at least in Tlaxcala and probably throughout the Valley of Puebla, every commoner belonged to one or another noble house (and could all have been called "*terrazgueros*"), so who were the non-*terrazgueros*? The Matrícula was compiled in 1560, and I suspect that their presence resulted from the Spanish conquest and economic restructuring.

These labor squads, and the system for organizing them, must have been extremely important in pre-Spanish Mexico, just as they were in the first decades of the Spanish viceroyalty. There was a vast amount of work that had to be done under government direction, from cleaning the streets and canals, to building palaces and temples or carving monuments. I would even say that in this pre-industrial and essentially non-monetized economy, this was the closest equivalent of taxes in Aztec society.

Changes under the Spanish

As soon as they gained control of New Spain, the Spanish rulers began to take steps to create a free market economy, which they saw as the wave of the future, and which was replacing the feudal system in Europe. In particular, they wanted to see land freely bought and sold on the market, and worked by hired labor — an economy separate from the polity. They realized that they would have to rule through the native nobility, and many nobles seized the opportunity to convert their waning political power into economic power. The decline of many noble houses and the opening of new economic opportunities led to many commoners leaving the noble house and becoming independent farmers or workers for hire (Cintrón Tiryakian 1979). As this process proceeded, there emerged a distinction, among rural commoners, between those that were part of a noble house and those that were not. The former were termed "*renteros*" or "*terrazgueros*" of the nobles, but they were all called "*maceguales*" by the Spanish. *Macehualli* referred in earlier times to one who was a subject of a noble or other person, but under the Spanish it referred to most any working-class non-noble Indian. Note that it was at this point in history that the writings and documents we use as our primary sources began to be produced.

I suspect it is the way the word *calpolli*, translated as "*barrio*" was used in connection with the noble house that misled some to see it as a community of free peasants, under elected leaders, working plots of the "*calpulli's*" common lands. The use of the same word, either *barrio* or *calpulli*, to refer to both residential units and labor squads, as well as other things, may be what has kept modern scholars from recognizing the labor squads as distinct from residential districts, and giving them the importance they deserve in the economic, political, and even artistic structure of Aztec society. Our museums contain much of their work, and the buildings they built attract tourists from all over. That, and an excessive reliance on the work of Alonso de Zorita (1999). Zorita is a very good source in many ways, but he did not handle the Nahuatl language well, and possibly he was confused in his discussion of *calpulli* because he was blending or mixing several things that could

be called *calpulli*, and trying to treat them as if they were the same thing. Mostly they were noble houses, but sometimes migrating ethnic groups or other kinds of communities. As a result, he presented a misleading picture of the *calpulli*. Yet as one of the first such sources to be published in modern times and read by modern scholars, his work tended to become the canon. I would suggest that we refrain from using the word *calpulli* except as a direct quote from a primary source. Simply describe what it is we are talking about, in plain English, Spanish, or anthropological jargon. A lot of things will become clearer if we do.

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View of sacred mountain Postectli seen from *municipio* of Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz, Mexico.

The Nahua

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A note to *Nahua Newsletter* readers:

Following is a draft summary of contemporary Nahua culture that will appear as part of the Yale University Human Relations Area Files (HRAF); see introduction to this issue. (An earlier version of the summary appeared as "Nahuas of the Huasteca" in *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, Vol 8: *Middle America and the Caribbean*, edited by James W. Dow and Robert V. Kemper, pp. 184-87. Boston: G. K. Hall; Human Relations Area Files, 1995.) The expanded text is a statement of record that will be used by scholars and students who wish to find out more about the Nahua or who are conducting their own research on Nahua culture, language, and history. It is critical that the information be current and accurate. Readers of the *NN* know that there is a vast literature on the Nahua and that the people are scattered over an enormous area that includes several countries in Middle America and beyond. These factors make writing a summary of such a scattered and complex group very difficult. I would greatly appreciate if you would take the time to read over the text and send suggestions for improvement. I will carefully consider all suggestions. Please be aware that space is very limited and that I will have to eliminate information in order to insert any new material. The bibliography is necessarily brief and does not represent the scope of published work on the Nahua but is meant simply to point to sources for further information. Many works by excellent scholars have been left out simply due to length restrictions and the constraints of the required format of the HRAF culture summary. The *eHRAF World Cultures* material that is currently being indexed as representative of the Nahua will include a more comprehensive bibliography. Please send any suggestions to me at sandstro@ipfw.edu. Thank you for any help you may provide.

Orientation

Identification. The name "Nahua" is used by scholars to refer to Native Americans of Middle America who speak one of the closely related dialects of the Nahuatl language. Nahua itself is a Nahuatl term that means "intelligible," "clear," or "audible." Nahua people generally recognize the appellation "Nahua" but rarely employ it to refer to themselves or to each other. More commonly, they use the word "Mexicano" for the language and either "Mexicano" or "Mexicanero" as a general name for their ethnic group. The latter terms derive from the ancient Nahuatl *Mexica* (pronounced me shē′ ca) but they have been Hispanicized and are pronounced and pluralized as in Spanish. In the 16th century, the Nahuatl-speaking Aztecs from the capital city Tenochtitlan called themselves and were known by others as "Mexica" and many Nahua of today continue to use this general term when referring to their ethnic group. "Mexicano" in modern Spanish connotes a citizen of Mexico and thus, for the Nahua, the ethnonym has a double meaning: a citizen of the modern nation and a proud descendant of the Aztecs. Nahua also use the term *masehuali* (pl. *masehualmej*) meaning "countryman" or "farmer" to refer to themselves or any other Native American regardless of ethnic identity. They use the Nahuatl word *coyotl* to refer to any non-Indian. Some writers refer to the

language as well as the ethnic group as Nahuatl or Aztec. The name "Aztec" properly applies only to the short-lived Mexica empire that was forged by certain central highland Nahua groups before the arrival of the Spaniards.

Location. Many Nahua live today on the periphery of what was the center of the Aztec empire. Scholars commonly divide contemporary Nahua into subgroups based on the geographic areas where their populations are concentrated. Major Nahua populations are designated according to these regions and today include Nahua of the Sierra Madre Occidental, Durango, Guerrero, Central Highlands, Sierra Norte de Puebla, Gulf Coast, and Central America. Of these, the greatest number live in the Central Highlands, Sierra Norte de Puebla, and the Gulf Coast. The Gulf Coast — home to the largest concentration of speakers of Nahua dialects in Mexico — is divided into the Huasteca (northern zone), Totonacapan (north central), Zongolica (central Gulf Coast), and Southern Gulf Coast (southern Veracruz and parts of Tabasco). Mexican states with the greatest number of speakers include Veracruz, Puebla, Hidalgo, Guerrero, and Morelos. Smaller populations are found in Michoacán, Durango, Jalisco, Nayarit, Tlaxcala, the state of Mexico, Oaxaca, and Tabasco. A total of 7,732 towns in Mexico are listed in which 5% or more of the population speaks a dialect of Nahuatl (INALI 2005). At the time of the conquest and continuing until today, Nahuatl speakers extend down into Central America. Those Nahua in contemporary Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras are known as Pipil, meaning "children" or "nobles." Nahua in Nicaragua are called Nicarao, after a 16th-century leader who also gave his name to the modern country. These peripheral people share many cultural traits with the Nahua of the Central Highlands and it is clear that populations of Nahua migrated into Central America sometime before the arrival of the Spaniards (Fowler 1989).

Demography. It is notoriously difficult to evaluate the accuracy of population figures for indigenous groups in Middle America. Part of the problem is that many people are reluctant to report to census takers that they speak an indigenous language because of the low socioeconomic status accorded to Native Americans. Also, many mestizo people speak an indigenous language and may live in an indigenous community even though they identify as Hispanic. Finally, the census reports on language speakers only for those five years old and above, leaving out a substantial portion of the population. The 2000 Mexican census reports that 6,011,202 people five years old and above speak an indigenous language and that 1,376,026 of these speak a dialect of Nahuatl. Perhaps a more accurate figure is that 2,176,922 people in the census are reported to live in a household where a dialect of Nahuatl is spoken. Not all members of such a household speak Nahuatl so it is likely that there are between 1.3 and 2 million speakers of the language. Populations of Nahua in Central America are relatively small. Census figures that include language are available only for Nicaragua and in 2005 there were 11,113 speakers of Nahoa-Nicarao and 46,002 speakers of Chorotega-Nahua-Mange. This last census category seems to be an amalgamated group that includes non-Nahua speakers. There are more speakers of dialects of Nahuatl than any other indigenous language in Middle America.

Linguistic affiliation. Dialects of Nahuatl (including both -tl and -t variants) are the southernmost extension of the Uto-Aztecan family of languages (sometimes called Yuta-Nawan or Yuto-Nahua). The northern branch of the family encompasses languages spoken in the American Southwest and includes, among others, Ute, Paiute, Hopi, Comanche, and Shoshone. Related languages spoken in the southern branch include Mayo, Opata-Eudeve, Tepehuan, Tarahumara, and Cora.

History and cultural relations. Most authorities believe that Nahuatl came into the Mesoamerican heartland from the northwest of Mexico and that it was established sometime before 500 CE. It was the language spoken by the Aztecs (Mexica-Tenochca), Toltecs, Tlaxcalans, and many other pre-Hispanic and contact-era peoples. By the time of the arrival of the Spaniards in the early 16th century, Nahuatl was the dominant language throughout the culture area well on its way to becoming a lingua franca. Mesoamerica is one of only seven cultural areas on earth where people managed to develop, without foreign intervention, urban civilization and state-level political organization (Carrasco 2001:213). The arrival of the Spaniards brought destruction of the urban centers and massive death that probably exceeded 90% of the indigenous population within a few decades of the conquest in 1521. But the Spaniards also brought with them the desire to convert indigenous people to their version of Christianity and a penchant for meticulous documentation and record keeping. Reports were prepared on the newly conquered territories by government and religious officials and sent to the king of Spain. These reports included observations on the indigenous people to facilitate governance and conversion efforts. Earlier friars, chief among them the remarkable Bernardino de Sahagún, learned Nahuatl and taught Aztec scribes to write in their language using the Spanish alphabet. Under Sahagún's influence, his followers and those of other like-minded clerics collected and wrote about histories, royal genealogies, customary practices of all types, religious beliefs and rituals, and the complex calendar system. Among other efforts, they wrote plays in Nahuatl that were performed to instruct the people in Christian theology and beliefs. The practice of keeping records in Nahuatl such as deeds, wills, court records, and testimonies continued for centuries and has provided scholars with priceless documentation on the transformation of Nahua culture over a period of nearly half a millennium.

Researchers from the very beginning have been working on these documents but there has been a notable increase in professional scholarship on Mesoamerica over the past 30 years. Not only historians and ethnohistorians but also archaeologists, art historians, linguists, and ethnographers have been devoting their efforts to better understand the aftermath of the great *encuentro* between indigenous Mesoamerica and Europe. Evolving approaches that have guided this complex ongoing effort are summarized by John Monaghan (2000) and by John Monaghan and John Hawkins (2001). The Nahua are one of several dozen surviving indigenous ethnic groups in contemporary Mesoamerica, but it has proved impossible to identify specific cultural traits (besides language) that distinguish them from the others. All Native American cultures in the region partake of a common Mesoamerican cultural tradition that is of considerable antiquity and that was widely shared at the time of the conquest. Contemporary Nahua are scattered over an immense area and often surrounded by other indigenous groups as well as Hispanic elites. What we find in this case are regional differences in culture that override common distinguishing elements associated with a particular ethnic group. The result is that Nahua of the Huasteca, for example, share more in common with

their Tepehua, Otomi, and Huastec neighbors, even though they speak unrelated languages, than they do with Nahua living hundreds of miles away in the state of Guerrero. The ethnographic data on the Nahua do not allow analysts to specify social, political, or economic practices that distinguish the Nahua regardless of region. This same statement can be made about most of the other indigenous ethnic groups in Mesoamerica as well. Otomis, for example, from the Central Highlands may not have much in common with fellow ethnic group members in the Huasteca. There are some smaller groups in the region such as the Huichols and Lacandons who can probably be distinguished from other ethnic groups based on cultural attributes but even these people share in widely dispersed Mesoamerican patterns. Edward Spicer (1962) has written about the historical factors that have led indigenous people in Mesoamerica to lose specific tribal or ethnic-group identity and to substitute in its place a generalized identity as Native American.

A complicating factor in this complicated situation is that acculturative pressures from the Euro-American world that have been in play for hundreds of years have affected local groups unevenly. Indigenous people living in or near urban centers have experienced more intensive pressure to conform to "modernization" than have people in more inaccessible areas. But improvements in roads and transportation systems along with profound upheavals in the regional economy have accelerated the pace of change even in the most remote regions. Ironically, sometimes pressure to conform to the local version of modernity causes people to develop a stronger ethnic identity as Native Americans (Sandstrom 2008). Thus the paradoxical situation can develop in which people closer to the city are more committed to indigenous language and cultural practices than people in distant villages.

Archaeological, ethnohistorical, and art-historical studies have helped to clarify the Nahua experience from the pre-Hispanic period through colonialism and independence while ethnographic studies are contributing to increased understanding of people's lives under current conditions. In 1926, Robert Redfield began a pioneering ethnographic study in the highland Nahua town of Tepoztlán. Published in 1930 as a preliminary study, *Tepoztlán: A Mexican Village* stood for many years as a classic account of peasant village life. Redfield portrayed the community members as peaceful and conservative, steeped in Catholic ritual practices and holding to many elements from their pre-Hispanic past. Seventeen years later Oscar Lewis undertook a restudy of Tepoztlán the results of which shook anthropology to its core. Published in 1951, his *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied*, was a far more thorough study of the community. Lewis' account went significantly beyond Redfield's ethnography to portray Tepoztlán as a more heterogeneous community riven with strife that sometimes erupted into violence. The ensuing controversy undermined scientific claims of objectivity in anthropology and social science in general. Much effort has been expended trying to reconcile these seemingly incompatible accounts of Nahua community life.

Over the decades, published ethnographic studies of the Nahua have reflected major trends in anthropology and the social sciences. It is impossible to highlight all but a few of these works. Some major topics treated in Nahua ethnography include loss of identity (Friedlander 1975), former Nahua communities (Mulhare de la Torre 2001), construction of ethnic identity (Sandstrom 1991, Schryer 1990, Berdan, et al. 2008, Rodríguez López 2003), kinship and social organization (Arizpe

Schlosser 1973, Nutini 1968, Taggart 1975, 1983, Sandstrom 2000b), civil religious hierarchy (Dehouve 1976), sociolinguistics (Hill and Hill 1986), fiestas (Reyes García 1960), ritual kinship (Nutini and Bell 1980), religious iconography (Hunt 1977, Sandstrom and Sandstrom 1986), economic development (Chevalier and Buckles 1995), witchcraft (Nutini and Roberts 1993, Knab 1995), myth (Preuss 1982), religion (Báez-Jorge and Gómez Martínez 1998, Gómez Martínez 2002, Lupo 2009), Signorini and Lupo 1989, Ingham 1986), summaries of Nahua culture (Madsen 1969, Sandstrom 1995, 2000a, Gonzáles 1995, Taggart 1995, Rodríguez López and Valderrama Rouy 2005, Vargas Ramírez 1995, Masferrer Kan and Báez Cubero 1995, Saldaña Fernández 1995, Alvarado 1994, Villela F. 1995, Sierra Carrillo 1989), broad-based community studies (Chamoux 1981, Montoya Briones 1964, Sandstrom 1991), Protestantism (Sandstrom 2001), cognized environment (Sandstrom 2005), and culture change (Dehouve 1976). Much Nahua ethnography has been done by Mexican scholars and their students and the results of their efforts are published in Spanish in monographs, journal articles, and book chapters.

Settlements. The Nahua generally live in small communities ranging from hamlets consisting of a few families to towns of four- or five- thousand inhabitants. Larger, more acculturated communities such as Tepoztlán may be organized according to the Spanish model with a church and plaza at the center. Smaller villages may consist of scattered groupings of houses belonging to kin. The design of their dwellings generally reflect the region they live in and environmental factors. For example, Nahua of the tropical Huasteca generally build single-room houses from poles lashed to a frame topped with a thatched roof. Sometimes the people apply mud mixed with chopped grass to one or more walls for privacy or to keep out wind and rain. The floor plan is rectangular, although sometimes one of the short ends is rounded. Floors are made of packed earth and kept clean by women who sprinkle them with water and sweep them daily. Houses at higher elevations may be constructed with planks, mud bricks, or other materials that deflect chill winds. An architectural cycle is evident whereby people use a newer house for sleeping and other activities while retaining the older habitation for use as a kitchen.

In general, interiors are sparsely furnished with few manufactured items. Each house has a high, narrow table that serves as an altar. It may contain candles, an incense brazier, a cross, and commercially produced pictures of saints. The kitchen may be at one end of the house or in a separate nearby building. It consists of one or more fireplaces, either on the ground or raised on a fire table made of timber and mud. Three stones surround the fire so that round-bottomed earthenware pots can be placed on it for cooking. Against the wall or hung from the rafters is shelving that may hold a water pot, dishes, unused cookware, food items, and utensils, usually simply spoons. People sleep on woven mats that are placed either on the floor or on a wooden frame. During the day people roll up the mats and store them in a corner of the house. Additional structures may include granaries for storing corn, in some regions a sweatbath, and more recently, a latrine. Harvested maize still in its shucks is neatly stacked in the house. Nahua often have small gardens in close proximity to their houses planted with herbs, flowers, fruit trees, coffee plants, and other useful or ornamental plants. Households usually maintain a few patio animals such as turkeys, chickens, ducks, or pigs, and dogs are often kept to guard the property and warn when visitors approach.

With the rapid economic development of Mexico and improved roads, Nahua houses are increasingly constructed of cement blocks with tarpaper, ceramic tile, or corrugated-iron roofs. Such houses may also have cement floors as well. Increasingly, even remote villages are connected to the national electric grid and many also have some form of running water. It is not unusual in remote areas to see a television antenna sticking out from the peak of a thatch-roofed house. In many cases, the new cement-block housing had advantages over the traditional designs. People complain that building materials such as thatching and straight poles are increasingly difficult to obtain and that traditional houses had to be replaced when they began to deteriorate (sometimes after decades of use). The new dwellings are more permanent and less susceptible to fire. In the hotter climates, however, people admit that the new houses act like airless ovens that trap heat and make living in them unbearable. Traditional houses were cool in the heat and allowed the air or smoke from cooking fires to pass through them even on the hottest days. Here is an excellent example of modern technology actually reducing the standard of living and quality of life for people rather than representing an improvement.

Transportation in most Nahua communities depends on walking or riding horseback. With improved roads more people are traveling by truck, bus, car, bicycle, or even railroad. Increasingly, younger Nahua are traveling to urban areas in Mexico to find employment. Often they end up living in poor conditions in slums bordering the cities. Many also take the long and dangerous journey to the United States to seek work in agriculture and factories. They often live in crowded conditions to save money. In these circumstances, most people are in the process of losing their identities as Nahua and they become marginalized, impoverished mestizos.

Economy

Subsistence and Commercial Activities. Most Nahua practice a mixed form of agriculture with a heavy emphasis on maize growing along with other crops that reflect environmental factors and availability of land. Depending on the terrain and resources, individual farmers may rely on the ancient technique of slash-and-burn horticulture using human labor and a machete to prepare the field and a dibble stick for planting. Others may use a horse- or mule-drawn plow to turn the soil, or, increasingly, a tractor to prepare the field and assist in planting and harvesting. Besides maize, the Nahua grow beans, chile peppers, squashes, camotes, onions, tomatoes, citrus fruits, papayas, bananas, chayotes, avocados, mangos, tobacco, maguey, nopal cactus, and condiments such as cilantro or mint. The people depend on hunting, fishing, and gathering to supply them with food and construction materials. Nahua may take advantage of government programs or market opportunities to plant coffee, orange groves, or sugarcane as a cash crop. In addition to patio animals, more prosperous Nahua many own a few head of cattle. Labor needs are met by *mano vuelta* (labor exchange) or by paying helpers. Virtually every family supplements their farming activities with secondary occupations (see below). Increasingly, younger family members move either temporarily or permanently to Mexico City, regional urban centers, or the United States to earn money and send it back to their relatives.

Industrial Arts. In the more tropical rural areas, one of the few industrial activities is the manufacture of sugarloaf. Individual families use a wooden or metal, *trapiche* (cane press) to squeeze cut stalks and extract the juice. This liquid is boiled until a thick syrup is rendered, then poured into molds and cooled. The loaf is wrapped in dried cane leaves and sold in the market. Families may also purchase an electric mill for grinding corn. They charge a small fee to neighbors who wish to avoid the hard labor of grinding corn on a mano and metate (broad volcanic stone with smaller cylindrical rubbing stone). In Nahua towns, individuals may own repair shops, bakeries, or other quasi-industrial enterprises. Some Nahua in the state of Guerrero several decades ago began to sell pottery and paintings based on pottery design in the tourist markets of Cuernavaca. The market for these colorful creations exploded when artists began to paint on amate bark paper that they secured from Otomi traders from the Sierra Norte de Puebla. Demand grew even further for these original works when artists began to paint scenes depicting life in their villages and towns. Entire Nahua communities produce the amate paintings that now appeal to a worldwide clientele. The Nahua transition from small-scale rural agriculturalists to major players in the international tourist market is one of the most remarkable economic transformations in the world (Eshelman 1988).

Trade. Major trading takes place in weekly markets organized throughout Mexico. Many Nahua attend one or more markets, sometimes at considerable distances from their community. Larger Nahua communities hold weekly markets in town and may have speciality shops for meat or produce that operate all week.

Division of Labor. The major division of labor is by sex and age. Women prepare food, make and repair clothing, attend to domestic chores, maintain patio animals, help with the harvest, and are primary care givers for children. They may engage in a number of secondary occupations to help increase family income. These activities include bread baking, embroidery, sewing, selling firewood, pottery making, bonesetting, curing illness, midwifery, operating a stall in the market, or selling cooked items. Men clear and plant fields, care for larger animals, build and maintain houses, hunt, fish, weave fishing nets, make sugarloaf, and carry produce or sugarloaf to the market to sell. They may also engage in carpentry, construction work, truck driving, running a small store or market stall, clearing the forest for mestizo ranchers, picking coffee beans, temporary wage labor in neighboring towns and major cities, playing music, curing illness, raising bees, butchering animals for meat, or becoming a schoolteacher. Children care for siblings, help in the fields and around the house, run errands, go to the market, and generally make themselves useful. Older members of the family contribute their labor and expertise to the household for as long as they are physically able.

Land Tenure. The land-tenure situation throughout Mexico is exceedingly complex. Dispossession of indigenous lands during the colonial period and after independence from Spain was partially reversed following the Mexican Revolution in the 1920s. The plan was to redistribute land to dispossessed indigenous peoples in the form of *ejidos* (system of landholding based on pre-Hispanic practices). Ejido land was granted to household heads who agreed to farm it. Individual fields were allocated to each household head who could pass them on to heirs. If there were no heirs or if the household head failed to farm for a specified period of time the land was returned to the ejido for

redistribution. Ejido land could not be sold or alienated from the community. Community decisions were to be made by an assembly of household heads or their representatives. Up until 1992, many Nahua lived on ejidos or had access to ejido land as well as private, rented, or sharecropped property. Following the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Mexican government changed the constitution with the intention of privatizing the ejidos. Land was turned over to individual families but in many cases the political offices and structure of the ejido has remained. Access to farmland is a key element in Nahua identity and material well-being and much blood has been spilled over the years because of land disputes.

Kinship

Kin Groups and Descent. Descent is determined bilaterally. Kinship terminology tends to be a combination of Eskimo and Hawaiian types. The nuclear family is the most important kin group among the Nahua but these units are often linked through male and sometimes female ties to form functioning extended families. The youngest male offspring often cares for the aged parents while his brothers build individual houses nearby. The result is a non-residential patrilocal extended family that exchanges labor in farming and house building and often forms a political faction in village politics. Nonresidential families based on sisters building houses close to each other are also in evidence but they are far fewer in number. There is a clear domestic cycle that oscillates between the extended family and nuclear family. Kinship rules are not rigidly applied and nonrelatives may build nearby as well.

Ritual kinship is vitally important in all Nahua communities and it serves to extend the circle of people that can be counted on in times of need. In-laws frequently become ritual kinsmen and others may enter into the relationship through sponsorship of events such as baptisms and school graduations.

Marriage and Family

Marriage. Marriage customs vary according to degree of acculturation. In more remote communities, such as found in the Huasteca, a couple may elope without permission of the bride's parents, usually following a community-wide ritual or social occasion held for other reasons. Sometimes the bride's father feigns anger upon learning of the elopement but he eventually reconciles to the inevitable union. In some communities marriage is a more formal affair in which an older kinsman of the prospective husband acts as a go-between and pleads the young man's case to the family of the potential wife. Gifts are exchanged, feasts may be held and the two families enter into ritual kinship with one another. Wedding celebrations derived from the Catholic or Protestant traditions are increasingly common in Nahua communities. Postmarital residence is ideally patrilocal but actual practice is in fact more flexible.

Domestic Unit. A majority of domestic units are nuclear families. After marriage a young couple may live in the household of the groom's parents until they are able to build their own place of residence. This practice creates a temporary extended family living in the same household.

Nahua domestic life takes place in and around the house. All family members rise early, usually before dawn, but the woman of the household gets up first to start the fire, grind the maize, and prepare tortillas. Younger children accompany their mother throughout the day and older children attend school. The man often goes to his fields to work but will take a break when his wife brings food for lunch. In the evening, the family relaxes, welcomes visitors, and engages in craft production or other activities.

Inheritance. In theory, property is passed equally to male and female descendants. However, the all-important family lands usually pass to male heirs under the assumption that it is they who will farm them. Daughters acquire access to land through their husbands. In the absence of male heirs, daughters inherit land rights. In cases where arable land is scarce, the eldest son or daughter inherits the bulk of the estate, leaving younger siblings to face the problem of gaining access to additional fields. The house usually reverts to the youngest son who will care for surviving aged parents.

Socialization. Nahua children are provided much attention, love, and support by both their fathers and mothers. Often an older sister cares for younger siblings during the day, freeing parents to pursue their work unhindered. A child is normally surrounded by many relatives who are nearly the same age, and children have the run of the house and surrounding areas. Parents usually value education for their children and support local schools.

Sociopolitical Organization

Social Organization. The following description of the social organization of the Huastecan Nahua applies to many Nahua communities throughout Middle America. Nahua social organization can be conceived as a grouping of cellular structures or as a series of concentric rings surrounding the nuclear- or extended-family household. One step removed from the household is the nonresidential extended family. The next largest subdivision is the toponymic group composed of residents of a named subarea in a community. These subareas are based on residence, may entail shared ritual obligations, and they often include non-kin. The toponymic group sometimes takes on attributes of a house-type society as outlined by Claude Levi-Strauss (Sandstrom 2000). Smaller Nahua communities are often divided into upper and lower halves, which constitute an extension of the social circle beyond named subareas. This division is probably the remnant of an ancient moiety system. Larger communities may be divided into two or more barrios, and these can be important extra-kin groupings as well. The entire village or town constitutes the next encompassing circle. Daughter or fissioned communities, usually established by families in search of land or work, extend social relations outside of the local community. These settlements may serve as a buffer between individual communities and the *municipio* and state levels of government.

Political Organization. Larger towns are invariably led by mestizo elites, with Nahua occupying lesser positions in the hierarchy. A civil-religious hierarchy or *cargo* system often characterizes larger communities. In this system, individuals work their way up a series of unpaid political offices and sponsorships of Catholic saints' celebrations. Economic development and the increased importance of Protestantism in Middle America is apparently undermining the traditional cargo

system and it may soon disappear or transform into something else in Nahua communities. In more traditional villages, an informal council of male elders may be looked to for leadership, particularly in times of crisis. Ejidos and former ejidos continue to be run by elected political officials as mandated by state and federal law.

Most Nahua communities require that each household head or a substitute work one day a week for the welfare of the group. People who miss their obligation must pay the equivalent of one day's wages into the treasury. Even women who inherit land or widows who farm their husband's land must provide labor. The institution is often called the *faena* or *fagina*. Projects are determined by elected officials and may involve clearing trails or roads, working a field to pay school expenses, working for a wealthy rancher to earn money for the treasury, weeding the schoolyard, or making repairs to school buildings. Participation in the faena indicates that a person is a member of the community in good standing.

Social Control. Most social control is effectively handled within the community by means of gossip, accusations of sorcery, and threat of ostracism. More serious offenses often result in the person having to leave the community for indefinite periods. In serious cases, local authorities may bring the offender to officials of the municipio for trial and punishment.

Conflict. Disputes over access to resources, especially land, are a common feature of many Nahua communities. Community members may band together in the face of external threats, but unsettled internal conflicts inevitably surface. Factions usually form along kinship lines and if violence erupts, entire extended families may be forced to leave the community (Taggart 2007, 2008).

Religion and Expressive Culture

Religious Beliefs. Nahua religious beliefs are generally a blend of Native American traditions with Spanish Catholicism. Increasingly, this mixed religion is being replaced by beliefs from different sects of North American Protestantism. However, even in areas where Christian ideology appears to prevail, beliefs tracing to pre-Hispanic practices often remain strong. In some cases, the ancient system survives in folk beliefs and practices. The sun is often syncretized with Jesus Christ and is viewed as a remote deity removed from daily affairs. The moon-related Virgin of Guadalupe, a manifestation of the pre-Hispanic earth and fertility deity Tonantzin, is widely venerated. Among less-acculturated Nahua, the pantheon incorporates a complex array of spirits representing manifestations of a unified sacred universe: earth spirits associated with death and fertility, water spirits that distribute rain and provide fish, and celestial spirits that watch over people and also provide rain. Many Nahua believe that each person has an animal companion spirit whose fate parallels that of the person. Myths told today in Nahua communities can often be linked to 16th-century narrations recorded by Spaniards. A common theme is that excessive emotion or actions can be dangerous and that moderation in behavior is the ideal (Burkhart 1989). Often pre-Hispanic spirits are combined with Christian figures, for example Tlaloc, an ancient rain deity, is sometimes merged with San Juan (Saint John). A complex sacred geography is associated with mountains,

springs, caves, lakes, rivers or arroyos, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific ocean. More acculturated communities may have a cult surrounding the saints. A significant religious development of the 1970s and 1980s was the conversion of increasing numbers of Nahua by North American fundamentalist Protestant missionaries.

Religious Practitioners. In more traditional Nahua communities the primary ritual specialist is a type of shaman-priest who receives power through dreams or miraculous recovery from an illness. Often called a *tlamatiquetl* ("person of knowledge"), this specialist may be either male or female. These specialists are able to make direct contact with spirits and sometimes act in a priestly role organizing community-wide events. Much of their activity surrounds curing and they must undergo an apprenticeship under a master before practicing on their own. Other specialists include midwives, bonesetters, and diviners who fulfill some religious functions. More acculturated communities with a stronger Catholic influence may have catechists and prayer leaders. Few smaller Nahua communities support a full-time priest. With the increasing influence of Protestantism, some Nahua have become lay pastors.

Ceremonies. The Nahua have a rich ceremonial life that is partly synchronized with the Catholic liturgical calendar. Major ceremonies may include a winter solstice ritual devoted to the Virgin of Guadalupe (Tonantzin), planting and harvest ceremonies, and important commemorations of underworld spirits at *Carnaval* in the early spring and on Day of the Dead in the autumn. Noncalendrical observances include curing and disease-prevention rituals, ceremonies to control rain, pilgrimages to sacred places, ceremonial washing of newborn infants, the creation of ritual kinship ties, house blessings, divinations, and funerals.

Arts. Many Nahua do not recognize artistic expression as a separate sphere of activity. Women take pride in creating beautiful colorful embroidered blouses and well-made clothing for their family. However, purchased clothing has become more common in all Nahua communities. Women also make pottery for use in the household. Men may weave baskets, make furniture, construct fishing weirs, make beeswax candles, or engage in woodworking. In less-acculturated communities men fashion headdresses from bamboo strips, mirrors, ribbons, and folded paper for use in dances. Men also play musical instruments including guitar and violin and they are most likely to be storytellers. Among the Huasteca Nahua, shaman-priests cut paper images of spirits and decorative sheets to adorn elaborate and beautiful altars. In Guerrero, many Nahua are involved in amate painting for the tourist industry, which in the eyes of experts has reached the level of fine art in some cases.

Medicine. Most Nahua have access to modern medicine and medical doctors through hospitals in the cities or small clinics in rural areas established by the Mexican government. Alongside modern biomedical specialists, many Nahua rely on herbalists to treat symptoms of disease, bonesetting specialists who practice massage, and midwives in attendance at births. These more pragmatic measures may be supplemented by elaborate symbolic-healing procedures orchestrated by shaman-priests. In many cases, patients sponsor a divination to determine the cause of a malady. The use of cut-paper figures to represent disease-causing wind spirits is characteristic of curing rituals held by Nahua of the southern Huasteca region. People often seek these types of home remedy before

consulting with a Western-trained medical specialist.

Death and Afterlife. Beliefs in the afterlife are undergoing transition under influences from the Hispanically dominated culture and late 20th-century Protestant proselytizing. In less- acculturated communities the fate of the soul is linked to the circumstances of death rather than being conceived as a reward or punishment for behavior. In these communities, children who die before acquiring speech become *angelitos* ("little angels") who may be reborn. Those who die an unpleasant or premature death may wander among the living spreading disease and death. People who die from water-related causes may go to a kind of paradise and reside with the water spirit. In communities that are more acculturated, people increasingly embrace Christian ideas about death and the afterlife.

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View of hills surrounding Postectli mountain in *municipio* of Chicontepec, Veracruz, Mexico.