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THE AMERINDIANS' CHANGING WORLD

IN 1577, KING PHILIP II of Spain decided that he wanted more detailed information on his American possessions, and he sent a lengthy questionnaire to Spanish officials throughout Mesoamerica and the Andes. The recipients consulted with Catholic priests and indigenous leaders in hundreds of communities. A total of 208 reports reached the king within a few years. These documents graphically demonstrate the profound changes that the native peoples witnessed in the first several decades that followed the arrival of the Europeans in Mexico and Peru.

Typical was the testimony of the Indian caciques of Oaxtepec in what is now the state of Morelos in Mexico. By 1580, the people of Oaxtepec enjoyed many Spanish fruits such as melons, figs, oranges, limes, and quinces. They had become enthusiastic participants in the emerging market economy, with much of their produce destined for sale in Mexico City. Like many other communities, Oaxtepec provided a brilliantly colored map, with both a Catholic church and the indigenous symbol for the community at its center (see Plate 8). But the caciques could not hide their nostalgia for the "good old days" before the coming of the Spaniards, when people worked hard, bathed three times a day, and "did not know what sickness was."

Few of Oaxtepec's caciques were old enough in 1580 to have direct personal memories of preconquest days, and they may well have idealized the years of Mexica domination. But they were certainly correct in their notion of the profound changes the indigenous peoples of the Americas had experienced since 1492. Their material environment had altered forever as Europeans introduced exotic plants and animals and reshaped the landscape to accommodate haciendas, plantations, and mines. The structure of their community life had changed too, as they now answered to new rulers and prayed to new gods. At the same time, Native Americans retained many features of life as they had known it before the

arrival of the Spaniards and Portuguese. Long-familiar crops still provided the bulk of their subsistence, and most people continued to speak only the languages their forebears had known for centuries. Behind a facade of adaptation to European forms of community life, indigenous peoples continued many traditional practices and beliefs when they governed themselves and communicated with the supernatural.

This chapter examines both continuity and change among native peoples under Spanish and Portuguese colonization. We will look first at the people who lived in the cores of the great pre-Hispanic empires of the Aztecs and Incas. The presence of mineral and agricultural resources and a native population accustomed to paying taxes and performing forced labor made Mesoamerica and the Andes especially attractive to Spanish colonists. We will turn next to natives of the frontiers of northern Mexico and southern South America, areas less densely settled in precolonial times and less inviting to European colonists. Indians in these regions were often gathered into mission complexes, an experience that triggered even more drastic alterations in their way of life than those experienced by natives in Mesoamerica and the Andes. Finally, we will examine how the indigenous peoples of the Americas resisted and adapted change, and how they reformulated their individual and group identities over time.

NATIVE COMMUNITIES IN MESOAMERICA AND THE ANDES

Spanish colonizers of the sixteenth century gravitated to the highland interiors of Mexico and South America. They marveled not only at the material splendor of Tenochtitlan and Cuzco but also at the sophisticated social and political organization of the great indigenous empires. The simultaneous discovery of great silver deposits in northern Mexico and Upper Peru in the 1540s gave the Spaniards ample incentive to stay, and they looked upon the native peoples of these regions as a convenient source of labor for mining and other enterprises. The colonizers quickly set about reorganizing indigenous community life and adapting traditional systems of forced labor and taxation to their own imperatives.

As a result, the highland peoples of Mexico and Peru experienced more immediate Spanish intrusions into their daily lives than did natives of areas that were more marginal to the European agenda. But Andeans and Mesoamericans also possessed a rich and complex indigenous culture that they could draw upon in fashioning their responses to their changing world.

Shifting Populations in the República de Indios

Official Spanish policy divided colonial society into two separate "repúblicas," one of Indians, the other of Spaniards. In Mesoamerica and the Andes, the "república de indios" was made up of hundreds of peasant communities with no real connection to one another. In theory, these villages were shielded from harmful outside influence,

1549
First Jesuits arrive in Brazil

1568–1572
Jesuits arrive in Peru and Mexico

1570s
Viceroy Toledo orders massive relocation of Peru's Indian population

1573
Franciscan missionaries begin work in Florida

1598
Franciscans begin work among the Pueblos of New Mexico

1610
Jesuit missionaries begin work among the Guaraní in Paraguay

1615
Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala completes his history of Peru

1680
Pueblo rebellion in New Mexico

1690s
Jesuit missionaries active in Sonora and southern Arizona

1692
Rebellion of Indians and other lower classes in Mexico City; Spaniards begin reconquest of New Mexico

1712
Indian rebellion in Chiapas

1769
Franciscans begin building missions in California

with non-Indians other than priests, corregidores, and alcaldes mayores forbidden to reside within them, while protective legislation supposedly safeguarded community lands. In practice, however, non-Indians infiltrated everywhere, eventually outnumbering the native population in some villages. Meanwhile, labor drafts forced natives from their communities of origin, and the need to supply tribute and other perquisites to the Spaniards drew them into the emerging cash economy of the "república de españoles."

The demographic makeup of the so-called Indian communities was anything but static. European diseases continued to reduce the indigenous population for a century or more until the native peoples began developing greater resistance to Old World illnesses. In order to facilitate missionary efforts and collect tribute, Spanish officials consolidated the survivors numerous times, forcing those living in outlying areas to move to more centrally located villages and sometimes lumping together people who spoke different indigenous languages. This combination of epidemics and forced resettlements left vast tracts of land vacant, facilitating the consolidation of Spanish-owned haciendas.

The most sweeping relocations occurred in the Andes, mandated by Viceroy Francisco de Toledo in the 1570s. In the province of Huarochirí, 100 or so settlements were concentrated into just 17, and in present-day Bolivia Toledo "reduced" some 900 hamlets and 129,000 people into just 44 villages. Toledo's program undermined traditional Andean survival strategies. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, each community held lands at different elevations up and down the mountainsides, giving them access to several different microclimates and allowing them to grow a variety of

crops. Communities created by Toledo's decrees often lost control of outlying ecological niches. The viceroy's program also disrupted cooperative labor arrangements that native peoples had developed over many centuries.

Native peoples did not always comply with forced resettlements. In Peru, some communities lodged official protests with the viceroy and audiencia even before they received their formal orders to relocate, while other groups complied but quickly returned to their former homes. Indians in New Spain appealed to colonial courts and sometimes secured reversals of relocation orders. In 1603, the village of Anenecuilco in the present-day Mexican state of Morelos successfully resisted removal to the village of Cuautla. Three hundred years later, as Mexico's Revolution of 1910 began, Emiliano Zapata rallied his fellow townsmen in Anenecuilco to fight persistent encroachments of nearby sugar haciendas on village lands. Other groups moved voluntarily in the years following the conquest. Andean peoples forcibly relocated by the Incas took advantage of the new colonial regime to return to their places of origin. Particularly notable were the Cañaris, whom the Incas had uprooted from southern Ecuador and resettled near Cuzco and elsewhere.

Many people also moved individually or in small groups. In the Andes, a man who left his community of origin and settled in another native village could escape being drafted for the Potosí mita. Known as *forasteros,* these men were denied membership in the ayllu (the traditional native community organization) and allocations of community land. However, they were also exempt from the payment of tribute. As a result, forasteros often accumulated greater wealth than those native to the community. Many forasteros also gained access to land by marrying local women or making informal arrangements with kurakas (traditional chiefs) in their adopted communities. Kurakas often exacted labor and other personal favors in exchange for these concessions.

Many native people left the república de indios altogether, settling in Spanish cities, haciendas, and mining camps. Meanwhile, favorably situated Indian communities attracted large numbers of mestizos, blacks, mulattos, and people of Spanish descent. By the late eighteenth century, for example, nearly two-thirds of Oaxtepec's people were non-Indians. Though officially barred from political positions in the república de indios, many of these newcomers acquired community lands through purchase, rental, squatting, or marriage to Indian women, and they wielded considerable influence in the Indian villages.

Local Government in the República de Indios

Local government in the villages of Mesoamerica and Peru rested in the hands of an indigenous ruling class deputized by the Spanish to supervise tribute collection, marshal workers for labor drafts, and maintain order. At first, the encomenderos, clergy, and crown officials dealt with whatever hereditary rulers they found in place, as long as these individuals were willing to cooperate. Soon, however, they began attempting to restructure local government to more closely resemble models of municipal organization they had known in Europe.

In each community, the Spanish designated a single individual, always a male, to be the *gobernador* or head of local government. Sometimes the person chosen had a legitimate tie to pre-Hispanic rulers, but in many other cases someone else assumed the position. Other leading figures in the village became *regidores* and *alcaldes* that together formed a governing body that the Spanish called a cabildo, similar to the town councils in Spanish municipalities. Native cabildos also included a bailiff and a scribe trained to record community business in indigenous languages but using the European alphabet. Cabildo members not only received a salary from the village treasury but also claimed food, personal service, and other perquisites from community members and were usually exempt from tribute payment and labor drafts. With such incentives, the number of officers tended to multiply.

The Indian gobernador and his cabildo exercised a wide variety of duties, often following pre-Hispanic custom. They handled the allocation of village lands, supervised the sale and rental of lands by private individuals, and oversaw local markets. They also punished community members for misdemeanors such as public drunkenness, theft, and domestic violence. Thus local government in the indigenous communities rested primarily in native hands, although Spanish district magistrates (corregidores or alcaldes mayores) could and did meddle in village business.

Spanish assumptions that political offices should be reserved for males did not mean that women were completely marginalized from politics in the república de indios. Women raised money to finance lawsuits in defense of community lands and were often at the forefront in village rebellions against colonial authorities. Numerous hereditary *cacicas* (the feminine form of caciques) could be found in the Mixteca region of southern Mexico, and there are scattered references to female kurakas in the Andes. Though excluded from holding office or participating in elections, these women wielded considerable influence within their communities.

Spanish authorities maintained the fiction that indigenous cabildo officers were elected, usually for 1-year terms. Pre-Hispanic custom usually dictated that new rulers were chosen only on the death of an incumbent, so in many places the same individuals were elected year after year. Voting was restricted to a select circle of elite men. Factional disputes abounded in colonial Indian communities, and local elections were sometimes punctuated by violence.

In some places, especially in Mexico, mestizos and others served as village gobernadores and other officers. The Hinojosa family, caciques of Cuernavaca, dominated local politics in the república de indios for several generations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Biologically mestizos, they perhaps descended from a Spaniard named Francisco de Hinojosa who settled in Cuernavaca in the sixteenth century. They spoke Spanish and maintained close ties with the priests at the Franciscan monastery and with owners of sugar haciendas in the area. The first Hinojosa to be elected gobernador of Cuernavaca was Don Juan de Hinojosa, who attained the office in 1629. Twenty years later, his younger brother Agustín also held the post. Juan boasted descent from the conquistadors of Cuernavaca. Both men openly acknowledged their status as mestizos,

although Agustín also claimed Spanish descent on numerous occasions. Agustín married Doña Juana Jiménez, granddaughter of a sixteenth-century gobernador and the sole heir of one of the region's most powerful native families. Their son Antonio served as gobernador for many years. People said he looked Spanish, and his wife was the daughter of a prominent Spaniard and a cacica. Their children's baptisms were recorded not in the book reserved for Indians, but in the volume used for the república de españoles.

The complicity of native officials with the Spanish power structure and their dogged pursuit of personal interests frequently eroded their legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents. Kurakas in Peru who collected tribute and rounded up men to work in the silver mines at Potosí were either unwilling or unable to provide the reciprocal benefits that their forebears had supplied to the commoners, for example.

Subsistence and Survival in the República de Indios

The plants and animals brought by Europeans to their New World and the varied enterprises of Spanish and Portuguese colonists brought profound changes to the physical landscape of the Americas, but Indian peasants continued their traditional modes of subsistence while borrowing selectively from the foreigners. Native crops such as maize and beans in Mesoamerica and potatoes in the Andes remained dietary staples, and Indians were slow to adopt plows and other tools as long as familiar techniques continued to meet their needs. Customary patterns of land tenure officially prevailed, with ownership of most lands vested in the community and native officials in charge of allocating plots to heads of households. In practice, though, passing years saw the increasing privatization of lands, as caciques and kurakas, along with enterprising commoners and non-Indian residents, accumulated more and more lands for themselves.

The greatest challenge the repúblicas de indios in Mesoamerica and the Andes faced was the encroachment on their lands by Spanish estates. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the Indian population was at its lowest, coexistence was possible, but once native numbers began to increase in the eighteenth century, competition for land and water intensified, especially in areas where Spanish penetration was heaviest. Villages also contended with one another for access to these vital resources, often perpetuating disputes that dated back hundreds of years. They employed a variety of tactics, including forcibly occupying lands, damaging irrigation works, and physically attacking hacienda employees, in an effort to reclaim lands they believed were rightfully theirs. Community leaders also mastered the intricacies of the Spanish legal system and often traveled to Lima or Mexico City to present their complaints in person to the viceroy or the audiencia. They carefully safeguarded sixteenth-century maps and other credentials that supported their case. These papers are replete with references to lands possessed "from time immemorial," long before the arrival of the Spaniards.

Natives also used the courts to get relief from excessive tribute, forced labor obligations, and other abuses. On many occasions they won, in part because the authorities may have still harbored sympathy for the Indians based on the ideals of Bartolomé de las Casas and other sixteenth-century advocates. More importantly, Spanish officials

understood the strategic importance of sustaining the native population, for Indians could pay their tributes and serve their labor obligations only if they retained enough land to provide for themselves. Although wealthy landowners might easily bribe a judge to rule in their favor, Indians often proved adept in playing various power figures against one another. They could frequently count on help from their parish priest, whose livelihood depended on the continued viability of the village economy. These victories came at a price, for in resorting to Spanish courts and Spanish laws to defend themselves, native communities tacitly and probably unwittingly acknowledged the legitimacy of colonial rule. On the other hand, one could also say that the authorities' willingness to hear and sometimes act on their complaints earned them a certain measure of legitimacy in the eyes of native plaintiffs.

Slice of Life

THE INDIANS OF OAXTEPEC DEFEND THEIR LAND AND WATER

AT THE BEGINNING of this chapter, we met the native leaders of the Mexican village of Oaxtepec, who in 1580 looked back on the manifold changes they had witnessed since the Spanish conquest. Little did these caciques know that their community would face continued challenges to its survival for generations to come. These challenges would force their descendants to capitalize on the resources available to them, to enter the cash economy by selling produce native to their land as well as crops brought by the Europeans, and to seek help from sympathetic outsiders. As the caciques gave their testimony in 1580, the area around Oaxtepec—today, the Mexican state of Morelos—stood on the brink of a major shift in patterns of landholding. In the final two decades of the sixteenth century, non-Indians acquired substantial lands near Oaxtepec, lands left vacant by the precipitous decline in the indigenous population, and expanded the cultivation of sugarcane.

From the beginning of the seventeenth century until Mexico's Revolution of 1910, the villagers of Oaxtepec had to compete with sugar haciendas for access to the land and water they needed for their own subsistence and for the fruit, vegetables, and sugarcane they produced for sale. Meanwhile, the village's fertile soil and agreeable climate attracted growing numbers of non-Indians who bought or rented lands from Indian leaders and became permanent residents in violation of royal prohibitions. Officially, however, Oaxtepec remained part of the "república de indios."

A particularly troublesome adversary was a hacienda named Pantitlán, and the object of contention was not land, but water coming from a spring located near the church in Oaxtepec. For many years, Pantitlán lay in ruins, and the villagers enjoyed exclusive use of the water. In 1750, a new owner decided to refurbish the property's sugar mill and expand production. At first, the two parties struck a compromise that allowed each to have access to the water, but by 1776 the hacienda's owner took the villagers to court, charging that they had taken most of the water, halting his sugar mill at the height of the harvest. Protracted litigation and several out-of-court

settlements over the next two decades failed to produce a lasting accord. Hacendados in the region circulated rumors that the villagers were planning a general uprising with support from other indigenous communities. Perhaps fear of an insurrection prompted the owner of Pantitlán to agree to build an aqueduct that would enable him to draw water from a nearby river instead of relying exclusively on the contested spring. In this case, then, the villagers won something of a victory; their only concession was to allow a part of the aqueduct to cross their land. The villagers and the hacienda owner continued to bicker over the use of water from the spring, however.

Meanwhile, the villagers carried on a long-standing water dispute with the owner of another hacienda, who accused them of damaging his aqueducts in order to divert water to their crops and to the thousands of banana plants cultivated by the town surgeon, the parish priest, and many other non-Indians who rented village lands. This feud reached particularly acrimonious levels in 1786, central Mexico's famous "year of hunger," when the warm, fertile valleys of present-day Morelos were able to produce extra crops of maize after a devastating crop failure in less-favored locales. For centuries, the Indians and other residents of Oaxtepec had produced irrigated crops of maize in the winter and sold it in the months when supplies were lowest and prices highest, and they stood to make an especially good profit as famine spread and maize prices escalated. A court decision awarded the Indians access to extra water in 1786, but 2 years later the hacendado won a reversal of that verdict. Oaxtepec's response was to renew its battle with Pantitlán over the spring water, continuing their litigation into the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Questions for Discussion

Suppose that the indigenous people of Oaxtepec had decided to close their community to non-Indians and to withdraw completely from the cash economy. Would this strategy have even been possible? Why or why not? Would it have enabled them to better survive the effects of Spanish domination? Why or why not?

When litigation and other means of rectifying abuses failed, a community might resort to violence. Men and women picked up rocks or machetes and attacked a specific target, usually a person or object directly associated with a particular grievance—a priest, government official, or hacienda overseer; a village jail; or a hacienda's irrigation works. Colonial officials met these challenges with a judicious blend of repression and appeasement. Usually, they singled out a few alleged ringleaders for exemplary punishment that might include forced obraje service, fines, public whippings, or exile from the area. They sometimes ordered the construction of a stone gallows in the center of a village to remind residents of the power of the state. Most often, however, the incidents ended with some sort of conciliatory gesture on the part of the authorities. The natives might win at least one round of an ongoing land dispute or gain reprieve from a new increase in taxes, labor obligations, or church fees.

Rarely did these revolts extend beyond a single village, much less challenge the colonial order as such. Most native peoples simply did not see themselves as "Indians" in a way that would have prompted them to unite with neighboring villages with which they had outstanding land disputes and other quarrels. Historian William B. Taylor, who has studied this kind of violence in central Mexico and Oaxaca, concluded that the native villagers in these areas were "good rebels but poor revolutionaries."

Native Communities and the Cash Economy

Indians also made profitable compromises with the evolving cash economy. Income from the sale of agricultural produce and craft items and wages earned laboring in mines and on haciendas provided natives with cash to meet tribute obligations, pay legal fees, buy personal items, make improvements on their churches, and finance community fiestas. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, vendors from Huarochirí in Peru supplied the Lima market with apples, peaches, guavas, chirimoyas (a fruit native to the Andes), maize, and chile peppers, as well as cattle, sheep, goats, and llamas. When they went to Potosí to serve their labor obligations, mita workers carried coca, freeze-dried potatoes, and other commodities to sell at the inflated prices that prevailed in the mining center. Caciques and kurakas used their connections to foster their personal commercial ventures.

A kind of mutual accommodation between haciendas and nearby Indian villages characterized rural society in central Mexico. Large landowners needed extra workers during planting and harvesting seasons, but they wished to avoid the expense of maintaining a large resident labor force. The villages provided a handy reservoir of temporary labor, and it behooved the landowner to see to it that the Indians retained enough land to support themselves during much of the year, but not to the point where they could supply all of their needs without recourse to the cash economy.

Forces other than the need for cash also drew Indians into the larger economy. The *reparto de mercancías,* whereby corregidores and alcaldes mayores pressured natives into buying commodities from them, was common throughout Mesoamerica and the Andes. Sometimes they furnished mules and other items vital to the Indians, but this trade might also involve items for which the natives had no use. Local officials also forced Indians to sell produce to them at prices well below market rates.

In some places, however, Indians willingly participated in the reparto de mercancías because it served their economic interests. In Oaxaca in southern Mexico, for example, Mixtecs and Zapotecs produced cochineal, a red dye extracted from insects that lived on cacti native to the region. Cochineal was highly coveted in Europe, and by the eighteenth century it ranked second only to silver among exports from Mexico. The actual production of this valuable commodity remained almost entirely in native hands, but most Indians needed credit to participate in the trade. At the beginning of each year, local officials advanced them funds to buy the "nests" of pregnant insects that they placed on the cacti. In return, when they harvested their product, they gave their creditors one pound of cochineal for each 1.5 pesos they had received. The Mixtecs and Zapotecs could have gotten higher returns by selling their cochineal in the open market. Without

credit, however, they would not have been able to produce it in the first place, and few people other than the corregidores were willing to lend to poor peasants. The 1.5 pesos they received at the start of the season usually exceeded the cost of producing a pound of cochineal, so the arrangement helped them meet other expenses as well. From the natives' point of view, doing business with the corregidores made economic sense.

Families and Households in the República de Indios

The basic unit of production and subsistence in the república de indios was the household. European colonization had brought important changes to indigenous family life. In place of the extended families and other kinship networks common in indigenous society, missionaries attempted to impose the patriarchal nuclear family. They exhorted their converts to accept premarital chastity, monogamy, and the lifelong bonds of Christian matrimony. In the privacy of the confessional, priests evidently probed the most intimate details of the Indians' lives. A confessional manual written in 1631 suggested more than 200 questions that confessors might ask penitents about sexual thoughts and behavior.

The demands of colonialism also upset traditional kinship networks. Widespread mortality left many old and young people without close relatives. Men were gone for weeks or months at a time while they performed forced labor service, and many never returned. Women therefore shouldered heavier burdens at home. When tribute obligations included quantities of woven cloth, women's work further increased. The imposition of highly patriarchal Spanish legal and religious concepts throughout the colonies and the breakdown of the ayllu in Peru disrupted the cooperative and complementary arrangements between men's work and women's work that had characterized gender roles in pre-Hispanic society. Women also found it more difficult to hang on to inherited property in the Spanish legal system. There is evidence of high levels of domestic violence. Spanish social and legal norms recognized a man's right, in fact his obligation, to administer physical "correction" to his wife, children, and other members of the household. Only when such punishments exceeded the bounds considered appropriate did the authorities intervene, and many cases went unreported. Native women were frequent victims of homicide, usually at the hands of their husbands.

Native society thus experienced multiple pressures at the level of the family and the household. Indigenous people nonetheless found new ways to build and maintain kinship networks. Particularly important was the Spanish practice of *compadrazgo,* literally co-parenthood, that created a special bond between a child's parents and godparents. Godparents might also assume guardianship of a child if the parents died. Compadrazgo thus provided an alternative family when migration, disease, and other calamities tore apart natural kinship networks. There is evidence too that the persistence of native notions of community life mitigated against some of the more harmful effects of Spanish patriarchalism. The Mixtecs and Zapotecs, for example, continued as before the conquest to identify women as members of the community as a whole rather than simply as the wives of specific men. When a husband inflicted physical injury on his wife, he had to answer to the entire community.

Native peoples also ignored the church's teachings on sexuality. In Peru, they persisted in the practice of *sirvinacuy,* or trial marriage, in which young couples lived together to test their mutual compatibility before formally marrying in the church. Those who decided not to marry went their separate ways without any loss of personal honor. Children born of these unions, illegitimate in the eyes of the church, bore no such social stigma in Andean society.

RELIGION AND COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE REPÚBLICA DE INDIOS

The evangelization of native peoples in Mesoamerica and the Andes began almost as soon as the Spanish arrived. For many Indians, the first European they met was a priest, whether Franciscan, Dominican, Jesuit, or a member of the secular clergy. Missionaries initially claimed great success in converting the natives, but their early optimism soon waned. They often accused natives of backsliding into pagan rituals and gave up on the idea of creating a native priesthood. Even though colonial Indians were relegated to a decidedly inferior standing within the church, Catholicism as they understood it occupied an important place in their lives. The local church was often a focus of community pride, and Christian festivals gave them regular opportunities to come together and reinforce the ties that bound families and villages together. In an effort to make sense of their continually changing material and cultural world, native peoples freely combined Catholic symbols and dogma with elements of pre-Hispanic religious custom.

Natives as Catholics

Most Indians received rudimentary instruction in the intricacies of the faith. Parents usually brought their infants to church to be baptized within a few days of birth. Children attended catechism classes, where they memorized prayers such as the Our Father and the Ave María and precepts such as the Ten Commandments. Bilingual catechisms used to instruct native children in the Andes suggest that these youngsters were presented with a simplified version of Christian doctrine, reflecting the priests' skepticism about natives' intellectual and spiritual capacities. Priests in Indian parishes enforced regular attendance at Sunday mass.

Catholics were supposed to receive the sacraments of confession and the Eucharist once they reached the age of reason, about seven or eight, although many Indians, especially in the Andes, never did participate in these rites. Perhaps because their indigenous religions had nothing comparable to Christian notions of individual sin and guilt, many Nahuas in central Mexico reportedly avoided the sacrament of confession whenever they could. The incompetence of priests in native languages could also limit the quality of confessions. If a touring bishop reached their community, they might also

be confirmed, and whenever possible, priests administered the last rites to the dying. Many adults participated in the sacrament of matrimony as well, although priests continually complained of the number of couples living together without the official blessing of the church.

Relations between Indian peasants and their priests often became strained. Priests demanded perquisites from their parishioners over and above the customary fees they charged for their services. Native women were required to perform domestic chores in the priest's household, for example. Priests sometimes used physical punishment in disciplining their flocks. When secular priests replaced the regular clergy in Indian parishes, they frequently spent so much time on personal business ventures that they neglected their spiritual duties. Parishioners also complained that their priests meddled in village politics and failed to live up to the ideals they preached, especially in the area of sexual behavior. Many priests fathered children by native women.

Belief and Practice in the República de Indios

Native persistence in what priests viewed as vestiges of their old religion, including clandestine rituals that involved the use of hallucinogens and the sacrifice of small animals, proved to be a major source of tension between priests and their Indian parishioners, especially in Peru. Andeans venerated their *huacas*—traditional sacred places and the divinities that inhabited them. Although Indian men often fell under Spanish scrutiny as they performed obligatory labor service, women found chances to retreat to remote locales where they conducted elaborate rituals in honor of these local deities, as they had done in pre-Hispanic times. Native peoples in the Andes also revered the mummified remains of ancestors. They exhumed the corpses of relatives from church cemeteries, dressed them in traditional garb, offered sacrifices of llamas, guinea pigs, maize, and coca, and reinterred them in their old burial grounds.

Numerous campaigns aimed at what churchmen called the "uprooting of idolatry" occurred throughout Peru in the seventeenth century, and a special jail in Lima confined the most recalcitrant offenders. The clergy justified such measures by pointing out that the natives had been converted to the true faith but had relapsed—the same rationale used when non-Indians faced prosecution by the Inquisition. But priests differed among themselves as to what actions constituted dangerous heresy worthy of prosecution and what customs were harmless elements of indigenous culture, inferior to European folkways but not socially disruptive in and of themselves.

Native peoples accepted certain elements of Christianity, retained many old practices and beliefs, and in the end created something new that served personal and community needs through contact with the supernatural. They were more receptive to Christian teachings that fit well with traditional beliefs. For example, native peoples showed particular enthusiasm for the Catholic devotion to the souls in purgatory, perhaps because it meshed with their customary reverence for their dead ancestors.

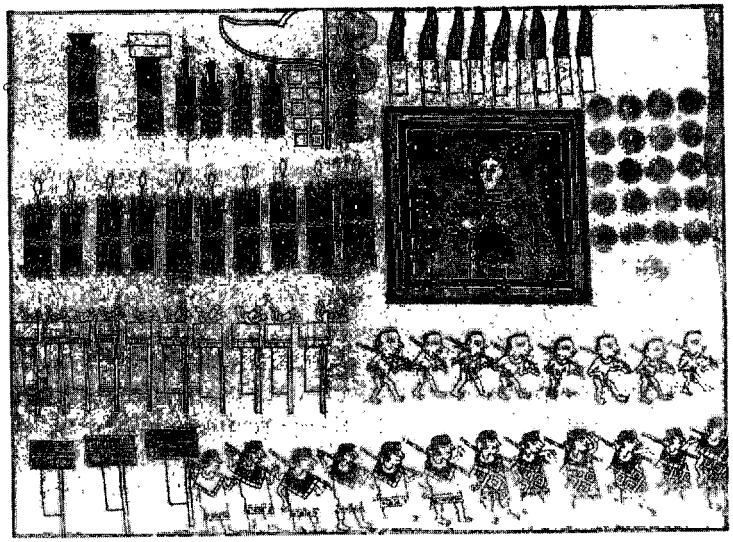
Priest interrogating an alleged Indian idolater, from the manuscript of the native Andean historian Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, who served as an interpreter and assistant to a Spanish priest charged with investigating native idolatry in Peru.

As time passed, the distinction blurred between that which was pre-Hispanic and that which was Catholic. Native Americans showed great devotion to Catholic saints without discarding traditional notions that assumed the presence of the sacred in many animals, plants, and inanimate objects. People in central Mexico, for example, revered bees that produced wax used in the candles that burned on the church altar. Like so many aspects of their life as colonial subjects, the religious experience of Native Americans was a vibrant mix of indigenous elements, European Catholicism, and daily adaptation.

Religion and Community Identity

Whatever the natives' level of doctrinal sophistication or religious orthodoxy, villages took pride in the size and beauty of their principal church, often spending lavish sums on church bells, altarpieces, and other adornments. At the urging of a Franciscan missionary, the Indians of Huejotzingo in central Mexico commissioned a Flemish painter from Mexico City to fashion an altarpiece for their church. Completed in 1586 at a cost of more than 6000 pesos, the altarpiece featured statues of 15 different saints and numerous paintings showing scenes from the life of Christ. Rituals that were at least superficially Catholic, from regular Sunday mass to special feast days, brought the community together on many occasions throughout the year.

A cadre of Indian laymen, known as *fiscales,* helped maintain the church and led devotional services in the absence of a priest. Others served as *cantores* (singers) or sacristans. In central Mexico, these officers were known collectively in Nahuatl as *teopantlaca,* literally, "church people." These positions often carried social prestige, opportunities for personal profit and exemption from tribute. Fiscales in one community near Mexico City required children to bring them gifts of maize when they came to church for catechism class. Following Catholic custom, these positions were restricted to males. Women's roles in official worship services were not as well defined, but in many places they took responsibility for sweeping the church and cleaning the altar linens.



Painting made in 1531 by Indians of Huejotzingo, Mexico, showing goods and services that colonial administrators had demanded of them; one of the items was a banner of gold, silver, and feathers depicting the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus.

Central to religious life in the república de indios were the *cofradías,* organizations that fostered devotion to particular saints and provided spiritual and material benefits to members. Cofradías and the celebrations they sponsored became vehicles for community solidarity. They also provided a kind of life insurance, paying for the funerals of deceased members. Women were very active in the Indian cofradías, sometimes outnumbering male members. Leadership positions, however, were usually restricted to men, and they conferred considerable personal prestige. Indeed, a community's political officials often served in key cofradía offices as well. Specially designated village lands supported cofradía activities. Villagers either rented out these lands or cultivated them collectively, selling the produce and turning the proceeds over to cofradía officers. The Mayan cofradías of Yucatán were noted for their extensive cattle ranches, for example.

Religious holidays that were nominally Catholic became an outlet for indigenous cultural expression. After the obligatory mass and other solemnities that required the presence of a priest, natives often continued the celebration by themselves. Priests decried what they viewed as excesses—bingeing on food and alcohol, elaborate processions and fireworks displays, bullfights, dancing, and lewd behavior—as well as the blatant or subtle traces of traditional custom that accompanied the festivities. The exuberance of their religious fiestas shows how Indians in Mesoamerica and the Andes truly made Catholicism their own, picking and choosing those aspects of the faith that served the spiritual and temporal needs of individuals and communities.

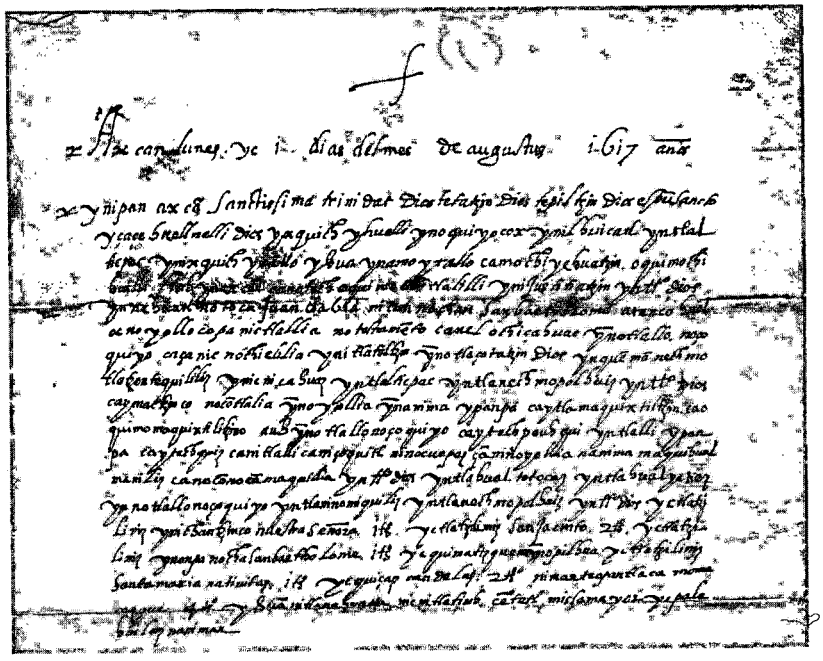
How Historians Understand

MEASURING ACCULTURATION USING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE SOURCES

As indigenous peoples learned to write their own languages in the European alphabet, they became adept at using their literacy to defend and advance their interests. Community leaders kept written records of the proceedings of their cabildos and cofradías, and composed documents that purportedly substantiated village land claims. Men and women of many different social ranks enlisted native scribes to write their wills. Historians have used all of these sources to gain perspectives on changes within the native communities during three centuries of colonial rule.

Nahuatl speakers of central Mexico produced many native language sources. These documents reveal nuances of colonial life that cannot be detected from documents written in Spanish. We learn, for example, what rituals accompanied land transfers within the native community, what kinds of polite formalities people exchanged in various social encounters, how men and women organized their households, and how on their deathbeds they divided their personal possessions among their kin. Historians using Nahuatl sources have also shown greater continuity in the practice of local government from preconquest to colonial times than what researchers working exclusively from Spanish documents had supposed.

Scholars have also tracked the process of native acculturation by examining the gradual incorporation of Spanish loanwords into Nahuatl. The Spanish brought



Introduction to Nahuatl will and testament of the Indian Juan Fabián, from the town of San Bartolomé Atenco, August 1, 1617.

many objects and concepts for which no Nahuatl equivalent existed. At first, the natives simply used their own words. For horse they said *macatl,* the word for deer, and a firearm was a "fire trumpet." Baptism was *quaatequia,* literally, "to pour water on the head." They did, however, begin adopting a Nahuatlized form of the Spanish word *Castilla* (Castile), which they added to indigenous words to describe other Spanish imports. Wheat thus became "Castile maize."

Within a couple of decades, Spanish nouns began to make their way into Nahuatl. Natives learned to call a horse a *caballo,* and used the words *vaca* (cow) and *mula* (mule) as well. The Spanish *trigo* (wheat) replaced "Castile maize." By the end of the sixteenth century, nouns such as *cuchillo,* the Spanish word for knife, and *camisa* (shirt) had been so thoroughly absorbed into Nahuatl that most Indians probably did not even recognize these items as innovations introduced by the Spaniards.

Natives also adopted words associated with Catholicism such as *misa* (mass), *cruz* (cross), and *Santa Trinidad* (Holy Trinity), along with the days of the week and the months of the year. When Juan Fabián of the town of San Bartolomé Atenco wrote his Nahuatl will in 1617, he began by noting that the day was Monday (*lunes*), the first of August. He then proceeded to invoke the three persons of the Holy Trinity and referred to *Dios* (God) throughout his text.

Terms such as *gobernador, virrey* (viceroy), and *obispo* (bishop) also began appearing regularly in Nahuatl documents by the late sixteenth century. Frequent appearances of the word *pleito* (lawsuit) reflected their growing recourse to the Spanish legal system. In the seventeenth century, Spanish verbs, conjugated as if they were Nahuatl words, began appearing. Especially common were such verbs as *pasear* (to stroll), *confirmar* (to confirm, a reference to the sacrament of confirmation), and *prendar* (to pawn). Even Nahuatl grammar showed some Spanish influences.

This incipient bilingualism reflected native peoples' growing contacts with the cash economy. Scholars have also noted, however, that certain Spanish words failed to appear in Nahuatl. Particularly notable for its absence is the word "indio." The Nahuas persisted in identifying themselves in terms of their local community, despite the strong Spanish tendency to lump all natives together in this category.

Comparisons between Nahuatl sources and colonial documents written in other indigenous languages have suggested that the natives of central Mexico probably experienced far greater exposure to European influence than their counterparts elsewhere in Latin America. Sources from Yucatán, for instance, show far fewer Spanish loanwords incorporated into the Mayan language, and none of the grammatical adaptations common in Nahuatl by the late colonial period.

Questions for Discussion

What similarities and differences are there between the ways Nahuatl speakers began incorporating Spanish words into their speech and the ways people today adopt words from other languages with which they come in contact?