

POSTCONQUEST NAHUA SOCIETY AND CONCEPTS VIEWED THROUGH NAHUATL WRITINGS

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The Nahuas of central Mexico (often misleadingly called Aztecs after the quite ephemeral imperial confederation that existed among them in late prehispanic times) were the most populous of Mesoamerica's cultural-linguistic groups at the time of the Spanish conquest, and they remained at the center of developments for centuries thereafter, since the bulk of the Hispanic population settled among them and they bore the brunt of cultural contact. For these reasons, more was written about them in the colonial period than about any other group, and they have been equally favored by modern scholars. Yet until the last few years hardly anyone took advantage of the mass of documents the Nahuas produced in their own language, Nahuatl, in the time from about 1550 to about 1800, using the European alphabetical script which took hold among them almost immediately. It was as though Roman history were being done without Latin. Let us look at one of the documents the Nahuas have left us:¹

On an unspecified day in the year of 1584, more than two generations after the conquest, an indigenous clerk or legal representative appeared before one of the two Indian municipal councils in the important town of Tulancingo, located on the northeastern edge of central Mexico, and presented a written petition on behalf of one Simón de Santiago, an Indian commoner. Beautifully penned and perfectly spelled, the petition was set down by the clerk, not by the doubtless illiterate Simón, a person so humble that he took his surname from his district of Santiago and probably went through life with no other appellation, on ordinary occasions, than Simón. But the writer maintained the convention of a first-person presentation by Simón,

¹ Preserved in the special collections department of the library of the University of Texas, San Antonio. The Nahuatl document, reversed, is used as a cover for a piece of Spanish litigation dated 1584 and may in fact date from a few years earlier.

and he seems to have followed Simón's actual spoken words very closely.

After briefly calling out "my lords, my rulers" in the preconquest style of public oratory, Simón got right down to business. His complaint concerned a certain Cristóbal, a commoner of the same district, as humble as himself if not more so, who was presently lodged in the municipal jail. In the night of Tuesday preceding, Cristóbal had entered Simón's property by stealth, meaning to steal a turkey. But when he got among them, the turkeys gave the alarm, causing Simón's wife to awake and run to the turkey pen to investigate. By then Cristóbal had wrung a turkey's neck and was on his way out with it, but Simón's wife got a good look at him as he sped past the grainbin, where upon she woke her husband, shouting to him what had happened. Simón forthwith ran to Cristóbal's house, finding him and his wife warming themselves by the fire, and demanded his turkey back. Cristóbal denied all and threatened to kill Simón; taking an iron-tipped digging stick, he knocked him down with a blow to the head, and Simón, while lying there in a pool of blood from the cut, heard Cristóbal tell his wife to fetch him the knife lying on the chest in order to spill Simón's guts. Simón managed to push Cristóbal's hand aside, and in their struggle Cristóbal's clothes, which were old and worn out, began to rip off: first his cloak, then his shirt, and finally his loincloth, leaving him naked. Even so, Cristóbal, imagining himself the victor, ran off to Simón's house, told his wife to come recover his body, and proceeded to beat her up. She was the one left in the worst shape; by now Simón had spent 2 pesos on her treatment, had borrowed more from merchants, and owed yet more to a Spaniard. He therefore petitioned that Simón's wife be required to help take care of his own wife during convalescence and that Simón cover all costs.

Here is postconquest indigenous life seen through a new prism and in new dimensions. More than twenty years ago Charles Gibson, using Spanish documents, brought about a great advance in our understanding of indigenous corporate development, showing that numerous local indigenous states or kingdoms—some petty, some not so petty—survived the conquest intact, becoming the basis of *encomiendas*, parishes, and Hispanic-style municipalities organized under Spanish auspices, and out of these most of the larger structures of the Mexican rural scene gradually evolved.² What went on inside this

² Gibson 1964. Nahuatl-based scholarship is adding to the insights of this

corporate framework continued to be a relative mystery. One had to rely on generalizing, partisan statements of Spaniards who in any case knew and cared very little about Indian-to-Indian relationships. Prominent in this corpus were the *Relaciones geográficas*, surveys of localities compiled by provincial Spanish administrators, who when it came to Indian customs were likely to say simply that they were "bad," in line with the Indians' notorious idleness and inconstancy, and that they dressed "poorly."

It was a revelation, then, to discover the existence of documents in which ordinary Indians spoke to each other about everyday things in their own language. We are delivered from hearsay, we see actual individual cases and the original categories of thought. The immediate message, as in the story of the stolen turkey, is often a double and apparently contradictory one. On the one hand, the Indian world appears to be maintaining its balance, concerned at least as much with internal affairs as with Spanish-Indian relations, while many preconquest patterns retain their vitality. On the other hand, evidence of contact with Spaniards and Spanish culture is everywhere, even in surroundings as humble as those of Simón and Cristóbal.

Simón begins his address, as we have seen, with a string of vocatives taken directly from preconquest practice; his complaint to the municipal judges and the remedy he seeks from them put us in mind of descriptions of preconquest adjudication in the *Florentine Codex* of Sahagún.³ All the personnel directly involved—accused, accuser, and judges—are indigenous. Simón's establishment, with its grainbin and fowl, appears unchanged in the basics from a modest household of prehispanic times. Cristóbal (presumably Simón as well) wears the man's traditional cloak and loincloth.

But Cristóbal also has a shirt, called a *camixatli* (from Spanish *camisa*), the fitted and buttoned garment type brought by the Spaniards. Looking further, we see much more evidence of Spanish material culture incorporated into the life of this indigenous commoner, so near the bottom of the scale that he is reduced to stealing turkeys. He hits Simón over the head with an indigenous digging stick, but this traditional instrument is tipped with the new material iron and does corresponding damage. He tries to stab Simón with a knife, not of the traditional obsidian-bladed type, but one of steel, a *cochillo* (from Spanish *cuchillo*). And the knife happens to be lying on a chest,

monument and changing many perspectives on it, but its core analysis remains valid.

³ For example, compare Sahagún 1950-82, 8: 42.

not a traditional container made of mats or reeds, but a Spanish-style *caxa* (*caja*) of wood, lockable, with iron hinges and latch. To this extent has the life of even the poorest members of indigenous society been affected by the late sixteenth century. Simón is paying money to have his wife treated; he mentions not only the Spanish denomination *peso* but the generic term *tomines* (originally referring to a specific coin, but extended by the Nahuas to signify cash or money). Indigenous merchants (*pochteca*) are still active in Tulancingo, but among other things they are lending out Spanish money. A Spaniard (*español* in the Nahuatl text) is also somehow involved in the treatment of Simón's wife; probably he is an apothecary who has provided Spanish medicines on credit. The "Spanish things" are treated no differently from the indigenous things; all seem to be unselfconsciously accepted for what they are and incorporated into life as lived. Once chests, knives, shirts, and money had been built into indigenous culture, there was no longer any awareness of them as something foreign. Indeed, elements of Spanish origin were soon capable of becoming a badge of local pride and self-identity. The ostensibly Spanish-style council (*cabildo*) of each Indian municipality was its primary vehicle of corporate representation, and the ostensibly Spanish patron saint its primary symbol of corporate identity.

Both council and saint, however, were identified in the indigenous mind with preconquest antecedents. Not many years from the time of the Tulancingo turkey theft, in the small settlement of San Miguel Tocuillan in the Valley of Mexico, a woman named Ana petitioned the local council, of which her brother was a member, for a piece of land where she and her husband could build a house. The notary chose to tell the whole story in dialogue form rather than restrict himself to Spanish legalities, thus showing us for once what really went on on such occasions.⁴ No sooner had Ana told her brother Juan Miguel (whose second name was taken from the town saint) of her intention than he went out to collect the other members of the council while Ana prepared tortillas and pulque (the alcoholic drink from maguey juice). On their return, eating, drinking, and polite conversation were the first order of business, followed by Ana's request, couched in words of elaborate humility, and a quick acceptance of the petition by the guests. Thereupon she took them to the site she had chosen; they measured it out, declared it hers, and politely declined her pro forma invitation to come back and have a bit more pulque.

⁴ Transcription and Spanish translation of this document are published in Lockhart 1980, together with substantial commentary.

Ana promised "I will burn candles and always provide incense for my precious father the saint San Miguel, because it is on his land that I am building my house." The town fathers expressed their approval, each giving a little speech, after which all embraced and the function was adjourned. Thus the annually elected town officials with Spanish titles were really in operation, and the Spanish patron saint received real allegiance, but they had become so closely identified with the indigenous tradition that as in pre-conquest times a feast for the officials and parties involved was an indispensable part of the legitimation of land transfers, and the entity's land was thought of as ultimately belonging to a supernatural being symbolizing the corporation, now a patron saint rather than an ethnic deity as before the conquest.

Most Nahuatl writing had the purpose of communication among indigenous people, and that is its strength. But at times texts produced for Spaniards can be instructive too. Around 1570 or 1580 in one of the old imperial capitals, Tetzcoco, a Nahuatl who must have been serving as an aide to the Franciscan friars there composed for them a set of language lessons in the form of speeches and dialogues on all sorts of everyday occasions: greetings, small talk, addresses apropos of marriage, birth, and death. Though the transactions are ordinary, the discourse is in the grand manner, for the speakers come from the circle of the town council, and some are descendants of pre-conquest kings. Within the framework of Spanish-style municipal government and enthusiastic Christianity, an exquisite protocol for daily interaction continued, closely defining the nature of a given occasion and the relative position of each actor in it. In a dialogue, the arriving party always spoke first, remaining standing, and outdoing himself in apologies for intrusion of his worthless self into such an august presence, whereas the stationary party, adopting the attitude of a superior, remained seated, responding with the formula "you have wearied yourself," i.e., "welcome." Inferiors never called superiors or elders by name and rarely even referred openly to any relationship that might exist between them, whereas superiors could do both (though sparingly). A system of inversion of kinship terms had rulers calling their aides "uncles," while to subjects the ruler could be "our grandchild." Children were not exempted from the formalities. Consider how two boys of the nobility greet their mother in the morning:⁵

⁵ Karttunen and Lockhart forthcoming, p. 141-43. The publication includes a complete transcription and two English translations of the entire set of speeches, together with a comprehensive preliminary study.

The elder: Oh our mistress, oh lady, I kiss your hands and feet. I bow down to your dignity. How did our Lord cause you to feel on rising? Do you enjoy a bit of His health?

The younger: Oh my noble person, oh personage, oh lady, we do not wish to distract you; we bow down to you, we salute your ladyship and rulership. How did you enjoy your sleep, and now how are you enjoying the day? Are you enjoying a bit of the good health of the All-pervasive, the Giver of Life?

Not only certain fundamental patterns of the indigenous world, then, persisted into Spanish times. A rich and flowery language of polite social intercourse also long survived, bearing within it a multitude of subtle concepts which were thus given time to enter in one way or another into the evolving ideational systems of the postconquest period.

A great many of the most spectacularly informative Nahuatl documents stem, like the three just drawn upon, from the second half of the sixteenth century, when the new techniques of writing had been mastered but were so fresh that one seems to detect a positive joy in using the medium, and furthermore many preconquest survivals were then still starkly evident. Documents from later times also sometimes open up to the reader, however, particularly those of the genre often called "titles", though they could be more accurately described as attempts to make up for the lack of proper title. In the first half of the colonial period, because of a massive and long continuing decrease in indigenous population, combined with slow growth in the numbers of Spaniards from a small base, there was relatively little pressure on the land and correspondingly little concern with authenticating title to it. By the second half of the seventeenth century things had changed. The Hispanic sector had expanded, land had risen in value and was becoming scarce, and Indian towns were being pressed to document their land rights in the Spanish fashion. Often they could not; instead a town would resort to writing down its oral tradition of how it came by its rights, going far beyond a recital of boundaries and Spanish official acts to tell as much of the entity's history as legend had preserved. The self-view that emerges from these documents emphasizes the autonomy of the local entity in both pre- and postconquest periods and its solidarity against all outsiders, be they indigenous or Spanish. More distant outsiders, however, such as the Spanish king, viceroy, and archbishop, are seen as potentially benevolent allies against external threats coming from the immediately surrounding Indian towns and Spanish estates.

As in the first postconquest century, Hispanic cultural elements

are intermingled in the "titles" with those of indigenous origin, but now the process has gone even further. Christianity is sometimes projected upon figures from the remote preconquest past, stone images of that time may be referred to as saints, and the postconquest organization of Hispanic-style municipalities may be taken for the original foundation of the entity centuries earlier. Such identifications are no doubt related to the indigenous cyclical view of events in general, but simple merging and loss of historical awareness are also involved. Nahuatl writers of the first colonial century, though they saw postconquest entities as retaining an identity and history carried over from before the arrival of the Spaniards, nevertheless were able to distinguish clearly between the two periods, and many of them still possessed a large amount of objectively correct historical information about their own groups before the conquest. The writers of the later titles, despite preserving much lore of preconquest origin, were often unaware which elements belonged to which tradition (presenting Spanish officials, for example, with a tale of an ethnic leader being converted into a feathered serpent by way of supporting their claims). Indeed, some writers seem not to have been able to imagine two sharply differentiated succeeding periods at all; some of those who were able to do so and attempted partial portrayals of the preconquest world proved to have woefully little information, resorting instead at times to Spanish-influenced reinvention, with results bearing little resemblance to the original phenomena.⁶

Much the same trends are seen in another form of Nahuatl ethnic-historical writing, the annals genre, in which discrete bits of information are organized by the year of their occurrence, marching chronologically forward so mechanically that if no noteworthy event is known for a given year, the year designation is often included anyway, with next to it a blank space or an apologetic note. In preconquest times such annals consisted of a glyphic-pictorial document plus a memorized oral recital; postconquest annals quickly went over to an alphabetical text as the primary vehicle, though the pictorial element long remained strong and never disappeared entirely. The prehispanic annals covered events such as the foundation of the local state, the succession of its kings, its wars, its internal strife, and also natural phenomena, including earthquakes, plagues, and the appearance of comets. Sixteenth-century annals often devoted a large amount of space to preconquest

⁶ I have discussed the genre at some length, using examples from the Chalco region, in Lockhart 1982. See also Wood 1984, Ch. 8, for related material concerning the Toluca Valley.

material, adapted to the new medium but otherwise unchanged, before continuing in the same vein for the postconquest years, though now reporting changes in the governorship and town council of the local entity rather than successors to the dynastic rulership.⁷ Annals continued to be written in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, still primarily concerned with the affairs of a single town, still retaining the same type of organization and subject matter. But in the late annals the preconquest era hardly figures, and even events of the sixteenth century are reported skeletally, often unreliably. The full specification of years by the indigenous calendrical scheme is sometimes simplified. The appointments of new viceroys and archbishops, often reported from the beginning, are now such standard annals fare that they rival the changes in local indigenous government.⁸

To convey in a small space a notion of how communicative Nahuatl documents can be, as well as something of their thrust, I have been concentrating on some of the more colorful, juicy types and examples. The bulk of Nahuatl documentation preserved today was produced by municipal notaries as a function of routine activities of indigenous local government. It includes sales and grants of land, litigation, town council minutes, and above all thousands of testaments.⁹ Most of the material sticks much closer to Spanish legal formulas and procedures than the writings we have been sampling. Testaments, the staple item, normally follow the Spanish model closely, proceeding from an abbreviated credo to dispositions concerning the burial and masses, then apportioning houses and land to relatives and liquidating debts. But even here there are reminiscences of the Nahua declamatory style, with a great many admonitions and spontaneous outbursts one would not expect in a Spanish will. Aside from massive evidence on the nature of Spanish influence and the elucidation of a multitude of general indigenous concepts, the special contribution of Nahuatl testaments is to teach us about the Nahua household. When first seen in sixteenth-century documents, the household unit is of variable size, moving toward a complex containing two or more related nuclear families, then periodically splitting into constituent parts and repeating the process. The household's lands were scattered and divided into relatively small

⁷ The best example of annals of the earlier type is Chimalpahin 1963-65. Aspects of the work are studied in Schroeder 1984.

⁸ Frances M. Krug is presently nearing completion of a doctoral dissertation on the late colonial annals of the region of Tlaxcala and Puebla.

⁹ Mayor published collections include Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhart 1976 (with some translations now outdated in certain respects); Karttunen and Lockhart 1976; Cline and León-Portilla 1984; and Lockhart, Berdan, and Anderson 1986.

plots even when the aggregate amount was large, and the different adult household members were responsible for their respective portions. Inside the home complex were separate buildings arranged around a patio, each holding and in a sense belonging to an adult family member or nuclear family. And for all the changes and additions that over the centuries the introduction of Spanish techniques, varieties, and artifacts brought about, the essential structure of a complex of clustered separate dwellings and scattered landholdings remained the same in the indigenous sector across the whole colonial period, and labor-intensive cultivation of indigenous crops remained the core of indigenous agriculture. In the earliest sources there is great variation in the amount of land held by different individuals and family groups, not only, as expected, between the nobles and the commoners, but among the commoners themselves, indicating a great deal of flexibility and low-level autonomy in the land regime, and this attribute too is maintained over the centuries, even while the indigenous sector as a whole lost land to the expanding Hispanic sector.¹⁰

Some important insights coming out of Nahuatl documentation are not to be gleaned from any one genre but pervade the whole corpus. We become privy to unfamiliar concepts and procedures and aware of the absence of familiar ones. Among the most striking absences is that of the category "Indian". Nahuatl contained no word covering this semantic range, and later, when it began to borrow Spanish words, including much ethnic terminology, Spanish *indio* did not become a standard part of the language. Indeed, no large-group category for indigenous people had much currency. The term "Nahua" in the sense I am using it here was understood but rare.

Self-definition and differentiation between indigenous groups was primarily in terms of the *altepetl*, the type of local kingdom mentioned above as having survived the conquest all over central Mexico; this the Spaniards usually called a *pueblo*. The entity was partially defined by its tradition of ethnic distinctness, partially by its possession of a certain territory, and partially by its dynastic ruler, the *tlatoani*, whom the Spaniards immediately and correctly recognized as such, terming him the *cacique*. As to the internal structure of the *altepetl*/*pueblo*, the Spaniards, in line with their own traditions, perceived it to consist of a *cabecera* or capital ruling a set of *sujetos* or subject hamlets. And in fact, one could often find the semblance of a central settlement in

¹⁰ Here as in much of what follows I am anticipating the conclusions of a large and heavily documented book I am now writing on the social and cultural history of central Mexican Indians across the colonial period on the basis of Nahuatl sources. See also Cline 1986.

an altepetl. The residence of the tlatoani, the site of the kingdom's main temple, and its central marketplace often coincided, leading to a settlement cluster in that vicinity. The cluster, however, had no separate name and no juridical identity or organizational unity. Different segments of it belonged to different constituent parts of the entity. These named parts, called *calpolli* or *tlaxilacalli*, comprised a theoretically symmetrical whole (often but not always in groups of 2, 4, and 8); each part was separate, equal in principle, and self-contained, with its own territory, subethnic identity, and subrulership. The parts were arranged in a fixed order of rotation according to which all mechanisms of the altepetl operated. This order of the parts, indeed, defined the whole at a level even more basic than the rulership. Where the Spanish view included three types of entities —pueblo, cabecera, and sujeta—, Nahuatl documents recognize only two: the altepetl, being the whole, and the calpolli or parts. The Spanish view emphasizes urban nucleation and a stepped hierarchy; the Nahuatl view emphasizes a symmetrical arrangement and rotational order. Through indigenous-language sources it becomes clear that the Spaniards operated under a partial delusion, and modern scholars have followed them in it. Over the course of the colonial period the altepetl underwent many modifications, but, half undetected by Spanish authorities, it retained its basic principles of organization.

The office of tlatoani was gradually transformed into the Spanish-influenced governorship, in principle a removable, elective position, as was already well understood from Spanish documents alone. Subsequently much of the machinery of Spanish municipal government was introduced into the altepetl. A Spanish city council had two *alcaldes* or first-instance judges and a larger number of *regidores* or councilmen. Nahuatl documents show us how these offices were fitted to the indigenous mold. In the Spanish tradition, each official in a sense represented his extended family and clientele, a kin-based faction, but functioned at large. Among the Nahuas, office continued to be tied closely to the constituent parts of the (now municipal) entity. Thus an alcalde above all represented his calpolli; soon either the alcaldes were being rotated systematically among the calpolli following the fixed order or—in the long run the dominant trend—the number of alcaldes increased until there was one for each major constituent part. Regidores followed the same pattern, to the point that there was no general distinction between the two offices than that of rank, alcalde being higher, whereas in the Spanish system the often longer-lasting office of regidor had greater prestige. Indeed, whereas a Spanish town

council (*cabildo*) was a well-defined corporate entity, clearly set off from the commonwealth in general, an indigenous town council, though equally meaningful, was in a sense an ad hoc group of representatives of the constituent parts, and as such it merged imperceptibly into the generality of prominent citizens and former office holders.

The altepetl scheme is but the best and most central example of a type of cellular or modular organization that appears in several forms in indigenous life. The Nahuatl songs preserved from the second half of the sixteenth century consist of self-contained verses, often eight of them, arranged in pairs. The pairs relate similarly to a central theme but never refer directly to each other, and therefore in variant versions the pairs are often found differently arranged, although the overall numerical scheme remains the same, and the integrity of each pair is maintained. A similar organization of decorative motifs has been noted in preconquest indigenous art and again in survivals associated with postconquest religious architecture.¹¹ Although not involving such marked symmetry, the annals genre, reporting events in discrete segments under individual years, operates on the same principle. So do the home complex, divided into separate subhouseholds in separate buildings, and the land regime, dividing holdings into many independent subunits.¹²

After absorbing the fresh humanity and color of Nahuatl documents in a direct, philological fashion, exploring the topical content of various documentary genres, and tracing certain central concepts through the entire corpus, the natural next step in building a history based on indigenous-language sources is a linguistic approach, trying to win meaningful patterns about society and culture from the language of the texts itself. Like other languages of the world, Nahuatl has been neither static over time nor uniform over space. The Nahuatl-speaking world functioned as a cultural unit in many ways, with similar trends in all its parts, and new elements often affected the whole within a very short period of time. Yet each altepetl had its own specific way of speaking and writing. Paying close attention to such differentiation, we can tell something of which areas retained the most elaborate development of preconquest culture and which were losing the refinements; which were at the forefront of new trends and which lagged behind. For example, it becomes apparent that many of the larger

¹¹ Karttunen and Lockhart 1980 contains a thorough study of the structure of Nahuatl song; the modular principle in art is mentioned in McAndrew 1964, p. 199.

¹² The topics of the preceding three paragraphs are discussed also in Lockhart 1985 and Lockhart forthcoming. See also Lockhart, Berdan, and Anderson 1986.

altepetl, which felt the full force of Spanish intrusion into the countryside and consequently underwent the greatest change, nevertheless at the same time had and retained the greatest corporate strength and far into the colonial period kept more of the social and other distinctions embodied in preconquest Nahuatl polite discourse than did smaller and less centrally located entities. Amecameca in the southeastern part of the Valley of Mexico is a good example of such a center.¹³

It is hard, however, to achieve more than impressionistic results through cultural-linguistic research unless the potentially vast and amorphous field of investigation is somehow restricted. A naturally restricted field is available in the form of the Spanish loan words that leap to the eye in Nahuatl texts, and the choice of this topic is further justified by the fact that it is at the very core of the question of cultural change and continuity. Frances Karttunen and I thus set out some time ago to discover the patterns in Spanish-Nahuatl language-contact phenomena (on the Nahuatl side, that is), primarily by collecting all the loan words in all Nahuatl texts then known to us, with attention to the date of each example, and subjecting the resulting lists to several kinds of simple linguistic analysis. A dynamic picture emerged, characterized by three successive well-defined stages.¹⁴ Since the process went on over generations and centuries, doubtless beneath the level of awareness, we have no contemporary comments on what motivated it, but considering the general movement of early Mexican history and what is known about two-language situations in other parts of the world in modern times, it is clear enough that the stages correspond to increasing amounts of everyday contact between Nahuatl-speaking and Spanish-speaking populations.

Stage 1, extending from the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519 until about 1540-50, involved minimal contact between Spaniards and Indians; hence hardly any change in the Nahuatl language took place at all. Since during most of this time the Nahuas were not yet producing alphabetical texts in any number, Stage 1 remains shadowy and little documented, but it is embodied in a few texts written probably in the time period 1535-45, and we can reconstruct aspects of it from relics left in dictionaries and texts of the succeeding period. Rather than borrow Spanish words for the new things which they were after all seeing more than hearing about, the Nahuas described them with

¹³ See Karttunen and Lockhart 1978, and also Lockhart forthcoming.

¹⁴ The following description of the stages summarizes, interprets, and sometimes expands on material in Karttunen and Lockhart 1976. A full-scale yet succinct treatment of the process is Karttunen 1982.

the tools of their own language, using various kinds of extensions, circumlocutions, and neologisms. The new material wool, for example, as a usually whitish fiber for textile use, was called *ichcatl*, "cotton," and the word was then extended further to the animal that bore it, coming to mean "sheep." *Tepoztli*, "copper," as a designation for a workable metal, soon took on the additional meaning "iron". The Christian sacraments were called *teoyotl*, "holy things," and *quaatequia*, "to pour water on the head," became the term for speaking of baptism.

The only loans taking place in Stage 1 appear to have involved names. Many of the Nahuas began to receive Spanish baptismal names, and Hernando Cortés' title-name of Marqués (often *Malquex* in Nahuatl texts) became widely familiar, as did the name of his indigenous interpreter, doña Marina (*Malintzin*). Full of implications was the place name *Castilla*, "Castile," taken into Nahuatl in the naturalized form *Caxtillan*. Using it as a modifier, the Nahuas could now express simultaneously their perception that introduced items shared defining characteristics with items already known and their awareness of the Spanish items' newness; thus wheat was *Caxtillan centli*, "Castile maize." *Caxtillan* also gave rise in some fashion to *caxtil*, one of the words the Nahuas were to use for the European chicken. It is tempting, if perhaps too whimsical, to think that since the Nahuas took the final *-lan* to be their own suffix "place characterized by", and since they saw the Castilians always accompanied by chickens, they deduced that "Castilla" meant "place with chickens," then proceeded to retrieve and use the presumed root in that meaning.

In Stage 2, beginning 1540-50 and extending over about a hundred year to approximately 1640-50, the Nahuas borrowed Spanish words readily and copiously. In this time period Spanish cities grew in size, economic and institutional networks brought Spaniards into steady contact with Indians, and a long slow process of formation of Hispanic residential nuclei in the countryside got underway. The words now pouring into Nahuatl belonged to several semantic domains, representing different aspects of a massive cultural impact. All the loans were alike in naming an element introduced by the Spaniards that in one way or another had become a part of indigenous life. Words for new plant and animal varieties head the list. Spanish *trigo* now replaced *Caxtillan centli* for "wheat" and *caballo* the earlier extension *maçatl* ("deer") for "horse"; *vaca*, "cow", pushed *quaquahue* ("one with horns") into the specialized meaning "ox." Some of the Stage 1 forms lived on. *Ichcatl*, mentioned above, remains the usual Nahuatl word for "sheep" to this day. New tools (often metal), materials, and artifact types

form a second important category. Our turkey theft story, written in the first half of Stage 2, offers good examples in Cristóbal's knife (*cochillo*), chest (*caxa*), and shirt (*camixatli*). A third category consists of new role definitions: the names of the ubiquitous local officers, *gobernador*, *alcalde*, *regidor*, and others; of Spanish officers, from *virrey*, "viceroyn," and *obispo*, "bishop," on down; group designations, such as *cristiano*, "Christian," and *español*, "Spaniard" (which also appears in the turkey story). More abstract loans were by no means lacking. They included specific Spanish-style concepts and procedures, whether economic (such as *prenda*, "pledge, pawn, security"), legal (such as *pleito*, "lawsuit litigation"), or religious (*misa*, "mass"). Especially pervasive in the indigenous world and important in enabling Nahuas to act in a Spanish context were the loans involving words for the measurement of time, extension, weight, and value. The turkey story again offers examples: *martes*, "Tuesday," and the denomination *peso*.

The Spanish words that during Stage 2 became an integral part of Nahuatl vocabulary by the hundreds (probably thousands, if the record were more complete) represent a vast cultural input and a considerable addition to the lexicon. Lest anyone should imagine that the loans are an artificial, minority phenomenon restricted to the written expression of a few well-educated notaries, consider whether we have any earthly reason to doubt that humble Cristóbal really did have a knife, chest, and shirt, and that he called them by the Spanish loans used in Simón's account. What else, indeed, *could* he have called them? Consider too that although colonial Nahuatl writing was highly developed in its way, it did not constitute an independent canon. What we call "words" lacked any universal spelling; rather the individual letters followed the writer's actual pronunciation, whatever form that happened to take. The purpose of writing was simply to reproduce speech. Consider further that every altepetl of the hundreds across central Mexico, including very small and humble entities where it would be an exaggeration to separate an educated upper group from the rest (as in Tocuillan in the story of Ana and her house site), had its notary or notaries; yet the same kinds of loans are found in the texts of all of them, in all the types of documents they produced. And this despite the fact that writing was handed down directly from generation to generation within each altepetl, leading to pronounced local idiosyncrasies.

Yet the impact of Spanish on Nahuatl was in another sense severely limited during Stage 2. The grammar of the language hardly changed.

Essentially all the loans were grammatically nouns, leaving everything else unaffected. The loan nouns were treated no differently than Nahuatl nouns, not only acting as subjects and objects but being compounded with native elements including nouns, verbs, subject prefixes, and relational suffixes. It is true that after a brief period in which some loan words received the absolutive suffix (*-tli* and variants) found on most native nouns, as in *camixa-tli*, "shirt," new loans were left without the absolutive, but this was not an innovation in principle, since Nahuatl did already have a class of absolutiveless nouns.

Nor was pronunciation affected at this time. Nahuatl had no voiced obstruents (that is, it had *p*, *t*, and hard *c* but not the corresponding *b*, *d*, and *g*); among the liquids it had *l* but lacked *r*; among the vowels it had only *o* where Spanish had both *o* and *u*; it did not tolerate initial or final consonant clusters. None of these things changed during the bulk of Stage 2. No new sounds were added to the repertoire. Rather each loan was pronounced in a way conforming to the existing Nahuatl phonetic system, with substitution of the closest Nahuatl sound for missing Spanish sounds and insertion of an extra vowel or omission of a consonant to break up impossible consonant clusters. We know this because of the Nahuas' propensity to write as they pronounced, often making exactly the adjustments we would expect. Thus for Spanish *trigo* ("wheat") we can find *tilico*, for *sábado* ("Saturday") *xapato*, for *vacas* ("cows") *huacax*, for *cruz* ("cross") *coloz*, for *cris-tiano* ("christian") *quixtiano*, and so on. And since the Nahuas heard no difference between *p* and *b* or *l* and *r*, they were prone to hypercorrection, writing such things as *breito* for Spanish *preito* ("lawsuit") and even sometimes using *b*, *d*, *g*, and *r* in native vocabulary.

Spanish words in Nahuatl did not always mean exactly the same thing as in the original language. We have already seen how the Nahuas, having borrowed the word *tomín*, "an eighth of a peso," extended it to serve as their primary term for money or cash, a meaning which Spaniards probably would not have understood immediately, especially as they increasingly abandoned *tomín* in favor of *real*. *Cristiano* or *quixtiano* often meant not "believer in Christianity") but "person of European extraction," and *señora* or *xinola* ("lady") usually referred specifically to a Spanish woman. The names of the municipal officers, though they had the same referents in Nahuatl as in Spanish, connoted different functions and characteristics. Spanish words in Nahuatl, naturalized as they were in both external form and inner meaning, were as much a part of the general linguistic and conceptual equipment as vocabulary that had been in the language for centuries.

Stage 3 can be considered to have begun around 1640-50, continuing for the rest of the colonial period and indeed until today, wherever Nahuatl is still spoken. Now Nahuatl opened up to take (though still selectively) whatever Spanish had to offer. The language remained very much itself, but it was now permeated with elements of Spanish origin which affected grammar and pronunciation as well as lexicon. This type of penetration can only mean that a large number of Nahuas were by now bilingual; not nearly a majority, no doubt, but a critical mass. Speaking Spanish in the marketplace or where they worked, they needed easy ways to report the events of the day to the monolingual Nahuatl speakers at home. Thus Nahuatl began to go beyond borrowing primarily to name new things for which no other word was readily available to reproducing common Spanish expressions even when nearly equivalent indigenous expressions existed, sometimes with the result of displacing the latter. By Stage 3, Spaniards were firmly ensconced in every part of the central Mexican countryside. They lived cheek by jowl with Nahuas in what once were purely Indian settlements, owning large amounts of rural land. Here they had created a network of haciendas, ranchos, and other enterprises connected with the urban market, which permanently employed an ever increasing number of Nahuas, in addition to continuing seasonal employment of yet larger numbers. For their part the Nahuas were now more inclined than ever to move back and forth between the countryside and the large Spanish cities, México City and Puebla.

The discovery of Stage 3 and its timing represents an especially large contribution to the periodization of Mexican history. Scholars had already known of the just mentioned characteristics of the seventeenth century, but the trends began in the sixteenth and continued full force in the eighteenth and later. Whereas a series of large reorganizations were taking place around the time of the transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2, so that we are not surprised to find that they coincide with a major social and cultural shift, nothing so dramatic occurs in the seventeenth century; there was little reason to think of any one stretch of time as more crucial than another. Nor are bilingual Indians distinguished in contemporary censuses and population estimates from any other Indians. Once discovered, however, the onset of Stage 3 proves to coincide approximately with a whole set of changes in the indigenous world, as we will see in more detail below.

As to the linguistic content of Stage 3, Nahuatl now developed a convention for borrowing Spanish verbs, adopted some Spanish particles (prepositions and conjunctions), found equivalents for many

Spanish idioms, and added new sounds to its phonetic repertoire in loan vocabulary. Although these things happened more or less simultaneously over a few decades, the change did not come overnight; some signs appeared in the early seventeenth century, then the movement gathered strength as mid-century approached, and by 1650 late colonial Nahuatl was essentially in place as far as its mechanisms are concerned (though individual accretions along the same lines continued and still continue). To borrow verbs, Nahuatl developed the strategy of adding the native verbalizing element *-oa* to the Spanish infinitive; the construction then conjugated like any other Nahuatl verb. Loan verbs were not very numerous—a drop in the bucket compared to nouns—but they became a standard feature, found sprinkled here and there in texts of all kinds. They tended to be technical legal, religious, or economic terms, such as *confirmar^{oa}*, “to confirm (an appointment or administrative action),” or *prender^{oa}*, “to hock,” but perhaps the most widespread of them, *pasear^{oa}*, “to take a stroll, parade about,” referred to a general social practice, and simple everyday vocabulary could also be affected, as in *cruzar^{oa}*, “to cross (a street, etc.).” The first presently attested true loan verb is from the 1630’s and we may yet find isolated examples from earlier yet, but it is not until around 1650 that they become an expectable feature of Nahuatl texts.

Loan particles are as striking a symptom of Stage 3 as are verbs. Nahuatl made little distinction in native vocabulary between conjunctions and adverbs, and it had no construction remotely like a preposition, expressing similar notions instead through suffix-like relational words. Yet it now began to accept from Spanish both conjunctions and prepositions, at first primarily the latter. They were few, even fewer than the verbs, but they were pervasive, especially *para*, “(destined) for, in order to,” and above all *hasta* “until, as far as, even,” which became an indispensable part of the language. Introductions of this type went beyond expanding the lexicon to bring about substantial changes in Nahuatl syntax.

Another important characteristic of Stage 3 is the frequent use of calques, that is, expressions in which native vocabulary is employed to express foreign idiom. This tendency had been developing for a long time, but it reaches full flower only in Stage 3. Though Nahuatl was rich in ways to signify possession, inclusion, and connection, it originally lacked a close equivalent of the ubiquitous Spanish verb *tener*, “to have.” As early as the second half of the sixteenth century the Nahuatl verb *pia*, “to guard, take care of, have charge of, hold,” seems to have been veering in the direction of “to have (possess).”

By the early seventeenth century we can find *pia* used in expressions which would have made no sense in preconquest Nahuatl, deriving their meaning instead from a Spanish idiom involving *tener*. Thus *quipia chicuey xihuitl*, which once would have been a meaningless "he guards eight years," meant "he is eight years old," following the Spanish *tiene ocho años*, literally "he has eight years." By Stage 3, a full-scale equivalency relationship had come into existence, that is, *pia* could automatically be used to replicate in Nahuatl any Spanish idiom involving *tener*. The same was true of some other common verbs, including *pano*, originally "to traverse (a body of water, field, or the like)," which became the equivalent of the much-used Spanish verb *pasar*, "to pass."

One of the most subtle, hard to detect, and hard to date aspects of Stage 3 was a change in the pronunciation of loan vocabulary as the Nahuas learned how to reproduce the sounds of Spanish. This development took place over a good stretch of time, often by intermediary steps; thus Nahuatl speakers first acquired a single new pronunciation for Spanish *d* and *r*, then later learned to distinguish one from the other. Exact pronunciations cannot always be deduced through the inconsistent spellings and ambiguous orthography. Yet it is clear that a large change occurred across the middle of the seventeenth century, and before 1700 Nahuatl speakers in general were able to pronounce new loans as in Spanish (older loans, however, retained their original form).

The stages of the linguistic adaptation of Nahuatl to Spanish have close parallels in almost every facet of indigenous life.¹⁵ Since the whole field of Nahuatl-based historical studies is so new, much remains to be learned, but something can already be said. Perhaps the most striking example of parallelism concerns the mechanisms of procurement of short-term Indian laborers by Spaniards. Given the lavish use of temporary labor characteristic of the colonial period as of the preconquest era before it, bulk labor mechanisms were both a major department of indigenous organization and one of the most important ties between the Indian and Spanish populations.

During Stage 1, Spaniards acquired temporary Indian labor through the *encomienda*, a device which, essentially, gave a single Spaniard for his lifetime the tributes, in kind and in labor, which one *altepetl* would otherwise have rendered to the Spanish government. This system involved as little contact as it did change. An unaltered local indigenous state, through the prerogatives of its ruler and the operation of its

¹⁵ I now return to summarizing aspects of the project mentioned in note 10.

internal rotational order, delivered work parties to a single Spaniard (and, to be sure, often to his employees); the parties usually remained intact, under corporate indigenous supervision, and did things in or close to the indigenous tradition.

At the end of the time period I have assigned to Stage 1, the central Mexican *encomienda* lost its labor power. During Stage 2, temporary labor was procured through a system that the Spaniards called *repartimiento*. The constituent parts of the *altepetl* continued to provide contingents through rotation as before, but the operative indigenous authority was now usually the governor and town council rather than the dynastic ruler *per se*, and above all the assembled contingents were now divided *ad hoc* into more numerous smaller parties which worked for a short periods for whatever Spanish estate owners and entrepreneurs happened to need them. The new framework involved more Spanish-Indian contact; smaller groups worked at tasks more Hispanic in nature under closer Spanish supervision.

By Stage 3, the *repartimiento* had given way to informal arrangements in which individual Indians made agreements to hire on for seasonal labor with individual Spaniards at a negotiated wage (usually simply the going rate for less skilled work). Ordinary Indians now had absorbed enough Hispanic lore to be able to deal with Spaniards one to one, without need of a corporate prop; on the other side of the coin but for the same reasons, the indigenous corporations were less and less able to deliver laborers when so required. The legal abolition of the central Mexican agricultural *repartimiento* came in the 1630's a few years before the time I have set for the beginning of Stage 3, but the coincidence is still quite close, and as I indicated above, advance signs of the developing linguistic shift did show themselves earlier in the seventeenth century.¹⁶

Indigenous government is another area in which the stages can be detected. During Stage 1 the organization of the *altepetl* remained basically untouched, with the *tlatoni* retaining his full traditional powers. At the onset of Stage 2 the governorship and town council took shape. Although no later transformation is of quite the same magnitude, as well defined in content, or as sharply etched as to dating, several traits prominent after about 1650 make it appropriate to speak of a Stage 3 form of town government. In most places the *regidores* (councilmen) either faded from the scene altogether or were relegated to sharply subordinate rank. The governor and *alcaldes*

¹⁶ The legal and institutional side of these developments receives extensive coverage in Gibson 1964, Ch. 9.

were joined on many occasions by the *fiscal* (church steward), and they, together with previous holders of those offices, who ostentatiously bore the title *pasado*, "past (officer)," and often returned to active status after an interval, constituted a consortium which made the most important internal decisions or appeals to the outside and was indispensable in all sorts of ceremonial legitimation. Stage 3 also saw a widespread fragmentation of large altepetl into their constituent parts (or confederations thereof), the new smaller independent units operating on the same principles and with the same type of officials, though often lacking a governor. These independence movements took place through energetic campaigns carried on by the seceding parts; although especially characteristic of the late colonial period, they at the same time represent a realization of one of the tendencies inherent in cellular alteptl structure from preconquest times.¹⁷

cloely intertwined amog te Naua. Te tlatoai or kig wa at tenihssshhnmsh

Altepetl office and the system of social distinctions had always been closely intertwined among the Nahuas. The tlatoani or king was at the apex of the social pyramid; *teteuctin*, "lords," held the same position in each constituent part, and it was from among the *pipiltin*, "nobles," that all office holders were recruited. Unchanged in Stage 1, the terminology of noble rank not only largely continued in use in Stage 2, it became associated with the introduced Hispanic-style offices. Thus the governor was often called "tlatoani" even if he was not the dynastic ruler, and the council in general would be referred to as *teteuctin* and *pipiltin*. By Stage 3, the indigenous terminology of social rank effectively disappeared; only rare, frozen remnants can be found. In its place, a subtle system of differential naming patterns had grown up, making many of the same distinctions in a more flexible fashion.

At the level of the household, the nature and pace of change is hard to detect. Simple continuity seems the dominant note, but kinship terms do provide some interesting evidence of patterned change. As late as Stage 2 the system was altered only by the concept of monogamous Christian marriage and some loan words associated with it, such as *viuda* and *viudo*, "widow" and "widower," and *soltera* and *soltero*, "spinter" and "bachelor". (The Nahuatl word *-namic*, "spouse", may or may not have been a new formation during Stage 1.) In any case, all these terms had close equivalents in preconquest times. In Stage 3, the Nahuas moved nearer to the Spanish system, largely

¹⁷ Compare Haskett forthcoming and Wood 1984, and for Stage 2 Lockhart, Berdan, and Anderson 1986.

abandoning the indigenous categorization of siblings, cousins, and in-laws, which had been the most obvious points of difference in the two systems, and adopting the Spanish categories instead.

In the field of historical writing, we have already seen the distinction between Stage 2 annals, reporting many authentic preconquest events, and those of Stage 3, devoted entirely to the postconquest period. Stage 2 was the time when a mixed Hispanic-indigenous style of expression flourished, executed by individuals still cognizant of preconquest skills and lore, buttressed by a still strong solidarity of the altepetl. Stage 2 has left us the annals of Chimalpahin, the *Florentine Codex*, the collections of Nahuatl song,¹⁸ and other such monuments, and in the realm of art the great monastery complexes, complete with stone carvings and frescoes still close to indigenous traditions.¹⁹ Nothing comparable exists from later times. The syncretizing, synchronizing "titles," on the other hand, are entirely a phenomenon of Stage 3. Only Stage 3 writings make prominent mention of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and this is no chance occurrence. In Stage 2 many local cults arose around the patron saints of individual altepetl (with a preconquest substratum), and Guadalupe was one of these; only in Stage 3 did the devotion to Guadalupe spread beyond the vicinity of Mexico City to become a symbol of the nascent sense of identification of indigenous (and Spanish) people with a general Spanish-Indian Mexican framework over and above the home altepetl and the immediate locality.

The marvelous and many-dimensional new world of Nahuatl sources, then, is showing us that indigenous structures and patterns survived the conquest on a much more massive scale and for a longer period of time than had seemed the case when we had to judge by the reports of Spaniards alone. The indigenous world retained much social and cultural as well as jurisdictional autonomy, maintaining its center of balance, concerned above all with its own affairs. Yet viewed in their totality, Nahuatl writings show us movement and intermingling, not stasis and isolation. Change went on constantly, and it occurred precisely because of contact with Spaniards. Increasing degrees of contact with the numerically growing and territorially expanding Hispanic population caused successive general waves of indigenous structural adjustment. The Spaniards represented, however, more the fuel than the motor of the development. They did not by themselves, either

¹⁸ A superb transcription, an in a way good but unreliable translation, and an unacceptable interpretation of the largest such collection are published in Bierhorst 1985.

¹⁹ See Kubler 1948, McAndrew 1964, and Peterson 1985.

individually or en masse, determine the nature of change; change was a transaction between two groups and two cultures. Indian numbers were as important as Spanish numbers. The long demographic slide of the indigenous population, lasting well into the seventeenth century, meant that the Spanish impact was divided among fewer and fewer recipients, so that a given number of man-hours of contact represented an ever larger proportion of the Nahua world's total experience.

Above all, though, it was the nature of Nahua culture in relation to Spanish culture that determined the shape (as opposed to the tempo) of change. Mere Spanish decisions to implant certain elements, either through forcible imposition or through benevolent teaching, did not suffice to bring about the desired results. Nahua culture had to have structures and values close enough to the new Spanish elements to make them viable in the indigenous context. When this was the case, there was often no need for imposition or teaching. Everyday contact between Spaniards and Indians in the course of routine, often economic activities emerges as the primary vehicle of cultural transfer, with governmental and ecclesiastical influence merely one congruent subset within that framework. Major policy decisions of Spanish authorities, including the establishment of *encomiendas* and ancillary parishes, were made in awareness of the nature of indigenous structures; there was no other choice. When Spanish officials tried to replicate such institutions in areas lacking a close equivalent of the *altepetl*, they failed. And even as time went on into the later periods, Spanish administrative decisions, including the basic ones concerning labor mechanisms, were made in response to the social and cultural constitution of the indigenous population at that point in its evolution, doing little more than ratifying what the two populations had gradually, spontaneously brought about. To give another example, official urging from about 1770 forward that the Nahuas do more of their record keeping in Spanish and allow Spaniards more direct intervention in community affairs had a good deal of effect because as a result of long-standing trends these things were already happening and the Nahuas were ready; similar Spanish concern in the sixteenth century had had no impact. In areas where less contact occurred and the indigenous sector remained in the earlier stages, the institutional forms corresponding to Stage 1 and 2 persisted longer, sometimes by centuries, than in the Nahua sphere, despite occasional metropolitan urging of reform.²⁰ Whereas in the earlier stages

²⁰ Frances Karttunen (1985) has done research showing that phenomena corresponding to Nahuatl's Stage 3 appeared in the Mayan language of Yucatan only in the course of the eighteenth century, well behind the central Mexican

it was largely Nahua-Spanish similarities that allowed adoptions to succeed, later, as rapprochement proceeded, it might be those things that were different which were adopted, as was seen in the case of the kinship system.

Nahuatl writings illustrate for us the common perception that continuity and change are often to a large extent the same thing. As we have observed, the Spanish elements which the Nahuas were able to take over because of a perceived affinity with things already current in indigenous culture immediately veered from the Spanish model, or rather never fully embodied that model from the beginning. A partially unwitting truce existed in which each side of the cultural exchange seemed satisfied that its own interpretation of a given cultural phenomenon was the prevailing, if not exclusive one. Elsewhere I have called this the process of Double Mistaken Identity.²¹ The Nahuas accepted the new in order to remain the same; the Spaniards for their part were generally willing to accept a new title as evidence of a new role definition. Under the cover of this truce or mutual incomprehension, Nahua patterns could survive at the same time that adaptations worked themselves out over generations. Nothing could illustrate the evolution better than Nahuatl alphabetical writing itself. Readily adopted because the Nahuas already had paper, documentary records, and professional record keepers, alphabetical writing in Nahua hands nevertheless at first retained a large pictorial element and a declamatory text corresponding to the preconquest style of recital. The illustrations gradually faded away, and the texts assimilated more to Spanish models, but they never lost their idiosyncrasy entirely, and new specifically indigenous genres, such as the titles, continued to evolve. A large task still facing historical scholarship is to determine how and to what extent patterns like these, of ultimately indigenous origin, entered the general Mexican cultural stream in the nineteenth century, when upper groups in small Mexican towns had gone over to speaking Spanish, and Nahuatl writing, having flourished in central Mexico for two and a half centuries, had become a thing of the past.

schedule. Hunt 1976 and Farriss 1984 demonstrate a more general relative retardation of developments in Yucatan, in both Spanish and indigenous spheres.

²¹ Lockhart 1985, p. 477. One could find many formulations. The essence of the matter is that each side naively underestimates the complexity and idiosyncrasy of phenomena as seen from the other side and imperviously marches ahead in its own tradition.

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