

Transcending Conquest
Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico

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University of Oklahoma Press : Norman

bors who helped the European invaders, some who experienced the heat of battle, others who never raised a weapon, citizens of cities and members of small rural communities who survived the epidemics, some who felt early and intense evangelization, others who saw a generation pass before the first priests came to visit regularly, and then the descendants of all of the above, who learned myriad techniques for coping with the emerging colonialism, its economic, social, and cultural diversity, and its exacting demands. I hope to demonstrate how native records transcend the traditional historiographer's fixation on the transfer of power as cataclysmic (surprisingly, often underrepresenting the demographic disaster) and render inaccurate the old assumptions of immediate and thorough domination and destruction in the surviving communities. Indigenous historians constructed identities for their communities and memories to preserve for future generations a heritage of active participation and a native orchestration of crucial events.

2

Pictorial Images of Spaniards

THE OTHER OTHER?

*They write and
—picture the achieve-
ment of victory and
the conduct of wars,
the succession of
principal lords, bad
weather conditions,
noteworthy signs in
the sky, and pesti-
lences—at what time
and under which
lord these things
occurred.*

THE FRANCISCAN FRIAR
MOTOLINIA, DESCRIBING THE
NAHUAS' YEAR-COUNT ANNALS, AS
QUOTED IN ELIZABETH HILL BOONE,
"AZTEC PICTORIAL HISTORIES"

Drawing and painting were already the media of choice for indigenous author-artists alive at the time of the Spanish invasion, including native historians who kept the annals Motolinia described. It is logical, then, that they employed images to record some of their first impressions of the foreigners who invaded their lands in the second decade of the sixteenth century.¹ These invaders were visually remarkable, too, with their fair skin and often lighter hair color, far more body hair, distinctive clothing, hats, and other striking objects of material culture.² They consumed unusual foods and beverages, things that members of one North American group described as wood and blood, probably referring to hardtack and wine (Axtell 1991, 8).³ They traveled in unusually large vessels when on the sea, and some of them rode oversized, deerlike beasts

when on land.⁴ Giant, salivating dogs accompanied them.

The first figure for this chapter (fig. 2.1) is the small, glyphlike image from the entry for 1518 in the atlas portion of the mid-sixteenth-century *Codex en Cruz* (1981, 21; Robertson 1959, 144–46), enlarged here in order to highlight the details.⁵ It shows two profile busts of Spaniards with thick short beards,⁶ metal helmets, lances, the Christian cross, and banners, all

tucked neatly inside a minimalist, stylized ship sailing west. The sea appears at the bottom in the form of pre-Columbian imagery for water. This glyph-like symbol encodes considerable information about the invaders in the space of about two centimeters and would surely have caught the native eye as something unprecedented, even though it received no extra attention in its size.

In these kinds of records, graphic images actually serve as texts, although sometimes glosses or other written explanations accompany them.⁷ Like alphabetic texts, some of these pictorials sought to meet internal, indigenous needs, and others were made at the prompting of ecclesiastical or judicial Spanish colonial authorities.⁸ The challenge is to interpret the images as they were intended by the artists who painted them and as they might have been read by indigenous audiences, bearing in mind whenever possible the context that produced each pictorial.¹¹ With hundreds of extant pictorials produced in as

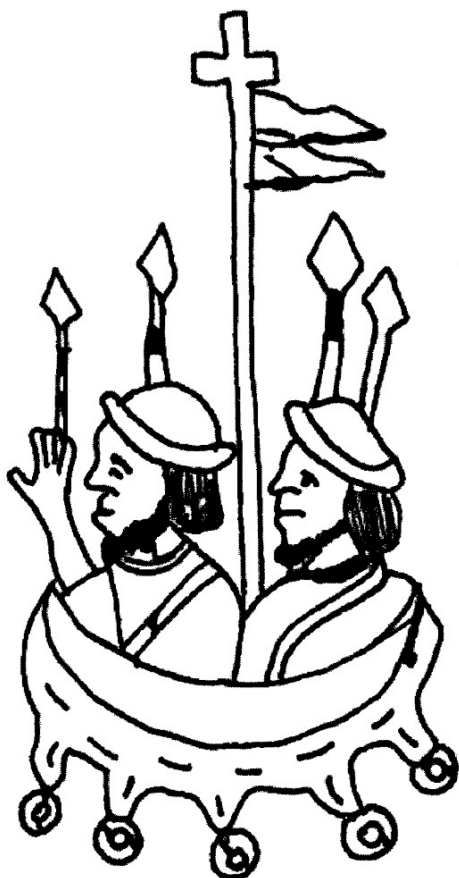


FIGURE 2.1. Spanish arrival in 1518. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from the reproduction or “Dibble Copy” of the *Codex en Cruz: Atlas* (1981). Reproduced with permission of the University of Utah Press.

many contexts, the challenge is daunting. The modest goal here is to survey a fairly broad range of graphic images and begin to identify recurring types of figures, contexts, activities, and themes, as well as their general presentation and treatment. A principal question to keep in mind as we survey pictorial material for basic elements is, what can we learn from these images about the way indigenous people viewed the historically unprecedented landing of the European strangers, their seizure of power, and their introduction of a new faith, polity, society, and economy? How did they incorporate all of this into their mind-set and express it in their most familiar medium of nonverbal communication?

It would be ideal to have a chronological catalog of pictorial images, in order to determine how they evolved over time and to see how they interfaced with or were supplanted by textual descriptions. Unfortunately, many or most pictorial manuscripts are difficult to date with precision, as are colonial native texts. Yet we can still think of the pictorial tradition as the older of the two, even if friars gave the production of texts a large boost in certain population centers in the first generation of contact, so that some texts are older than many pictorials. For about a century the two forms continued side by side and overlapped. By the late sixteenth century, however, alphabetic literacy had spread to most central-area indigenous communities, making alphabetic writing the primary medium for native notaries and historians at that time (Glass 1975a, 15; and see Lockhart 1992, 330–31). Still, author-artists, whether notaries or other educated members of these communities, continued to produce pictorials and illustrated texts even into the nineteenth century.⁹

The survey of pictorial manuscripts in the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* includes 434 examples of such documents (Glass 1975a, 15), and many more have been identified in the decades since that census was compiled (see, for example, *Catálogo de Ilustraciones* 1979; Reyes García 1993). Fortunately, a large number of colonial pictorials have been published in whole or in part, some in wonderful facsimile editions. The extensive collection in the library of Pre-Columbian Studies at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., gave me an excellent starting point for surveying indigenous pictorial images of Spaniards, with various other repositories and interlibrary loan helping to broaden this base.¹⁰

The Spanish colonists referred to these pictorial records—usually made on European paper, sometimes on native bark paper or fabric, and less

often on animal skin—nearly indiscriminately as *pinturas* or *mapas*, among other names that we continue to use today. But in Spanish the preferred generic term for pictorials is now *códices*—in English, “codex” in the singular, “codices” in the plural.¹¹ Although we recognize only about a dozen as genuinely pre-Columbian today, large numbers of codices (loosely defined) survive from the post-invasion period. A majority of them record historical information of some kind. Among the more obvious pictorial histories are the genealogical histories, cartographic histories, and year-count annals (see Boone 1994b), but indigenous documents of all types can have historical references. A great many pictorial manuscripts include images of Spaniards, marking first the invasion and then their activities during the establishment and evolution of the colony. Any search for indigenous Mexican views of the Spanish invaders and settlers should therefore start with native colonial pictorial records.

THE INVADER

After scanning only a few codices, one quickly realizes that these manuscripts contain abundant images of assorted Spaniards involved in varied activities. Perhaps least surprising from our modern historical perspective, with its overemphasis on the European landing as the defining moment, is the presence of the Spanish combatant, dressed for war or participating in scenes of battle. In some cases he—Spaniards are nearly always pictured as male¹²—appears counterpoised against an indigenous warrior, usually also male,¹³ almost as if the Spaniard and the indigenous man are equally powerful, even though they are outfitted somewhat differently. This is the case, for example, in figure 2.2, from the *Azcatitlan Codex* (Smith 1968, 162, r66), which shows two figures of equal size face-to-face, gripping shields and swords beneath a European-style banner. In European symbolism, the banner would suggest a contest over dominion, which may be how the indigenous artist also saw it. Interestingly, the Spaniard’s shield seems to be adorned with the sun’s face, possibly a graphic representation of the appellation Children of the Sun, which at least one Nahuatl text from Oaxaca employs to refer to Spaniards (Terraciano and Sousa 1992, 45, 73, and n. 86, 87). The *Relación de Itztepexic*, from Oaxaca, also refers to the “new people who came dressed in iron . . . who were said to be sons of God or the Sun” (Acuña 1984, 2:249; my translation).¹⁴ Still, the image

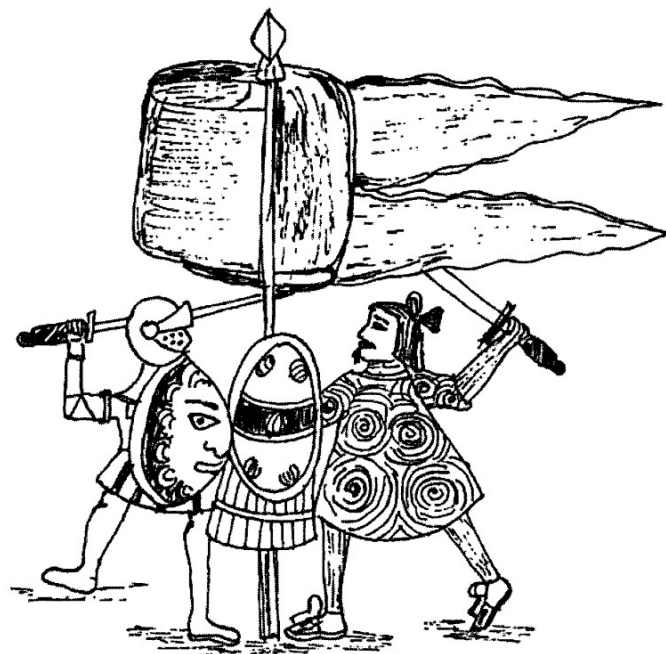


FIGURE 2.2. Battle scene. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from a leaf of the *Códice de Azcatitlan*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mexican Manuscript 59-64. Reproduced with permission.

from the *Azcatitlan Codex* paints the Spaniard no more godlike than his native opponent.

There are images, in contrast to this image of parity, in which indigenous warriors appear to have the advantage. In a depiction of a Mexica counterattack that followed a massacre, the native warriors occupy more space, are painted in color, and advance with strength and bravery, having cornered the Spanish opposition, which appears only in black and white (Cruzinski 1992, 46–67).

In other manuscripts, such as the *Códice Telleriano-Remensis*, from the Valley of Mexico in the 1560s, the foreign invader can appear more powerful and better prepared for war than the native warrior. In the scene associated with the year 1541 (*Codex Telleriano-Remensis* 1995, 95), the indigenous warrior is completely nude and therefore seems more vulnerable, at least according to a European reading.¹⁵ In the battle scene of 1521

depicted in the *Histoire Mexicaine*, or Mexican Manuscript number 40 in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (hereafter, BNF-MM40), a sixteenth-century chronicle from Mexico City, the figures of the Spaniards are a little larger and their armor is more detailed in comparison with the indigenous figures (fig. 2.3). The author-painter gave greater attention, at least, to the European invaders. But those interlopers were the fascinating creatures of an unknown culture, whose every detail could be remarkable, especially while it was something new and different. It is instructive that the Spanish fighters do not appear so disproportionately large as to be superhuman and are neither monsterlike nor godlike. The firearm is probably the most formidable element, yet in this scene it does not appear especially large or destructive.



FIGURE 2.3. Battle scene. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from a leaf of the *Histoire Mexicaine*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mexican Manuscript 40. Reproduced with permission.

The invaders' attire and weaponry, however, could sometimes have lent an impression of ferocity. Their metallic garb attracted considerable attention in native texts such as the *Florentine Codex* (Lockhart 1993, 96), which states, "Some of them came wearing iron all over, turned into iron beings, gleaming. So that they aroused great fear and were generally seen with fear and dread." The *Título C'oyoi* of Guatemala lists the impressive weapons of the newly arriving foreigners: "lances, battle axes, rifles, shields, and swords; all the chiefs were finished, killed by the metal weapons they used against them" (Carmack 1973, 302). In the pictorials they also carry deadly weapons, including firearms, swords, and lances. Yet while European arms could be daunting, so could the indigenous *macana*, a club with imbedded obsidian blades (fig. 2.3), described by the Spanish chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1963, 145) as having nearly completely severed a horse's head. Perhaps, in the indigenous view, the sword and the *macana* were complementary. In the *Florentine Codex*, furthermore, descriptions of the foreigners' weapons make them sound like works of art and beauty, possibly even coveted objects: "Their iron lances and halberds seemed to sparkle, and their iron swords were curved like a stream of water" (Lockhart 1993, 96).

Although there is some variation in the size and presentation of Spanish warriors from one manuscript to another, possibly indicating who had the alternating upper hand, for the most part the combatants appear to be men squaring off against other men, not humble humans fighting an impossible battle against all-powerful deities. The battles appear to be deadly serious, but a sense of abnormally heightened fear is difficult to find. The drama behind the Europeans' victory—proverbially achieved despite being vastly outnumbered, though in reality supported by thousands of indigenous allies—is appropriately absent.

The portrayal of Spaniards in the *Codex en Cruz* (fig. 2.1), which captures a memory of the expedition of Juan de Grijalva (Díaz 1963, 27–43), one of the voyages launched from Cuba that explored Yucatán and the Gulf of Mexico in 1518, prior to the Cortés expedition, intentionally or incidentally conveys the militarized nature of their "exploration" while reminding viewers of the central presence of the cross. It is an ominous marker to those of us today who know of the considerable and lasting consequences of transatlantic contact. Yet what is especially noteworthy is the ease with which this tiny image enters into the record, quietly and even

✓ inadvertently marking the transition from the so-called pre-Columbian epoch to the Spanish colonial, making scarcely a splash across the page. Of course, if the original version of this record was not made in the same year as the sighting, but rather in retrospect, then the impact of the first appearance of those unusual boats with strange men would have been diminished somewhat.

Still, the memory of a similar sighting does hold some prominence in written texts. The *Florentine Codex* (quoted in Gruzinski 1992, 38) recalls at mid-century how a scout witnessed a Spanish vessel for the first time: "There was a terrible thing in the bay, it was big and round, in the middle of the water, and went back and forth on the waves." Serge Gruzinski (1992, 38–39) reproduces a comparable event, attributed to 1517, from the *Codex Durán*, possibly the expedition of Francisco Hernández (Díaz 1963, 15–26), in which we can see an indigenous scout looking down upon the water from a treetop. But again, this picture conveys no fear; it is even less ominous than the quiet image of the *Codex en Cruz*. Here, one unarmed Spaniard sits alone in a small launch near a larger ship, pulling a fish out of the water with a pole while three other Spaniards, also unarmed, watch from the decks above. None of the Spaniards wears armor; all seem most concerned with getting their meal.

In some codices we do find scenes of the period of most intense conflict, which today can appear tragic and stir anti-imperialist sentiment. Bodies of indigenous people, cut up in pieces, lie strewn over the steps of pyramids or spread out over the ground, as we see in the *Durán Codex* from the sixteenth-century Valley of Mexico (Gruzinski 1992, 42), the *Lienzo de Analco* from the sixteenth-century Villa Alta, Oaxaca (Blom 1945, fig. 5), Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex* (Lockhart 1993, 50), the BNF-MM40 (fig. 2.3; Lehmann 1981, 345), and many scenes from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (*Antigüedades mexicanas* 1892, lám. 9, 14, etc.). But was this portrayal of carnage a desensitized formula for conquest that the native painters had long employed? A reading of terror behind segmented body parts is more European than indigenous.¹⁶ Further, for the Nahuas, the spilling of blood was viewed as an important means of feeding the earth and sustaining the heavens, keeping the cosmos in balance. This is not to say that survivors of the battle for power were not traumatized by their losses, as texts such as the *Cantares Mexicanos* (Bierhorst 1985, 151) attest: "Only sad flowers, sad songs, lie here in Mexico . . . it's misery, yes, it is felt . . . Tears are pour-

ing, teardrops are raining there in Tlatelolco . . . The smoke is rising, the haze is spreading."

Illustrations of executions by hanging or burning at the stake indigenous people who resisted Christian evangelization or fell back on former ways, such as that in the *Descripción de Tlaxcala* (fig. 2.4), present another dimension of the human drama of this colonization project. Here, Spanish officials and friars coldly point their fingers in authority and admonition as people with manacled hands helplessly burn or hang. Today the hanging cadavers, with their drooping heads, provoke sympathy as well as indignation for the extreme religious intolerance they represent.¹⁷ Shock-

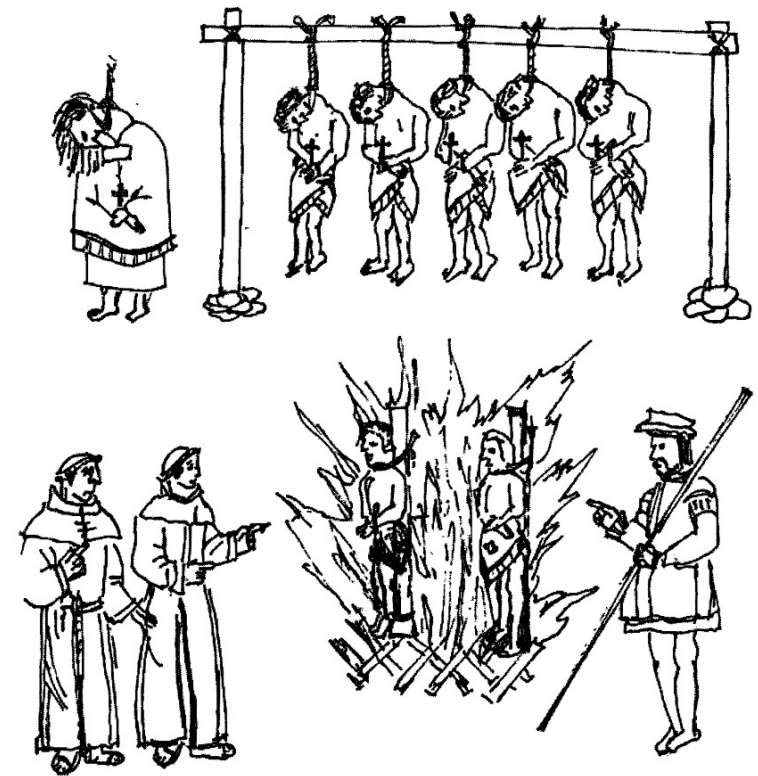


FIGURE 2.4. Executions for religious reasons, directed by Cortés and two friars. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Descripción de Tlaxcala* (MS Hunter 242), folio 242r. Reproduced with permission of Glasgow University Library, Department of Special Collections.

ing also is the image in the *Codex Coyoacán*—also known as the *Manuscrito del Aperreamiento*, or “Manuscript of the Dogging”—of a group of indigenous people in chains with a Spaniard allowing (or encouraging) his gigantic dog to attack one of them (fig. 2.5).¹⁸ The Nahuatl version of Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex* (Lockhart 1993, 80) completes the horror of such images in its description of the previously unknown dogs brought by the Spaniards, with their yellow eyes burning like fire, their tongues emerging from their fangs, and their coats spotted like the jaguar. Native dogs were nowhere near the size of the mastiffs, greyhounds, and wolfhounds that crossed the Atlantic (Varner and Varner 1983, xiv). The *Florentine Codex*’s description of horses, neighing, sweating, and thunderously pounding the ground (Lockhart 1993, 8), gives the same impression of fright, at least in depictions of the earliest encounters.

Although we have texts that help us interpret some images, in many of these scenes that are so disturbing from a modern perspective we do not know the full intention of the author-painter or whether an indigenous observer of that period would have seen in them a sad, an angry, or a cautionary portrait. An indignant artist, for instance, might have wanted to preserve a memory of an injustice in the loss of life. Another artist might have wanted to show his indigenous audience images of Inquisition-like executions as a somber warning about what could happen to those who did not comply with new laws and regulations. Still other painters, recalling their

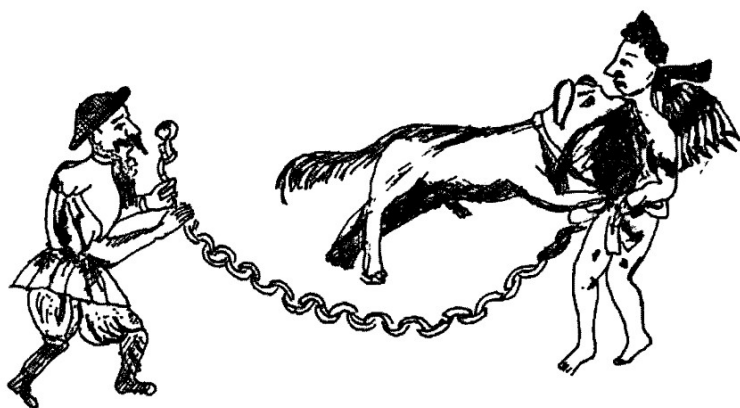


FIGURE 2.5. A dogging. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Manuscrito del Aperreamiento*, Bibliotheque Nationale de France. Reproduced with permission.

community’s warriors who fought alongside the Spaniards, could conceivably have taken pride in presenting an enemy indigenous group in a weak or defeated position as their own people gloated from behind the scenes.

In codices from the region of Tlaxcala, among a few other regions,¹⁹ the European invaders turn up forming alliances with indigenous communities and fighting with these allies at their side. Or rather, the Spaniards are the allies of the indigenous warriors. This relationship, accordingly, demonstrates a positive attitude toward the Spaniards and, by extension, their plan for colonizing Mexico—an attitude often formed after some period of resistance and perhaps regretted by some indigenous groups or individuals as time went by. Gordon Brotherston (1995, 36) reminds us that bloody battles took place on the eastern frontier of Tlaxcala, as we see in the *Códice de Huamantla*, which is reproduced in his book. Charles Gibson (1952, 18–20) also speaks of the initial resistance in Tlaxcala. Some leaders, such as Axayacatl Xicotencatl, wanted to break the alliance with the invaders, and in modern Tlaxcala people still celebrate the memory of the young Xicotencatl, who was executed in 1521 for his opposition to the Spaniards.²⁰ But in the majority of codices from all over Mexico, a certain amount of respect seems to be accorded the ally or the worthy opponent, embodied in the European victor.

Just as Western histories dwell on the movers and shakers, the omnipresent individual European combatant in the codices is none other than the *capitán*, the captain of the *entrada*, or expedition, later the *Marqués del Valle*, a title attached to his dominion—Hernando Cortés. He appears nothing like the hunchback with inflamed knees and weak chin of Diego Rivera’s mural on the balcony of the National Palace in Mexico City today, a portrait that makes Rivera’s disdain for the interloper obvious (see Pellicer and Carillo Azpeitia 1985, 228). The Cortés of the codices has no physical defects. He is a central figure of authority. He frequently meets with the most eminent indigenous lords. It may be that for the author-painters, the presence of the historical figure of Cortés lent importance to documents in which he appeared.²¹ He commonly sits on a curule chair, which indigenous painters quickly recognized as the Europeans’ seat of authority. He rides a horse, walks with a staff of authority in his hand, or stands pointing his finger (fig. 2.6).²² The pictorial tradition reserves many of these same actions and iconographs for indigenous dignitaries, indirectly conveying to Cortés the authority or status they typically enjoyed.

FIGURE 2.6. The arrival of Cortés in 1519. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the photograph of the *Tira de Tepechpan* (LC-USZ9-317) in the photographic collection of Mexican Indian Pictorial Documents, Archive of Hispanic Culture, Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and the photograph published in Boban 1891, 243-73.



Many times the expedition leader appears in the company of the indigenous woman baptized as “doña Marina.” Their relationship may provide clues to the way the indigenous author-artists meant to portray Cortés. In figure 2.7 we see her quite close to the *marqués*, speaking and gesticulating with authority. As her title of nobility indicates, doña Marina (here, typically called “Malintzin,” the Nahuatlized and reverential form of Marina)²³ enjoyed some status among both indigenous groups and the members of the Cortés expedition, even though she had been victimized by her own family and then lived for a time as a slave in an indigenous community (Karttunen 1994; 1997). Once the Spaniards recognized her unusual linguistic abilities, she served as one of the expedition’s principal interpreters and informants. She also bore a child by Cortés, taking a prominent if unfair place in subsequent nationalistic histories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as Mexico’s Benedict Arnold and a whore—but also as one of the mothers of mestizaje.

The codices completely ignore Malintzin’s motherhood and focus on her interpreting. Interpreting involves two-way communication, of course, yet because of her presence in the Spanish camp—originally, at least, not a fate of her own choosing—her principal job was to obtain and disseminate information for the invaders. More specifically, she had to work for Cortés. She was always at his side and, intentionally or not, may have strate-

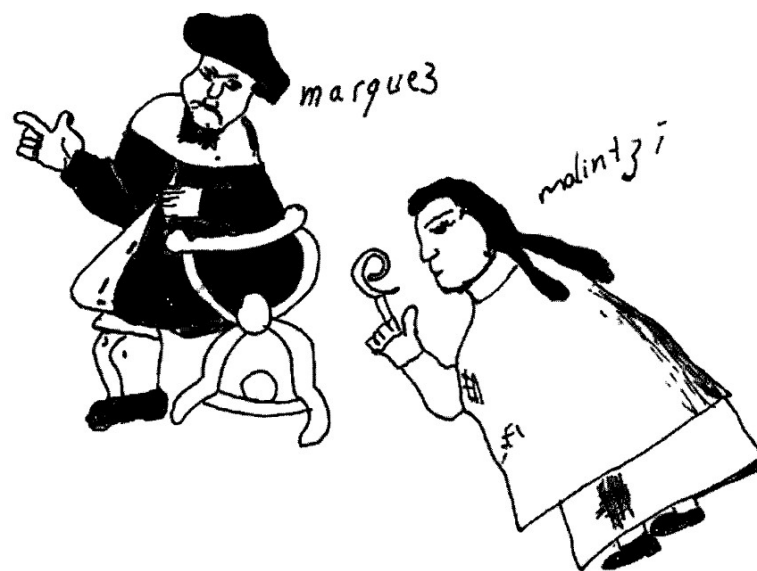


FIGURE 2.7. Cortés and Malintzin, or doña Marina. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Mapa de San Antonio Tepetlan* in the American Museum of Natural History. Reproduced with permission.

gically advanced his effort to seize power. She made his speeches intelligible to indigenous observers and audiences while secondarily conveying their messages back to him.

That she was more his voice than their voice becomes evident when we find that some indigenous people called both Marina and Cortés by the same name—hers. Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1963, 172) wrote that the indigenous people who were just getting to know Cortés originally called him “Marina’s Captain” (which would have been *Malintzin ycapitan*), but this got shortened to just Malintzin, or “Malinche” as Díaz wrote it. He also noted how another Spaniard, who went everywhere with Marina trying to learn Nahuatl, also came to be called Malinche. It is interesting that she was the referent in both these cases; in the indigenous perspective, she lent her identity to or shared it with these men.

Pictorial images of Malintzin place her in close proximity to Cortés (fig. 2.7).²⁴ Sometimes one of the two figures stands in front, more prominent than the other; it is not always clear who is the auxiliary.²⁵ Perhaps there is a certain pairing and complementarity of the two figures in the

indigenous reading. The alliance Cortés forged with this woman (whether or not with her consent) gave him entree into the indigenous world and probably diminished his difference or strangeness in the indigenous viewpoint. She also helped him overcome the considerable barrier that language differences can create between peoples, a barrier that plays a part in the “othering” process.

ECCLESIASTICS

Spanish combatants turn up in the codices not just in battle scenes but also in religious settings, helping to spread the Christian faith. The late colonial *Mapa de Cuauhtlantzinco* (Starr 1898, nos. 12, 13, 12a, 13a; Ojeda Díaz 1985, Fragment 8) provides numerous examples. In one scene (fig. 2.8), Spaniards dressed in armor assist a friar who is administering the sacrament of baptism to some indigenous people in a small community near Cholula. One armored figure stands behind the friar, holding the cross, while the other kneels in front, extending the baptismal font to pro-



FIGURE 2.8. Baptism scene. Sketch by Gabriela Quiñones, based on the copy of the *Mapa de Cuauhtlantzinco* held in the Latin American Library, Tulane University. Reproduced with permission.

trate neophytes. The artist or artists who made these paintings were well versed in European stylistics and Christian ideals. They had also embraced the elevated evangelical motive some Spanish chroniclers accorded the *entrada* in their own narratives, as we will see in chapter 3.

Ecclesiastics, whether regular or secular, appear with frequency in the pictorials, a frequency that suggests importance and possibly respect. Only rarely do the manuscripts attach an obvious negative connotation to the portrait of an ecclesiastic.²⁶ In some cases we find a preference for a certain order, such as the Franciscans. They were the first of the three most prominent orders to arrive in the 1520s and 1530s, and together with the Dominicans and Augustinians, they dominated the Christian presence in indigenous communities for many decades (Sell 1992, 159, 170). Georges Baudot (1995, 450) sees the Franciscans as also having taken an especially prominent stance in support of certain “institutions of pre-Hispanic native society.” In the *Códice de San Juan Teotihuacán* (*Los códices de México* 1979, 46–47), from about 1557, indigenous people show their resistance to the establishment of the Augustinians. Sometimes, however, what appeared to be a preference for or against a particular order was actually more an attempt to gain local control over changes imposed from outside the community.

The highest clergy generally enjoy an exalted position in the pictorials. Annals announce the arrivals (and later, deaths) of bishops or archbishops in the capital, their representations filed under the appropriate pre-Columbian year signs. Their comings and goings, heralded as occasions for important observations or celebrations in the Spanish community, take precedence over their activities; perhaps the daily routines of high ecclesiastics were not significant or remained something of a mystery in the native view.²⁷ Similarly, these portraits rarely convey individual identity in a precise manner (unless the images are glossed), but ever present are emblematic accouterments such as the scepter, miter, and vestment that clarify the figures’ legitimacy and presiding role (fig. 2.9).²⁸

Annals of a more textual nature similarly pay notable attention to representatives of the church. When the arrival of a bishop represents the only event worth mentioning for a certain year, we can get the impression that this was viewed as noteworthy—and more important than any event taking place solely in the indigenous world. (Entries can read “nothing happened” in a given year, or they might mention two to three events.) The

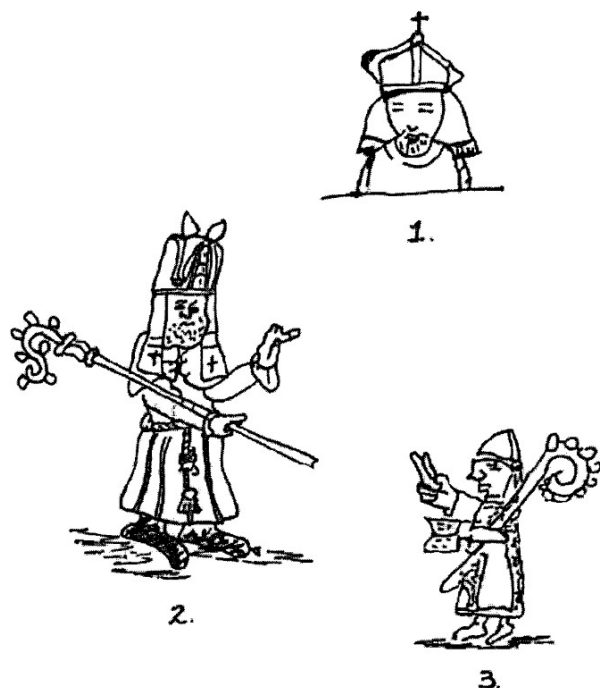


FIGURE 2.9. Bishops and archbishops. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from small portions of leaves in (1) the *Histoire Mexicaine*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mexican Manuscript 40, folio 17v; (2) the *Códice Telleriano-Remensis*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mexican Manuscript 385; and (3) the *Codex Aubin*, Add. MSS. 31219, folio 49r, British Museum. Reproduced with permission.

Anales de Tlaxcala, 1519-1720, for instance, have this entry for 1529: "11 House year. This is when the bishop of Mexico City, don fray Juan de Zumárraga, arrived."²⁹ He has a name and a geographic association, and he graced the land with his presence; either nothing more was known about him or nothing more seemed worth recording in the typically economical prose of many of these manuscripts.³⁰

In contrast, the friars and secular priests mentioned in the annals enjoy greater agency. They actually visited the indigenous communities and penetrated local life in an increasingly concerted manner. The Tlaxcalan annals state: "1523. 5 Reed year. This was when the friars arrived, and the houses of the devils were torn down" (obviously the author had already been

instructed in the new Christian vocabulary for describing indigenous divinities).³¹ In the pictorials, too, priests are busy in evangelical activities, setting up crosses, baptizing local people, and leading prayer (fig. 2.10).³² In the *Codex Yanhuítlan*, from Nochistlán, Oaxaca, in the 1550s, the largest figure is a Dominican friar (fig. 2.11; see also Prem 1974, 731v). Here we see him engaged in another popular exercise, sitting at a desk with quill in hand, possibly holding an audience with or writing on behalf of the much smaller indigenous lords standing to the side of and behind him. The civil authorities from Spain who appear elsewhere in this document are not quite as diminutive as the indigenous lords, but neither are they as prominent as the friar (*Códice de Yanhuítlan* 1940, lám. 8, 19).



CIVIL AND ECONOMIC FIGURES

In general, however, Spanish civil authorities do hold conspicuous places in the codices. For the authors of these documents, the most illustrious king of Spain was Charles V, who governed when the Europeans arrived in Mexico and continued in power until the middle

FIGURE 2.10. Friar with a cross. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from part of the *MATRÍCULA DE HUEJOTZINCO*, 731v, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mexican Manuscript 387. Reproduced with permission.

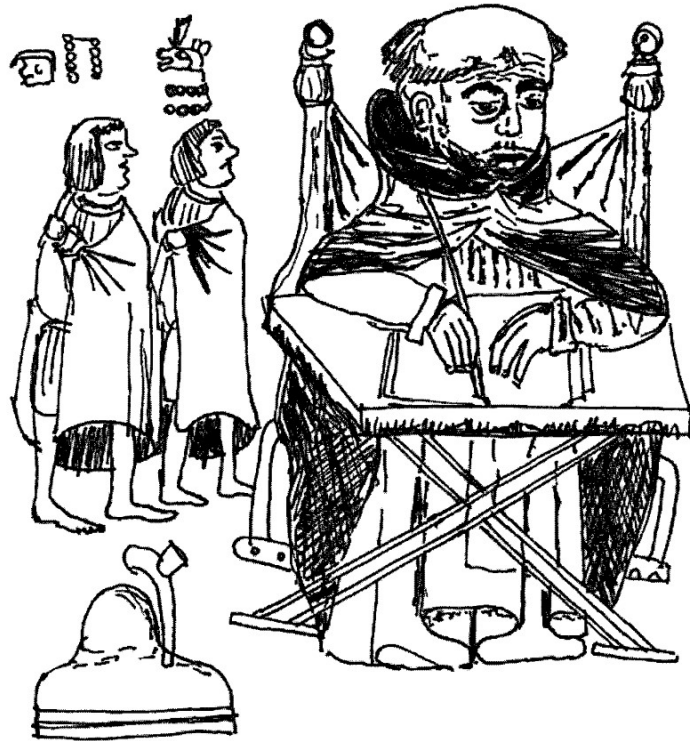


FIGURE 2.11. Dominican friar. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from part of the *Códice de Yanhuítlan*, Academia de las Bellas Artes, Puebla. Reproduced with permission.

of the sixteenth century. In at least three scenes, Charles V—someone who never visited the Americas—is shown receiving various caciques, recognizing their local authority and the territory of their pueblos.³³

Those who indeed arrived in Mexico were the viceroys, highest colonial representatives of the king. Indigenous annals announce their appearances and departures just as they announce those of bishops and archbishops. Annals also highlight some of the viceroys' major pronouncements. In the text of the *Codex Aubin* we learn of the viceroy's dispatching an expedition to Florida; a small figure of the viceroy or perhaps the expedition leader appears at the right of the text (fig. 2.12). The two first viceroys of Mexico, don Antonio de Mendoza (1535–49) and don Luis



FIGURE 2.12. Viceroy don Luis de Velasco (the elder). Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Códice Aubin*, Add. MSS. 31219, folio 51v, British Museum. Reproduced with permission.

de Velasco, who arrived in 1550 and governed until his death in 1564, play a notable role in various activities represented in the codices (fig. 2.13).³⁴ Often they participate personally in meetings with members of the indigenous nobility in the pueblos (figs. 2.14, 2.15). We know from the *Tlaxcalan Actas* (Lockhart, Berdan, and Anderson 1986, 16), for instance, that such visits were not outside their purview and occurred on various occasions. The

town prepared special feasts for these official visits. Pueblo delegations also made calls upon the



FIGURE 2.13. Viceroy don Antonio de Mendoza. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Códice Telleriano-Remensis*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mexican Manuscript 385, folio 44v. Reproduced with permission.

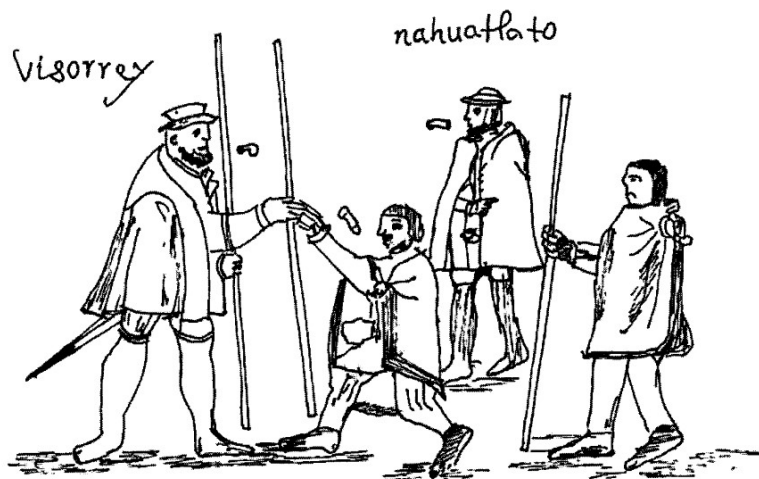


FIGURE 2.14. Viceroy with indigenous nobles and interpreter. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from folio 471v of the *Códice Osuna*, Biblioteca Nacional de España. Reproduced with permission.

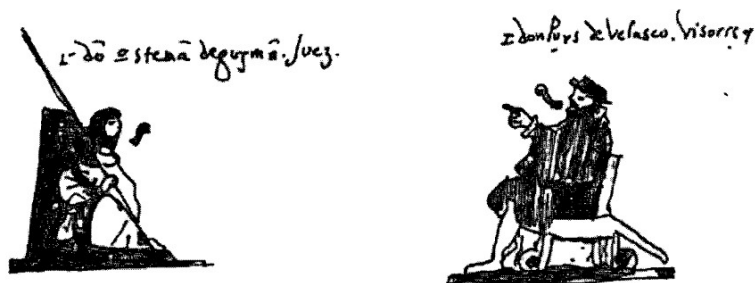


FIGURE 2.15. Viceroy Velasco (the elder) with the indigenous judge don Esteban de Guzmán. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Códice Osuna*, Biblioteca Nacional de España. Reproduced with permission.

viceroys in Mexico City. In the primordial titles of the later viceregal period—including the Techialoyan codices—Mendoza and Velasco are also “favorites,” as we will see in chapter 5 (Lockhart 1991, 59–60; and see Robertson and Robertson 1975, *passim*).³⁵

The regularity of Mendoza’s and Velasco’s presence in pictorials and texts alike indicates some favoritism for their memory, giving the impres-

sion that these viceroys, in contrast to others, better served the interests of the indigenous communities. But these men held office at a crucial time and devised policies that necessarily affected the native population, which was dwindling rapidly. A mercenary view would be that such demographic losses robbed the royal treasury of tribute and colonists of laborers. At any rate, in response, these viceroys pronounced edicts that helped shore up indigenous communities’ territorial holdings and semiautonomous municipal governments. The result is that their exalted signatures appear liberally sprinkled throughout whatever early sixteenth-century Spanish-sponsored documents towns could obtain and preserve. From there, the early viceroys’ names became legendary in oral tradition, and their portraits regularly made their way into local pictorial and indigenous-language histories.

Provincial authorities known as *corregidores* and *alcaldes mayores*, along with judges of the high court, also surface in the pueblos, acting in a variety of capacities (figs. 2.16–2.18). *Corregidores* and *alcaldes mayores* became the intermediaries between indigenous communities and the Spanish royal government by the second generation. They received tribute and managed labor arrangements, passed down pronouncements from higher governmental

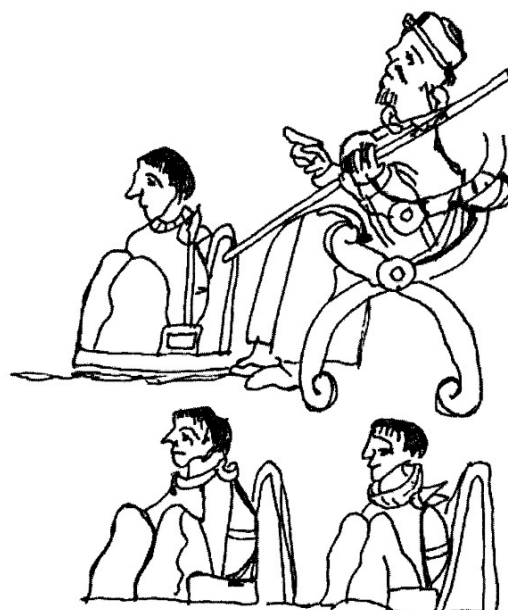


FIGURE 2.16. *Corregidor* with indigenous nobles. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the reproduction of the *Códice de Xicotepec* (1995, 153). Reproduced with permission of the Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico.

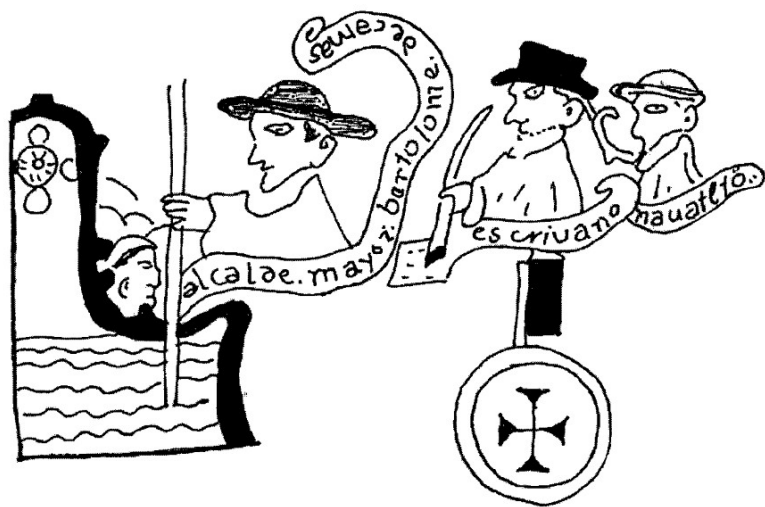


FIGURE 2.17. *Alcalde mayor*, notary, and interpreter. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Códice Sierra* (1933, appendix facsimile 15). Reproduced with permission of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.



FIGURE 2.18. *Oidor* of the *audiencia* (seated). Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Histoire Mexicaine*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mexican Manuscript 40, folio 18v. Reproduced with permission.

authorities, and acted in a judicial capacity. After originally teaching indigenous *cabildos* (town councils) some of the functions of European councils, by mid-century *corregidores* usually attended meetings only during annual council elections, and *cabildos* became increasingly independent (Lockhart, Berdan, and Anderson 1986, 15–16).³⁶

The *corregidor* in the *Códice de Xicotepec* (fig. 2.16) sits with three indigenous lords, he in his curule chair and they on their indigenous seats of authority, all facing the same direction and displaying serious countenances. But the figure of the *corregidor* is the more commanding of the four, not only because he is higher off the ground but also because the artist gave him a somewhat larger scale, elevating his consequence. Nothing in his image necessarily implies tyranny, in contrast with an image from the *Códice Azoyú I*, from the late sixteenth century in what is now the state of Guerrero. There we find an example of a *corregidor* or *alcalde mayor* “who has the staff of authority and orders torture by the stocks, boiling water, hangings, and chains for the indigenous people who have opposed his mandates,” according to Constanza Vega (1991, 87), who identifies in his actions the image of an oppressor.³⁷

Encomenderos appear in some pictorial manuscripts. These holders of grants enabling access to tribute and labor from a set group of indigenous persons were competitors of the provincial authorities and clergy in the pursuit of local influence, and indigenous author-painters apparently felt little affection for them. According to Charles Gibson (1964, 78), the *encomenderos* of the first generation greatly abused their power, demanding excessive labor and exacting heavy taxes. It follows that we find startling images of them in the *Codex Kingsborough*, from the sixteenth-century region of Tetzaco (see *Memorial de los Indios de Tepetlaóztoc* 1992, 137), including a portrait of the *encomendero* Gonzalo de Salazar holding the decapitated head of an indigenous person and a portrayal of a man named “Antón” burning people at the stake (figs. 2.19, 2.20).³⁸ The *Codex Osuna*, from the basin of Mexico and Tula, Hidalgo, in the year 1565 (see Robertson 1994, pl. 35), seems to describe either *encomenderos* or their assistants. It shows them demarcating a reduced plot of land for an indigenous family and directing the work of indigenous people in agriculture and in textile sweatshops (figs. 2.21, 2.22), actions that would have been unpopular with most indigenous audiences. This codex represents other complaints, as well, against the obligations of tribute and labor for a judge and

for the viceroy.³⁹ In the *Códice de Yanhuítlán* (1940, lám. 9), some encomenderos or colonial officials oversee the extraction and delivery of gold dust by indigenous laborers. The painters make no obvious commentaries against these Spaniards, but they portray them wearing armor and standing over the workers, seemingly impatient for the gold.

SPANISH MATERIAL CULTURE

Many times, if their portraits are not glossed, we find it necessary to identify colonial authorities or other Spaniards by their dress or other items of material culture that make up parts of the scenes in which they appear. In the beginning, unknown objects caught the author-artists' attention, probably entering into the pictorials in delightful detail almost as curiosities. Quickly, however, animals and effects such as tables, ships, flags, weapons, and clothing the Spaniards wore came to represent the identity of the new power holders in the colonial system. The props formed integral parts of the portraits and gradually took on lives of their own, becoming potential indicators of indigenous attitudes toward at least certain aspects of the intruding culture.

As in so many other examples of transatlantic encounters, European goods



FIGURE 2.19. The *encomendero* Gonzalo de Salazar holding a decapitated head. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Codex Kingsborough* (1912).



FIGURE 2.20. "Antón" burning four indigenous men. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Codex Kingsborough* (1912).



FIGURE 2.21. Enclosing indigenous lands. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from folio 469v of the *Códice Osuna*, Biblioteca Nacional de España. Reproduced with permission.

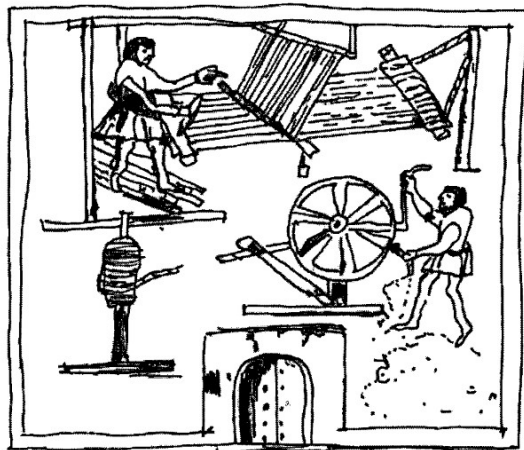


FIGURE 2.22. Directing agricultural and textile labor. Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from folio 50ov of the *Códice Osuna*, Biblioteca Nacional de España. Reproduced with permission.

formed the basis of relationships between the intruders and native groups (Pendergast 1993, 116, 117). Spaniards typically bore gifts or goods to exchange with indigenous people they would meet on their expeditions, anticipating from earlier experiences that the locals would attach value to such things as necklaces and metal tools. The *Annals of Quauhtitlan* (Lockhart 1993, 281) pay special attention to the gifts Moctezuma received in greeting “the Christians”: “a green frock; two capes, one black and one red; two pairs of footwear, shoes; a knife; a hat; a cap; a woolen cloth; a cup; and some beads.” If local people resented some things about the intruding culture, they still could look favorably upon the acquisition of certain new items of material culture. In short order their preferences for specific objects became clear. The rationale behind these preferences, however, requires some interpretation. For example, one indigenous noble, a don Gabriel Curi, received a license in 1592 to carry a sword, wear Spanish clothing, and ride a horse (Colín 1968, 78). Textual and pictorial sources alike provide evidence that caciques were acquiring and using these effects of the European colonists, apparently wishing to emulate their behavior and enjoy some of the corresponding status.⁴⁰

The native author-artists showed particular interest in the horse, an animal that is omnipresent in the codices, especially those of the sixteenth century (fig. 2.23).⁴¹ This creature, which originated in the Western Hemisphere but died out long before Europeans reintroduced it, quickly found a comfortable niche in its former habitat. Not that it was welcomed right off the boats with open arms. For some central Mexicans in the flashpoint of contact, it was a startling beast whose hooves made a thunderous sound—“As they went they made a beating, throbbing, and hoof-pounding like throwing stones”—and which made battling its riders a special challenge (*Florentine Codex*, Lockhart 1993, 110, 192). Searching to incorporate horses into their own mental catalog of fauna, the Nahuas called them “people-bearing deer” (Lockhart 1993, 160, 170). Whereas the *Codex en Cruz* depicts the first Spaniards as arriving by ship (fig. 2.1), the *Anales de Tula* (LC/MIPD photograph LC-USZ9-369-20) capture their momentous arrival with an ideographic representation of two horses and their riders. In the graphic images of the *Florentine Codex* (Lockhart 1993, 48–49), horses are numerous.

Pictorial artists and other indigenous observers soon became better acquainted with the horse, observing the way it carried important people

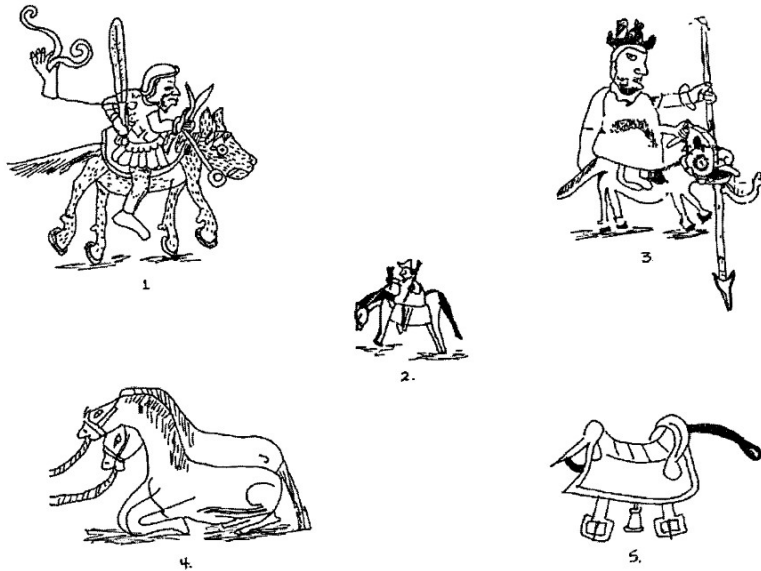


FIGURE 2.23. Horses and a saddle. Hand drawn by Gabriela Quiñones from (1) the *Códice Telleriano-Remensis*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mexican Manuscript 385, folio 44r; (2) the tracing of the *Lienzo de Coixtlahuaca no. 1* in the Latin American Library, Tulane University; (3) the photograph of the *Códice de Huamanila* (LC-USZ9-135-5) in the photographic collection of Mexican Indian Pictorial Documents, Archive of Hispanic Culture, Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; and (4, 5) the *Códice Sierra*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Reproduced with permission.

on its back, could help make light of labor, demanded a sizable price, required stables and large amounts of fodder, sometimes trampled cornfields, and required a whole array of leather and metal gear. Horses' considerable appetites sometimes placed a serious burden on the indigenous community. The *Codex Aubin* (Lockhart 1993, 276-77) contains an example of concern over fodder for "the deer of the gods" (*inmaçavan yn teteo*) following the massacre in Mexico City during the fiesta of Toxcatl; with supplies being scarce, horses were eating reed mats. The *Tlaxcalan Actas* (Lockhart, Berdan, and Anderson 1986, 39) show the town council conferring on the need to build a corral to house the recalcitrant "cattle, sheep, and horses caught eating the Tlaxcalans' crops." The *Actas* (16) also tell of plans to prepare stables and hay well in advance of the viceroy's visit in 1559.

It was not long before indigenous communities were making efforts to procure these animals for their own uses. At least some of the time, they encountered restrictions. When the town council of Tlaxcala wanted to purchase horses in 1550, one of its members had to go before the viceroy to obtain permission (Lockhart, Berdan, and Anderson 1986, 141). The community of Santa Catarina Texupan, of the Mixteca Baja in the modern state of Oaxaca, entered the purchase of two horses and two saddles in its beautifully illustrated records, which make up the *Códice Sierra* and span the years between 1550 and 1564 (1933, Facsimiles 19, 20, 38). We do not know whether they had to obtain a license for these purchases.

Individuals wanted to have horses, too, as we saw earlier in the case of don Gabriel Curi, who obtained the desired license. The 1579 testament of an indigenous leader of Cuernavaca provides another example with its impressive list of possessions, including a horse, a set of tackle, and eight saddles (Haskett 1988, 44).⁴² This man obviously had had considerable experience with horses and possibly mules, given the large number of saddles. Mule teams carried most of the freight around New Spain. Thus, as beasts of burden, horses had an attractive practical side in addition to their association with rank.

Riding a horse may have been one of the most coveted privileges for which caciques applied, but it was also the most expensive and therefore somewhat rare. It was less costly to purchase European garments. The acquisition of clothing perhaps offers a stronger indication of the desirability of emulating the power holders. Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican apparel presumably met the needs of the various societies prior to the arrival of Europeans, and so aesthetic value and status association more than practicality probably drove the market in imported fashions.

The construction of European clothing, however, did offer some differences that might have had a practical side. It was more form-fitting, and upper-body garments had sleeves (Anawalt 1981, 214). It may be that form-fitted apparel, if not too tight or binding, provided more rapid mobility than the draped fabrics of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican garments, which could cause people to trip. Tlatelolca women who entered into battle, for example, had to raise their indigenous skirts in order to give pursuit, according to the *Anales de Tlatelolco* (Lockhart 1993, 267).⁴³ It may also be that form-fitted apparel offered some comfort in the cooler seasons in the highlands. Certain imported fabrics or those made in the colony under

European direction, such as wool cloth for the highlands or silk for the lowlands, could have had a similar practical appeal for some individuals. In the fifteenth chapter of most sixteenth-century *relaciones geográficas*, or detailed descriptions of towns of New Spain, there are numerous references to the switch from native apparel (often simply loincloths plus woven garments and skins attached at the shoulder, neck, or chest) to Spanish garments (shirts, crude trousers, loose coats, and sometimes shoes and hats).⁴⁴

Priests may have encouraged people to cover their bodies more extensively, teaching them to associate nudity with demonic or shameful behavior. Shocked by indigenous people's tendency to wear fewer garments, Spaniards seem to have developed an exaggerated stereotype of the native American of ancient times as preferring to go about entirely or partially nude. The *relaciones geográficas* give away the colonial administrators' own discomfort with nudity in their frequent references to the way loincloths covered the "shameful" parts. The *Relación de Tezcoco* (Acuña 1985-86, 3:97) refers, for example, to a covering of the men's "shameful members" ("miembros vergonzosos"). The women of Tezcoco, according to the same *Relación* (98), were dressing almost as they had in pre-Columbian times, but "for modesty, they have added a white shawl" ("por honestidad, han añadido una cobija blanca"). Many Tezcocans had also shed their ancient *cutaras* (sandals?) for shoes.⁴⁵

Leather shoes offered more protection for the feet than, say, the henequen sandals that workers once wore in the mines of Taxco (see the *Relación de Minas de Tasco* of 1581, Acuña 1985-86, 2:127). Extracting ore was an extremely hazardous activity, and workers might have welcomed the new form of foot covering. But moving well beyond the concern for protection, one late colonial indigenous family of Cuernavaca, a town that provided laborers to Taxco, boasted the possession of "leather shoes with shiny buckles" (Haskett 1988, 45).

The shine on the buckles returns us to the importance of status. Clothing, as Tom Cummins (1991, 226 n. 13) has noted, was "a critical ethnic and social signifier" for the indigenous peoples of the Americas. One could argue this for other cultural contexts around the globe and throughout history, but it was especially true in the Western Hemisphere. The Nahuas, for instance, had a tradition in which they could put on the ceremonial garb of a deity and imbue themselves with "the power and agency of the

god impersonated" (Frank 1989, 201). Whether or not they saw divinity in the Spanish invaders, Nahuas may have considered the donning of European attire in this light. Their enthusiasm for wearing imported clothing was already apparent by 1528, only seven years after the Spaniards seized power, when the intruders legally forbade the practice except by licensed individuals (López Sarrelangue 1965, 119). Despite this edict, the practice continued and flourished. Obtaining a license was not difficult, especially for native elites. As Robert Haskett (1988, 45) suggests, officials may have seen in this situation a chance to "co-opt influential local Indian nobility and cement their loyalty as intermediaries in the colonial system." Spaniards may have largely left it to such intermediaries to prevent the lower strata of indigenous society from wearing such clothes and watering down the privilege it entailed.⁴⁶

Like clothing, headgear was always meaningful in pre-Columbian times and formed part of the finery that distinguished the higher social echelon. The turquoise diadem, or *xiuhuitzollí*, of the Aztecs was not only part of the essential garb of the emperors, but in the *Codex Mendoza* it serves as "an ideograph for *tecuhtli* (noble)" (Berdan and Anawalt 1997, 187). Fray Alonso de Molina's excellent sixteenth-century vocabulary translates *xiuhuitzollí* as a "corona real con piedras preciosas" (royal crown with precious stones) (Berdan and Anawalt 1997, 191 n. 70). Other circular head ornaments made from various substances were worn by indigenous authority figures across the hemisphere, and Europeans equated such items with their own crowns (see Axtell 1991, 18-19). The Maya captain Tecum, according to indigenous sources, wore "three crowns of gold, silver, diamonds and emeralds and of pearls" in his battle with Pedro de Alvarado (Bricker 1981, 40). It is no wonder that Europeans' hats and crowns captured the interest of indigenous people. They were ubiquitous, too; notice the way Spaniards wear something on their heads in virtually every one of our sample portraits. Many Spaniards in the *Florentine Codex* (Lockhart 1993, passim) have plumage coming out of their helmets and hats in a fashion not too distant from that of indigenous headdresses.⁴⁷

The native elites apparently understood the higher significance of crowns and concurred with their use being restricted to kings. The Nahuas saw their own highest nobles as deserving of this special privilege. Accordingly, we find caciques wearing crowns in the *Mapa de Chalchihuapan* (Castro Morales 1969, fig. 3), the *Mapa de Cuauhtlantzinco* (Starr 1898, nos. 30,

31, 33), and the *Manta de Salamanca* (Reyes García 1993, 282). From these crowns plumes emerge, representing perhaps a slight indigenous innovation on the European form or an original combination.⁴⁸ These crowns would have had the double power of the feathered headdress, with its incumbent honors, and the metallic colonial wreath symbolizing sovereignty and distinction. The coincidence of forms may have been accidental, but the association was not lost on indigenous observers.⁴⁹ In Michoacán, P'urhépecha speakers gave the name *curitiecha* to the European friars who wore crowns of thorns. This was the same name they accorded their own priests, who also wore fiber wreaths on their heads (Craine and Reindorp 1970, 87–89).

Hats may strike us today as a far cry from crowns, being made from less valuable materials and enjoying far fewer social restrictions. Native American observers probably also recognized the broader distribution of hats in comparison with crowns, yet they could have held both in special regard, putting crowns and hats into the general category of circular headgear to be donned by people of significance. In Michoacán, one name for the Spaniards was *acacecha*, meaning “people who wear caps and hats” (Lunenfeld 1991, 270), revealing the strong, early association between the newcomers and their headgear.⁵⁰ As with crowns, caciques were eager to wear hats. Some proudly sport hats in the *Códice Huapeán* (LC/MIPD photograph LC-USZ9-430-2), for example. In the sixteenth-century relaciones geográficas we also find references to *sombreros* (felt or straw hats?) as part of the new apparel adopted by individuals in indigenous communities (see the *Relación de Tuzantla* of 1579; Acuña 1985–86, 2:157).

Just as clothing and headgear carried powerful connotations of status for both Europeans and indigenous people, so, too, did furniture. For Spanish colonial officials the seat of choice was the wooden curule chair with heavy, curved legs (figs. 2.16, 2.18, 2.24). Once a throne mounted on a chariot and later a chair reserved only for the top echelon of officials in ancient Rome, in sixteenth-century New Spain the curule chair still enjoyed a privileged association with the elite members of the colonial world. For their part, indigenous lords had special mats, short stools, and the like, upon which to rest and from which to make pronouncements.⁵¹ Figure 2.15 depicts an interesting pairing of a native governor and a viceroy, sitting face-to-face in a complementary fashion on their respective seats of authority. Figure 2.16, although less balanced, does give each of the figures of



FIGURE 2.24. Notary, friar, and *corregidor* (left to right). Tracing by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Códice de Cuertlaxcohuapan*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Reproduced with permission.

importance his corresponding seat. Any omission of such crucial status indicators would have been a considerable oversight.

As with other symbols of power, caciques felt it appropriate for them to adopt the curule chair, substituting it for their own thrones. The Nahuas' *icpalli*, or reed seat with backrest, was a clear symbol of power and authority.⁵² Sometimes it was adorned with revered animal skins and feathers (Berdan and Anawalt 1997, 205). In the genealogical *Codex Valeriano*, from central Mexico in 1574 (LC/MIPD photograph LC-USZ9-383-1), we have a clear example of how the curule chair had taken the place of the *icpalli* over the generations. Some additional examples of caciques sitting on curule chairs include those in the *Títulos de Tocuaro*, Michoacán, from the same collection of photographs (LC-USZ9-357-1), the *Tira de Tepechpan* (notice also don Diego Yoloxochitl with his crown; LC-USZ9-317), the *Códice de Tlatelolco* (1948), the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (Reyes García 1993, 279), the *Códice Azoyú I* (1991, 88, lám. 20, and folio 38 of the facsimile), and the Sochtepec maps of 1579 (Mundy 1996, 163).⁵³ In the *Códice Sierra* (1933, facsimile 20), the indigenous community purchases a curule chair.

As it appears in the codices, the curule seat seems to have been very portable. It may have been possible in some examples to collapse the intersecting wooden legs for easy transport. Perhaps this increased the chair's visibility for indigenous artists and other observers as it was carried from town to town so that officials such as *corregidores* did not have to sit on the ground. At any rate, in the codices it typically stands in an open space, often in an outdoor setting, and not necessarily paired with a table.

But the wooden table, so useful for making and displaying large manuscripts—whether canvases, strips, screenfolds, or other popular forms—became another object of Spanish material culture one often finds at the center of an indigenous pictorial history. Like the curule seat, it could be set up in the open air, in the midst of a sizable gathering of people. Typically, men are pictured standing around it, whereas women sit on the ground with their legs tucked under them.⁵⁴ The table with documents spread out on top materializes in a scene in the *Codex Cuetlaxcohuapan* from sixteenth-century Puebla (*Los códices de México* 1979, 53), opposite a friar in the Techialoyan codex from Atlapolco, central Mexico, in the late viceregal period (*Handbook of Middle American Indians* 1975, vol. 14, fig. 90), and solely with indigenous people in the eighteenth-century *Pintura de San Lucas Tecopilco* from the region of Tlaxcala (Reyes García 1993, 255).⁵⁵

European and Mesoamerican cultures alike placed enormous value on writing. Manuscripts and documents regularly grace the tables or appear in the hands of Spanish ecclesiastics (fig. 2.11), officials (fig. 2.18), or notaries (figs. 2.17, 2.24) and those of indigenous nobles. A vicar of the late viceregal period once remarked cynically about the Nahuas, “They think that, with a piece of writing, a point is won” (AGN T, vol. 1530, file 5, 13v). He apparently did not see this as a borrowed trait, probably knowing of the ancient written traditions of Mesoamerica. But it was a remark that could have been made of the Spaniards, too, who documented everything.

Spanish culture also had its vitally important pictorial imagery, which could be seen all over the colony. One notable example is the coats of arms the colonists carried on banners or with which they adorned their architecture (fig. 2.25). Such imagery permeates the portraits of Spaniards and records of their activities made by indigenous artists. It appears in scenes of battles and baptisms alike. It is no wonder. Besides carrying their crests around with them, Spaniards carved them in stone in prominent places where native people could regularly observe them. Hacienda workers from indigenous communities might gaze upon Spanish family crests every day as they entered the estate compounds (see Romero de Terreros 1956, 281); trips to the cities similarly brought them face-to-face with escutcheons emblazoned on urban architecture. Members of the native elite who had a Spanish education would also have observed books bearing images of



FIGURE 2.25. Coat of arms displayed on architecture, Puebla, Mexico. Photograph by Stephanie Wood.

heraldry. Commoners and nobles alike were surely familiar with colonial Spanish coins decorated with castles such as those from the royal coat of arms of Castile (see Mundy 1996, 49).

Coats of arms represent one of the most interesting and instructive symbols of power that indigenous people adopted and modified (fig. 2.26; Haskett 1996). Modifications included the infusion of the armorial structure with encoded indigenous images, as we will see in chapter 4. By the late viceregal period, the coat of arms had, ironically, become a shield used to protect the indigenous community from the intruders,⁵⁶ as the following passage from the “Municipal Codex” of Cuernavaca suggests (Wood 1991, 176; and see Haskett 1996): “The King, our lord, granted us [the right] to make this [coat of] arms; it is our strength and our assistance. It will be made so we can free ourselves of the Spaniards, so they will not dishonor us or take something from us, nor will our priests afflict us.”

Some modern observers will see in all these examples of acquired material culture a process of gradual Hispanicization of the indigenous people. Portraits of the exotic beings who came ashore unexpectedly in the first years of the sixteenth century never made them stand out like sore



FIGURE 2.26. Coats of arms. Tracings made by Gabriela Quiñones from the *Título de Totoncapán* (left), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and folio 4r of the *Códice Techialoyan de Xonacatlan*, Latin American Library, Tulane University. Reproduced with permission.

thumbs but did show them as identifiably different from the indigenous elites, in part because of the trappings that came with them—the armor, the horses, the hats, and the banners. Gradually, however, the native author-artists reveal the transfer of such symbolic attributes to the indigenous nobility. The question remains whether these individual nobles would have interpreted their own identity as having become increasingly Spanish. At least two considerations come into play: whether they desired such an identity and whether they could have gotten away with it if they had. Spanish officials and colonists living in that period would have been quick to point out the remaining, crucial differences, anxious to distinguish themselves from the indigenous other. One colonial administrator noted critically that indigenous people in Taxco were wearing the dress of the Spaniard, “although imperfectly” (“aunque imperfectamente”) (Acuña 1985–86, 2:127). According to Sahagún, Spanish colonists of the late sixteenth century mocked indigenous people who imitated them. In 1579 he therefore urged the Nahuas “not to wear shirts . . . knee pants . . . hats . . . shoes” (cited in Sell 1992, 167).

The enthusiasm for such articles among indigenous commoners and nobles alike attests to their general disregard for Spanish ridicule and their relentless pursuit of avenues to power or status. Of course, it was only the nobles who might try to pass as Spanish on the rare occasions when this was possible or when it behooved them to do so, and usually they were more than content to flaunt their position at the pinnacle of native society. After all, indigenous nobles could enjoy higher status in some respects than commoner Spaniards, in that they could attach *don* and *doña* to their names and enjoy access to tribute and labor, among other privileges.

The transfer of material culture from the intruders to the locals is testimony to the latter’s ability to make the foreign comprehensible, finding parallels in the different cultures. Our survey of portraits of Spaniards in the codices also suggests that the author-artists wove the newcomers into their tapestry of the world fairly seamlessly. Although portraits are about exteriors and are not very revealing of interiors—whether the thought processes or feelings of either Spaniards or indigenous painters—a picture can still convey a great deal. These European men, though different, were not obviously hideous, weird, or despised. They were portrayed not as deities or monsters but as humans.

Not all were necessarily appreciated, however, or viewed equally. Monarchs, viceroys, the highest colonial authorities, and ecclesiastics appear either neutrally portrayed or respected. The most negative portrayals may prove to be those of encomenderos and the Spanish officials who gradually took their places as labor managers and tribute collectors, making economic demands on the communities or interfering in local decision making. It may be that priests’ portraits, if surveyed more comprehensively, would prove to contain a certain percentage of negative images, too. In pueblos’ numerous complaints against priests in the eighteenth century, according to William Taylor (1996, 246), “the common terms of opprobrium were cheerless and blunt: ‘avarice,’ ‘servitude,’ and ‘tyranny.’” Although the “tagwords usually employed in modern descriptions” of the Spanish colonizers, “‘cruel’ and the like,” (Lockhart 1993, 15), do not enter into the corpus of early texts we have surveyed and only rarely might be attached to the pictorial images, such terms would apply to the anti-Spanish narrative that forms the subject of the next chapter.

3

A Cry from the Mountains

THE AJUSCO NARRATIVE

They want to make themselves owners of our lands and all that is our wealth.

FUNDACIÓN DE SANTO
TOMÁS AXUCHCO, 1531;
AGN, T, VOL. 2676, FILE 4

From Santo Tomás Ajusco, a small community in the mountains south of Mexico City, formerly of the jurisdiction of Coyoacan, comes a fascinating manuscript with some anguished descriptions of the heat of battle and the early years after the Spanish invasion. Marcelo Díaz de Salas and Luis Reyes García (1970, 194–95) poetically describe the document as “a beautiful, although no less heartrending, complaint in the face of the plunder suffered,” and as “a cry, profound and impotent, from someone who now only wishes to save his life.” Its voice appears to be that of a local elder authority figure who is not at all happy with the Spanish invasion and emerging colonial domination. It speaks directly to a local, indigenous audience. Seemingly embraced over many generations, the Ajusco narrative certainly falls on sympathetic ears in the community today. Owing to all these features and more, it deserves serious attention.

The original, or oldest, version of this story has either vanished or is kept well hidden, away from public view.¹ Considering its early content, one would expect that the Ajusco narrative originally had a pictorial form that served as a prompt for the oral tradition. At any rate, someone in the community eventually wrote down that oral tradition in a Nahuatl-language alphabetic text of four leaves, and this was translated into Spanish in 1710 when a program of title verification (*composición*) swept the region.²

The Ajusco conquest account reads like a speech given by a *tlatoni* (Nahuatl for indigenous noble) or *teuctli* (indigenous lord), in this case a

Señor Tecpanecatí. His harrowing tale of the Spanish invasion still echoes through the community during public ceremonies. In the transfer of land documents during such a ceremony in 1994, one of the principal speakers quoted the Spanish translation of Tecpanecatí's narrative at length (figs. 3.1, 3.2). Showing further pride in the community's indigenous heritage and consciously linking it to the early nineteenth-century defeat of Spanish rule, the festival's queen, the “Señorita Independencia,” sang the national hymn in Nahuatl.

Tecpanecatí's first-person account opens with an indigenous calendrical date (the second day of the fourth month of *Taxcatl*) as well as a reference to the Christian year, 1531. He relates how at this time the indigenous lords are very upset because of what the Spaniards have done and are still doing, persecuting them for not coming forth with sufficient gold or gems, even killing some of them, shedding a great deal of blood. The Castilians are also abusing the lords' wives and daughters. In addi-

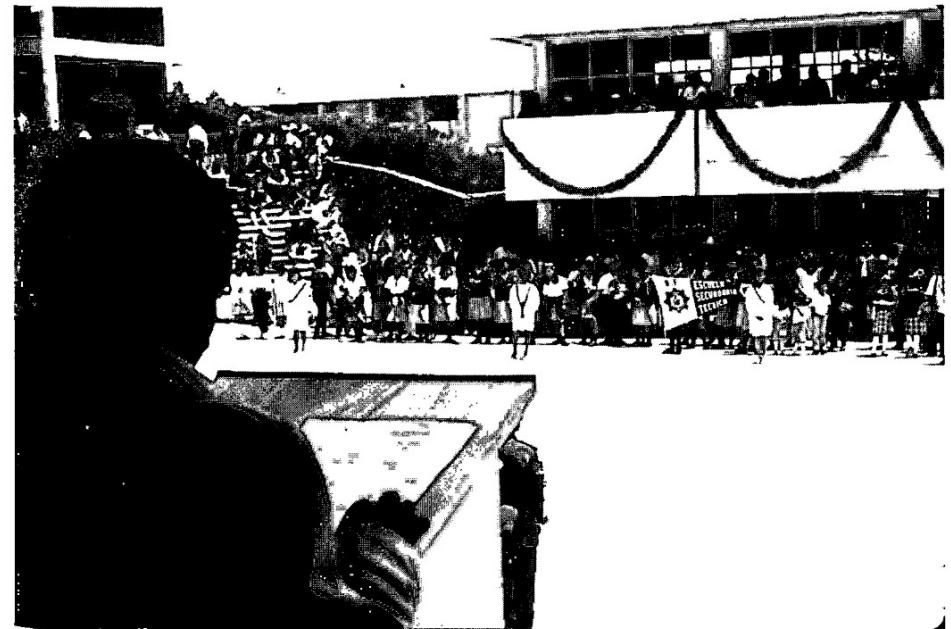


FIGURE 3.1. Señor Tecpanecatí's speech read to the community of Ajusco, May 22, 1994. Photograph by Stephanie Wood.



FIGURE 3.2. Transfer of guardianship of Ajusco's *títulos*, May 22, 1994. Photograph by Stephanie Wood.

tion, the intruders want land; Cortés will come to distribute parcels for the community yet will also take land for Spaniards. Meanwhile, Tecpanecatl will found the new town and construct a temple for the worship of the new god and for baptism. In the process, he voluntarily reduces the community's territorial base, knowing how the Spaniards are coveting land. He hopes to avoid more deaths.

The expanded edition of *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* includes some of this narrative. But the editor, Miguel León-Portilla (1992, 159), describes the Ajusco document as an "invented narrative." He suggests that it is an "eighteenth-century Nahuatl testimony" on the conquest, presuming it was fabricated just before its translation by colonial officials into Spanish in 1710. He associates it with the strain of colonial records called Techialoyan codices (fig. 3.3), probably because of his interpretations of the timing of its appearance and its questionable



FIGURE 3.3. Typical Techialoyan scenes. *Códice Techialoyan de Chalco*. Photograph by Stephanie Wood, reproduced with permission of the British Museum.

antiquity.³ It also contains some elements typical of the *tlalamatl*, or “land-book,” a translation popular with some scholars, such as Gordon Brotherston (1995, 185–88), for the Techialoyan genre.

An opportunity to see the hand, check the orthography, and analyze any pictorial matter in the “original” Nahuatl (or a pueblo-generated copy) would aid substantially in settling questions about the dating of the document and its intended purpose.⁴ Is this indeed a late colonial creation trying to pass as something originating two hundred years earlier? Such a practice certainly existed across New Spain.⁵ Or could it be that the Ajusco document truly preserves more than the usual amount of sixteenth-century oral tradition or (re)written accounts? If it is indeed early, then it provides us with a rare, small-town cry of distress in response to European colonization. On the basis of my own familiarity with late colonial Nahuatl manuscripts, the Ajusco record strikes me as only somewhat characteristic of these later records and in some ways notably different. Several elements do appear to have an identifiably early origin.⁶ Establishing a clearer picture of the timing of this outcry would help us chart the evolution of indigenous perspectives over time and provide a key to referencing additional manuscripts that might be discovered. Exploring some of the central features of this manuscript for their temporal dimensions also simultaneously brings to light what at least this community embraces as critical elements of the Spanish invasion and its legacy.

INVASION-ERA FIGURES

One starting place for analyzing these elements is with the principal speaker, “Señor Tecpanecatl.”⁷ This may be a title or a name derived from the title. Indigenous men of high social rank sometimes bore the prestigious title “Tecpanecatl teuctli” (“Palace-inhabitant lord”), even well after the Spanish invasion.⁸ “Señor” is a typical translation for *teuctli* (lord); it was common practice in the sixteenth century for Spaniards to recognize the highest local lords and their natural right of rulership, *señorío*, calling them *señores*. If “Tecpanecatl” refers to a name rather than a title, or if the title was so important that it became absorbed into the local nomenclature, then these are other plausible scenarios in the Ajusco area. Ajusco was situated in the broader jurisdiction of Coyoacan in the sixteenth century, and records from there show, for example, a Juan Tecpanecatl alive

in Iczotitlan in 1573.⁹ The Ajusco Tecpanecatl’s lack of a Christian given name suggests an early temporal frame, within the generation of the first baptisms.¹⁰ Perhaps with further research more information will turn up about this lord’s activities. We might also locate information about his nine co-signatories, who similarly lack Christian names.¹¹

Large portions of the manuscript not only contain sixteenth-century perspectives but consist of detailed descriptions of events in the heat of the struggle for power with Europeans. One statement, though somewhat retrospective, gives the impression that the conflicts initiated by the invaders were still under way, describing “what the whites, people of Castile, did and still are doing.”¹² The use of the racial description “whites” (*iztaque* in the Nahuatl version) has an early ring to it, although a few examples have been found in late colonial community manuscripts of central New Spain. Kevin Terraciano and Lisa Sousa (1992, 55, 78–79, n. 38) located a similar racial remark in the Mixtec título primordial of San Juan Chapultepec, apparently from the late seventeenth century. “Then we lived together in peace with the white people and the great ones and we gave them a place to build the big church.” In 1696 a cacique translated the Mixtec term *chee cui si* (“white people”) as “Spaniards.” Terraciano and Sousa say that this racial perception of Spaniards “is almost unprecedented in both the Nahuatl- and Mixtec-language documentary record.” Another of the rare occurrences they cite involves the use (in 1611?) of *iztaque*, “whites,” and *chipahuacatlaca*, “light [skinned] people,” in seeming reference to Spaniards. James Lockhart (1991, 59) also includes in his study of the Sula primordial title its use of the phrase “white hides” to refer to the skins of the Europeans. These may be memories preserved from sixteenth-century oral or written traditions.¹³

Whiteness of skin would seem to have been something more noticeable in the early years of contact, when awareness of differences might have been at its peak. Initial impressions of Europeans described in the *Florentine Codex* include the simple remark, “They were very white” (Anderson and Dibble 1975, 19).¹⁴ In Guatemala the *Título C’oyoi*, with seemingly sixteenth-century roots, recalls “the people with white skin, the soldiers of Don Pedro de Alvarado, the great captain” (Carmack 1973, 301).¹⁵ Similarly, the Andean chronicle of 1551 by Juan Diez de Betanzos recalls “some people, white and bearded” having recently arrived (quoted in Pease 1989, 183; my translation). James Axtell (1991, 8, 9, 23–24) cites several examples

of the indigenous recognition of Europeans' white skin in the contact period of what is now the United States. According to one European, "the natives 'wondred mervelously when we were amongst them, at the whiteness of our skinnes, ever coveting to touch our breastes, and to view the same'" (Axtell 1991, 23).¹⁶

A further indicator of the timing of composition of the Ajusco narrative emerges in the reference to the leader of the Spanish effort, don Hernando Cortés, as the "recently named Marqués del Valle."¹⁷ He obtained that title in 1529, which would be consistent with the statement's supposed origin in 1531.¹⁸ Most late colonial pueblo records show no indication of knowing when Cortés became the marqués. The Soyatzingo primordial titles fuse the expedition leader and his title with a later viceroy: "Cortés don Luis de Velasco Marqués" (Lockhart 1992, 412). These kinds of later records typically handle names and titles of invading Spaniards with some confusion, as they were usually written down after the fact and then were recopied and amended over time, with later copyists making mistakes.

GOLD HUNGER

Also in contrast to later colonial primordial titles, the Ajusco document makes several references to the Europeans' demands for gold, a characteristically early pursuit that gave way to endeavors attuned to other, more abundant natural and human resources of the colony. "Never are they contented, only with gold and sparkling crystals [i.e., gems]," states the Ajusco manuscript.¹⁹ Gold hunger is more typically remembered in sixteenth-century indigenous records, such as the *Relación de Michoacán*, which has a chapter titled "Plundering the Gold," and the *Florentine Codex*. Lockhart's vivid translation of the latter (1993, 16) reads, "Like monkeys they grabbed the gold. It was as though their hearts were put to rest, brightened, freshened. For gold was what they greatly thirsted for; they were gluttonous for it, starved for it, piggishly wanting it."²⁰ Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala's Peruvian chronicle similarly contains an illustration (fig. 3.4) of an indigenous lord asking a Spaniard, "Do you eat the gold?" He replies, "Yes, we eat the gold." Guamán Poma wrote: "All day long all they did was think of the gold, silver, and riches of Peruvian Indians. Because of their greed, they seemed desperate, stupid, crazy, and deprived of all judgment."²¹

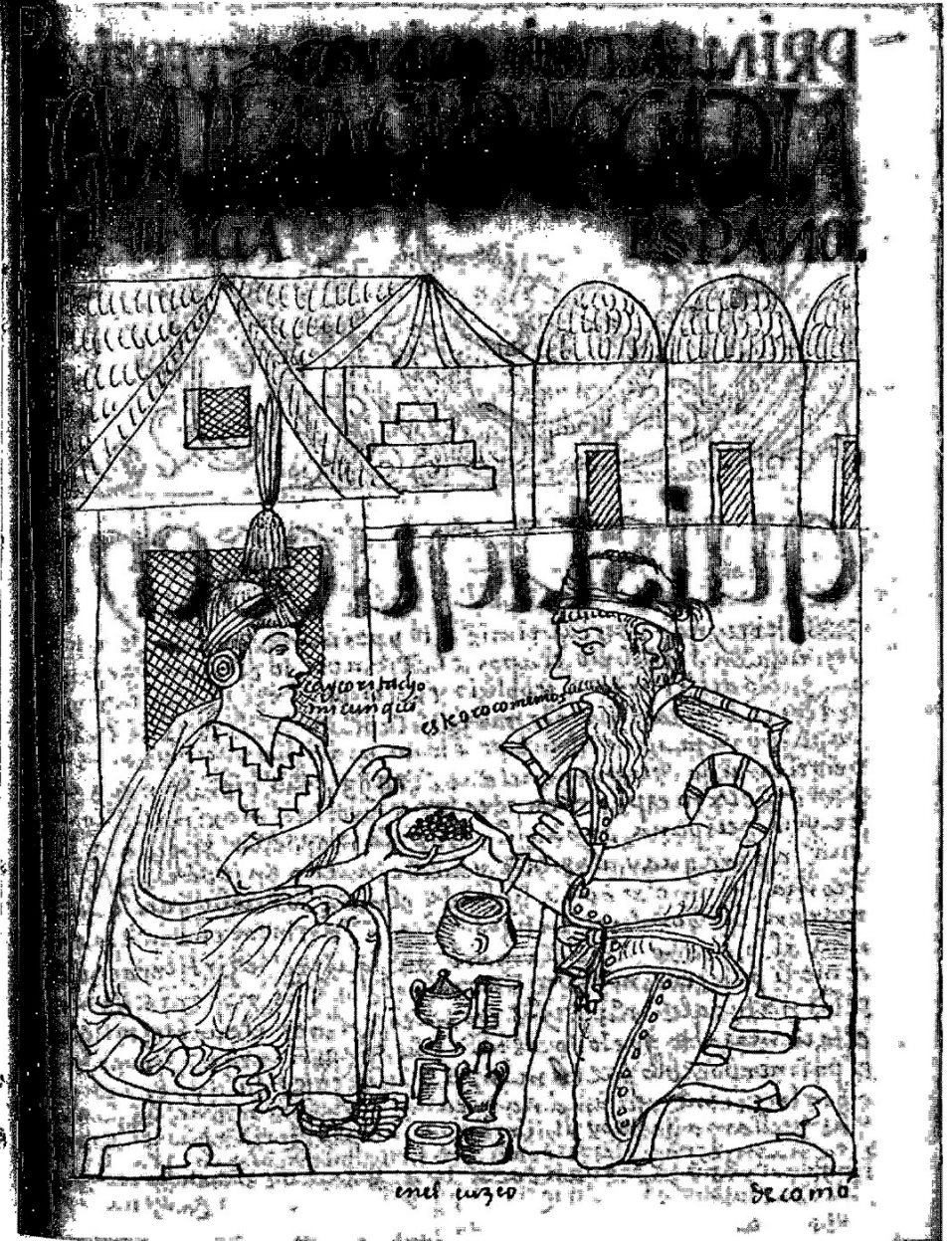


FIGURE 3.4. Guamán Poma de Ayala's commentary on Spaniards' gold hunger in Peru. One leaf of *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (GkS 2232 4to), Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books, The Royal Library, Copenhagen. Reproduced with permission.

That the theme of excessive gold hunger appears in these sources may reflect Spanish ecclesiastical influences. It was a cause of concern to some sixteenth-century clergy that the invaders seemed to worship mammon rather than Christ, an old biblical issue. Bartolomé de Las Casas commented frequently about the deadly mining of gold and asserted that gold was indeed the conquistador's god (see Rivera 1992, 259). Nevertheless, it is easily conceivable that the exaggerated lust for gold caught indigenous people's attention independently. Again, it was an early phenomenon, as first-generation Spaniards in the central areas frantically sought out pre-Columbian golden objects to melt down for coin or for ingots to send to Spain. Beyond that, the theme would not have persisted in indigenous histories much after gold mining ceased to be a significant practice in the central areas, which was around the 1540s (Hennessy 1993, 28). Silver mining quickly eclipsed gold mining in these regions.²²

RAPE

Contemporaneous with the literal lusting after gold, and similarly short-lived, was European men's lusting after indigenous women during the expeditions. The rape account by Michele de Cuneo, an Italian "noble" who joined Columbus on his second voyage, comes to mind, as does the account of the Taíno destruction of La Navidad in retaliation for the abuse of women (see Wood 1998c). Presumably, in the central areas, along with full Spanish immigration and the re-creation of Hispanic society in the colonies came social mores and penal codes that reduced the frequency of such blatant displays of abuse, except on the frontiers. Certainly, eighteenth-century histories from pueblos of central New Spain do not regularly speak of Spaniards ravaging native women. But the Ajusco document reminds us of the tone of earlier records as it recalls, "It is known how [the Spaniards] take away [the indigenous rulers'] revered women and also girls." Two other remarks additionally remember insults inflicted upon the community's noblewomen and, by extension, its elite men.²³ Bernal Díaz del Castillo's memoirs (completed in 1568) of the Spanish invasion of Mexico relate how the men's primary concern after breaking enemy ranks "was to look for a pretty woman or find some spoil."²⁴ Similarly, the *Florentine Codex* (Lockhart 1993, 248) recalls how, after the fall of Tenochtitlan, the invaders seized the indigenous women,

"and [the Spaniards] took, picked out the beautiful women, with yellow bodies."²⁵

EXECUTIONS

In the Ajusco narrative, reflecting the concerns of its principal speaker, Tecpanecatl, abuses in the form of executions are really aimed as much or more at the local men in authority, the "superiores gobernantes patronos de los pueblos," than at the lower-ranking audience he was addressing.²⁶ Native lords are still being burned at the stake (*quinmotlatilia*, "los queman") when they fail to deliver sufficient goods to the invaders. On this subject the manuscript reveals surprising breadth of worldview. The lords of which it speaks include the *cazonci*, a lord of Michoacán, and unnamed men as far away as Jalapa, Tlaxcala, Tehuantepec, and Oaxaca. Additionally, its speaker remembers how numerous rulers were killed in the company of the Aztec king, Moctezuma, in Mexico City.²⁷ (Incidentally and tellingly, Mexico City appears as "Anahuac," the place next to the water, the older Nahuatl way of naming the city by those who lived outside of it.) The author demonstrates a substantially broader familiarity with some of the geographical dimensions of the battles and with the fates of distant rulers than we have yet seen in later colonial primordial titles, which are considerably more locally centered and which often only vaguely remember violent conflict (as we will see in chapter 5).

Tecpanecatl appears to hold particular sympathy for his more illustrious Uacúsecha counterpart, the "really admirable ruler of Michoacan, the truly great Caltzontzi" (the *cazonci* Tzintzicha Tangaxoan II in Michoacán records).²⁸ If indeed he was recalling the *cazonci*'s memory in 1531, it would have been only one year after that leader's execution by the Spaniards for his supposed practice of "idolatry," among other acts of resistance. Again, as with Cortés's becoming marqués, the time frame is consistent. Hernando Cortés personally pursued the court case against Nuño de Guzmán, the expeditionary leader in Michoacán, in 1531, bringing to light the plunder of gold and silver, the torture of indigenous elites, and the demand that the *cazonci* provide Guzmán with indigenous women (Baudot 1995, 414). Such abuses probably stirred up a maelstrom of discussion, anger, and anxiety among indigenous people across the heart of the colony and even beyond.

If the memory of the *cazonci's* execution by burning was more distant, or if the *Ajusco* record was drawing upon written sources, then there are a number of possible origins for the information about the *cazonci's* death. Two sources—one left by García del Pilar, advisor to Nuño de Guzmán, and the other the “Fourth Anonymous Relation”—share this simple version of the leader’s execution by fire. Other accounts relate that he died either from torture before being burned (according to the seventeenth-century chronicler Fray Antonio Tello) or from strangulation (according to the trial records of 1531), in a gesture of supposed humanity that had him pulled from the fire once he showed sufficient repentance (Warren 1985, 234–35).²⁹

The *Ajusco* record also leans toward an almost sympathetic rendering of Moctezuma’s fate, recalling “all the many insults” the Spaniards inflicted on him.³⁰ But what brought all this on? Tecpanecatl heaps blame on the lords of Azcapotzalco, Mexico, Tetzaco, and Chalco themselves for being too proud and warlike, spilling each other’s blood.³¹ He also censures indigenous ancestors (*hucEAU tlaca*, “la gente antigua”) in general for the suffering of these lords while the Spanish struggled for power.³² Does Tecpanecatl exhibit here a typical micropatriotism and ethnic rivalry, or has he internalized Spanish justifications for the invasion and seizure of power, reflecting the passage of time and ecclesiastical influence on his way of thinking? If the latter, this would argue against the early date of 1531 for all such statements; perhaps the narrative is a compilation of various speeches, including some he uttered somewhat later in life and possibly others invented by his descendants.

It is intriguing that Tlaxcala is one of the sites Tecpanecatl mentions in association with the Spaniards’ execution of indigenous lords. One of the rulers executed there shares the *Ajusco* ruler’s name or title, Tecpanecatl, although the latter does not consciously make the connection. Did he know any of the details of those early executions? Might he have heard of them by word of mouth or read about them in indigenous sources? Some native annals from Tlaxcala memorialized that region’s executions (see Gibson 1952, 35, 254–55).³³ Annals from Cuauhtinchan, southeast of Puebla, known as the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* and believed to have been written about 1547–60, recall how in the year Thirteen Reed, “don Tomás, the Tecpanecatl [lord], was hanged at that point” (Lockhart 1993, 283). As a rule, *títulos* authors were not conversant with the annals

historical genre (Lockhart 1992, 413), but a few suggestive relationships have emerged.³⁴

Whatever the source of Tecpanecatl’s information about the execution of other indigenous lords, its effect was sobering. In several places the fear of further reprisals for resistance leads the speaker to recommend that “it would be best for us to turn ourselves in to the Castilian men,” and “let’s not get involved in anything, so they won’t kill us.”³⁵ The tone evokes a climate of fear and caution; the contest for imperial dominion is still under way.

PROPHECY

Another seemingly early feature of the *Ajusco* manuscript is its inclusion of two references to prehispanic prophecies forecasting the Spanish invasion. These read, “Our grandfathers . . . said that others would come from distant lands to make us sad, would come to take from us and make themselves owners of . . . our land.” And, “Now, already we saw the ancient word fulfilled.”³⁶ According to Werner Stenzel (1991, 102), the earliest mention of a prediction about the Spanish invasion was made in 1536, in the case against Martín Ocelotl. If the *Ajusco* prediction was first verbalized in 1531, and if this date is not an error or relevant only to some other portions of the narrative, then it would predate that trial.

The sixteenth-century *Florentine Codex* contains some of the better-known expressions of prophesying about the European invasion of Mexico, recorded in the mid-sixteenth century. It includes well-known omens that began unfolding ten years before the Cortés expedition landed in Veracruz in 1519. Part of the “seventh omen” has Moctezuma envisioning “people coming massed, coming as conquerors, coming girt in war array” (Anderson and Dibble 1975, 3).

According to Hans Roskamp (n.d.), the *Codex Plancarte* from Michoacán also contains a kind of prophecy of the European incursion. This manuscript, rich in sixteenth-century material, claims local gods knew that strange people wearing iron hats and riding horses were coming to the region.³⁷ Its authors foresaw—with some hindsight, perhaps—that the strangers would visit all the villages and kill the people, adults and children, using knives and whips and sometimes by poking out people’s eyes. Horses, which seemed so formidable at first, were expected to assist in the

killing, using their feet and teeth. This foretelling brought despair upon the entire community. Like the Ajusco manuscript, this one speaks bluntly of violent themes and captures negative indigenous sentiment about the Spanish invasion.

Such divination was not limited to predictions of the Europeans' arrival, for, as Tzvetan Todorov (1987, 66) has observed, "the whole history of the Aztecs, as it is narrated in their own chronicles, consists of realizations of anterior prophecies." Some of this prophecy, he suggests, "is all the more accurate in that it will be formulated only in a retrospective fashion, after the event has taken place." This type of foretelling, when used to explain a loss of imperial control to foreigners, might have offered some minimal comfort to those who formulated historical memories of their leaders' loss of power by reducing their responsibility for that loss. It might have offered some measure of dignity by preempting the victors in ascertaining knowledge of the end result before it happened. At the very least, it "provided a mode for the interpretation and the management of Spanish actions," as Inga Clendinnen (1987, 162) has suggested in analyzing the histories of the *Chilam Balam*. A singular invasion and defeat that is "perceived" in advance allows indigenous people to "mentally overcome it by inscribing it within a history conceived according to their requirements," proposes Todorov (1987, 74).³⁸

Prophecy has also been interpreted as having weakened native resistance to the Spaniards in Mexico. Thus, if in the Ajusco narrative the power struggle is still in progress, and if the leaders announce that the ancient word has already been fulfilled, this could have had the effect of instilling a sense of futility in the people. Resignation echoes in the manuscript's treatment of the Europeans' determination to introduce Christianity, already nearly accomplished. The narrator refers to "the new God that the Castilians brought us,"³⁹ speaking of it in the past tense but directly recognizing Spanish agency, showing an awareness that is rare in post-1650 primordial titles. Usually, as we will see later, they simply report that "the faith arrived." The Ajusco document ponders whether to accept this new God and decides, "Let's become baptized."⁴⁰ The manuscript acknowledges the Christian God as the "really true God." Still, this deity is portrayed not just as occupying but as traversing the heavens ("corre sobre los cielos"), a Nuhua interpretation that makes Christ into something of a solar deity.⁴¹ In fact, Tecpanecatl says, "I have determined that he has to be the same

[god] as ours."⁴² This ability to distinguish pre- and posthispanic deities, even if equating them, suggests an awareness that people might have had in the early sixteenth century or one they might have developed in the modern day. It does not echo in late viceregal-era indigenous histories, which often blur the distinction between religious beliefs and practices from before and after the arrival of the Spaniards, as we will see in chapter 5.⁴³ Finally, this newly introduced God will favor the people of Ajusco only "through the Castilians,"⁴⁴ another argument for surrendering.

PUEBLO TERRITORIAL ISSUES

A border survey was an integral feature of every primordial title. In the Ajusco border survey, an unusual element recalls the submissive but calculated statements just quoted: it self-consciously encompasses less territory than the town originally claimed, out of fear of retaliation from the foreign invaders if the local community's land base were too large.⁴⁵ "In order that they don't kill us, it is fitting that we do not recognize all our lands," recommends Tecpanecatl.⁴⁶ None of the known late colonial primordial titles willingly reduces the corporate land base, and none raises the possibility of being killed for the land. More commonly, community boundaries are idealized in those manuscripts.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Ajusco record's inordinate emphasis (for 1531) on the land issue hints at a later composition, at least for this part of the manuscript—a departure from much of its content, examined earlier. It is certainly possible that concern over territorial dimensions was felt in the early sixteenth century, but this is usually a feature of the post-1650 era, when the indigenous population began its gradual recuperation, Spanish estates were being formed or expanded, and competition over resources reached unprecedented heights. In fact, agricultural land, particularly in such places as the mountainous terrain of Ajusco, was much less an object of desire to Spaniards for several generations after their seizure of power than were grants of labor (*encomiendas*), to put to use in mining or in various enterprises on the valley floor.

Treating another possibly late theme, the Ajusco document speaks of the intention "to form here a pueblo" (*formar aquí un pueblo*). This could be a reference to a program of population concentration (*congregación*) of the mid-sixteenth century or—an even remoter possibility—to an earlier act

of recognition of the town of Santo Tomás Ajusco by some Spanish officials theoretically visiting in the 1530s.⁴⁸ More likely, this part of the manuscript has a late origin, reflecting the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century consciousness that focused intently upon pueblo formation and encompassed any number of measures that might strengthen the *altepetl*, the indigenous provincial unit, town, or city. One such measure involved invoking the decrees requiring a minimum territorial base for indigenous communities of, by 1695, “six hundred *varas*,” or colonial Spanish yards.⁴⁹ Called the *fundo legal* only from the 1790s onward, this allotment was the centerpiece of the supposed *merced* (grant) of 1609 from nearby San Andrés Totoltepec that Nicole Percheron (1983) published with her transcription of the 1710 translation of the Ajusco document. The Totoltepec manuscript speaks specifically of the “600” *varas* “de fondo legal,” unaware that the allotment was measured in 500-*vara* lengths until 1687 and that the term *fundo* (or *fondo*) *legal* was not coined until even later.⁵⁰

This tainted context for the Ajusco document again casts doubt on its authenticity. The mixed impression one gets of the timing of its composition also raises questions about the manuscript’s origins. Like most primordial titles of colonial derivation, however, it was probably “accretive,” or a composite of written fragments and oral traditions put together, then altered and augmented over time.⁵¹ Certainly, components of the manuscript have strong connections to the early sixteenth century; when they were put to paper we may never know, but they could have been recast two or more centuries later as new concerns over resources arose.

OFFICIAL APPROVAL

That colonial Spanish judges were willing to legitimate the manuscript’s message is apparent in the magistrate’s statement of 1710 that the “document that has been translated allows room for no doubt that the pueblo was founded in the year 1531,” and “it is clear that the foundation was made in lands that they call patrimonial.”⁵² Sometimes such pronouncements were pragmatic responses intended to bring order to documentary chaos uncovered in the *composición* proceedings (land title verification programs) that produced the original 1710 translation. Even if a manuscript presented by an indigenous community was neither accurate in every detail nor actu-

ally first written down at the time of the earliest event contained in it, magistrates accepted the thrust of its arguments, probably especially so when there were no counterclaims.⁵³ Towns were also paying fees for the supposed privilege of having colonial judges rubber-stamp their primordial titles.

The *composición* agent who handled the Ajusco case was certainly not stringent about obtaining an expert translation of the document. The 1710 translation is the work of a don Juan de los Santos, an interpreter of the court but surely an indigenous person who was not completely fluent in Spanish, if we can trust the 1741 transcription for every detail. For *allá* (there), for example, he gives “haya,” and “Ilo” for *yo* (I), and he regularly omits or misuses the preposition *a*. Nonagreement of number results in phrases such as “los mismo.” As with the coveted “original” (accretive) Nahuatl version, one longs to see even the original 1710 translation.

The colonial magistrate who approved the Ajusco document must have had either a particularly thick skin or a rare sensitivity to the plight and perspective of the indigenous people who witnessed the Spanish invasion or their descendants of the early eighteenth century, still struggling to survive in the face of foreign domination. An unusually strong anti-Spanish sentiment permeates the entire Ajusco piece, perhaps more than any other native account.⁵⁴ Where other accounts call the Spaniards “Christians,” without reflecting on the meaning of the term, Tecpanecatl angrily labels them “those covetous ones, greedy ones who are called Christians” and “those who strike terror, Castilians.”⁵⁵ Speaking with confidence to his internal audience, he points in rare form to the Spaniards’ goal of sole power, an abhorrent prospect for him.⁵⁶ These are not words written to please a *composición* official (unless he were known to be another Bartolomé de Las Casas). Tecpanecatl adds that the foreigners want to “have us under their heels”—as we might say, “under their thumb.”⁵⁷ Finally, “they want to make themselves owners of our lands and all that is our wealth.”⁵⁸

There can be little doubt that by 1710 the Ajusco community had taken a considerable risk to legalize its territorial standing before the colonial magistrates, sharing this acerbic denunciation of greedy, rapacious invaders with the heirs of those power holders. Possibly calculating the psychological payoff that would come from suggesting that their territorial claims had already been reduced by their own town founder, they nevertheless were making public a possibly injurious record of devious manipulation.

They not only hit pay dirt with the approval of the *composición* in 1710, but they also took a second risk, returning to the courts in 1741 to obtain another copy of this unflattering portrait of “shameless invasion.”⁵⁹

Whether the Ajusco document recalls the alarm that reverberated through central-area indigenous communities within a decade after the fall of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, or imagines it two hundred years later, the human drama it captures is moving. This rare transcript of dissent is not embedded in “songs, gestures, jokes, and theater,” whereby subordinate people can “insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct,” as, according to James Scott (1990, xiii), may often be the case.⁶⁰ Rather, it is a blatant and caustic expression of fear, pain, and disapproval. It does not, however, go so far as to call for insurrection to throw out the hated tyrants, nor does it raise the banner of messianic revitalization and rejection of the Christian god. Whereas the millenarian leader Antonio Pérez of Yautepec might in 1761 call bravely for *gachupines* (a slur meaning Iberian-born Spaniards) to burn and the archbishop to be carried off in chains by devils (Gruzinski 1989, 65),⁶¹ Tecpanecatl of Ajusco counsels caution and pragmatism to pull his people back from the brink of disaster. Not all indigenous voices from the viceregal era resonate with a revolutionary spirit gratifying to anti-imperialists five hundred years after Columbus’s landing—the manuscript under inspection in the next chapter definitely does not—but they nevertheless provide a moving articulation of indigenous difference and distinction throughout the centuries.

4

*A Proud Alliance*THE *MAPA DE CUAUHTLANTZINCO*

This most pure virgin . . . is she whom Señor Don Fernando Cortés, Marquis of the Valley, brought, and who condescended to illuminate with the light of the gospel us, who were in the darkness of idolatry.

TEPOZTECATL'S SPEECH IN
THE *MAPA DE CUAUHTLANTZINCO*

Indigenous memories of the Spanish incursion and presence can swing from radically different perspectives. The Ajusco manuscript, as we have seen, makes a scathing attack on the men of Castile, who “want to impose themselves upon us, because they are utterly gold hungry, voracious of what belongs to others: our chiefdoms, our revered women and daughters, and our lands” (León-Portilla 1992, 160). In startling contrast, a letter from indigenous citizens of Huejotzingo to the Spanish king in 1560 proudly proclaims, “We took you as our king, to belong to you and become your people and your subjects; not a single town here in New Spain surpassed us, in that first and earliest we cast ourselves toward you” (Lockhart and Otte 1976, 167). Such public discourse might have belied individuals’ private sentiments, but it was pronounced loudly and regularly, becoming internalized over time.

The name Huejotzingo will not ring a bell with historians of Latin America the way the name Tlaxcala might. Although other groups like the Huejotzincans, including the Cholulans, Cempoalans, Chalcanes, and Tetzcoacans, cast their lot with the Spanish invaders, the Tlaxcalans achieved greater fame for their alliance with the Europeans against the Aztecs, their traditional enemies. Tlaxcalans went in greater numbers than