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IMPLICIT UNDERSTANDINGS

OBSERVING, REPORTING, AND REFLECTING ON THE
ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN EUROPEANS AND OTHER
PEOPLES IN THE EARLY MODERN ERA

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endar associated with those politics, and social distinctions between nobles, commoners, and intermediate groups, the Nahuas had reasonably close analogues of the concepts structuring nearly all facets of European life. Each side was able to operate for centuries after first contact on an ultimately false but in practice workable assumption that analogous concepts of the other side were essentially identical with its own, thus avoiding close examination of the unfamiliar and maintaining its own principles. The truce obtaining under this partial misconception allowed for a long period of preservation of indigenous structures of all kinds while intercultural ferment went on gradually, hardly attaining the level of consciousness. I have called the phenomenon on the process of Double Mistaken Identity.³

Within a broad comparability between the two cultures in contact, Nahuatl-language documents show us a world of well-defined indigenous concepts, far from identical with their closest Spanish parallels, embodied in special vocabulary; as a corpus these fixed ideas organized sociopolitical, economic, and household life (and art as well), often making large use of the principles of cellular subdivision, rotation, numerical ordering, and symmetry. Most of this lore and its vocabulary survived for more than a hundred years after the conquest, and large and basic parts were still operative at the time of Mexican independence. The Nahuas continued to be primarily self-centered, judging things within the framework they had developed for themselves, concerned above all with life inside the local ethnic states that had always been their primary arena. Yet they did not shy away from contact with things Spanish, readily adopting any new artifacts, practices, or principles that struck them as comprehensible and useful for their own purposes. Clearly they had maintained their balance past the cataclysms of first contact in a way that many less sedentary peoples, who had less cultural common ground with the intruders, did not. Every year brings us new monographs and philological publications further reinforcing the proposition that the postconquest Nahuas were self-centered realists and corporate survivors.

Surely they were the same people during the generation that first met and dealt with the arriving Spaniards. Yet the picture of the Na-

³ First enunciated in James Lockhart, "Some Nahua Concepts in Postconquest Guise," *History of European Ideas*, 6 (1985): 465-82; also mentioned in Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 445. A similar notion will be found in Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) in relation to French-indigenous relations in the Great Lakes region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; for a brief statement of his view, see p. x.

CHAPTER 7

Sightings: Initial Nahua reactions to Spanish culture

JAMES LOCKHART

BEFORE speaking directly of how the Nahuas first viewed the Spaniards, I should mention that I have recently brought to a provisional conclusion a project of many years, the aim of which was to survey the cultural and social organization of the Nahuatl speakers of central Mexico over most of the three centuries after European contact, on the basis of records produced by themselves in their own language.¹ I have no intention of attempting to summarize the results in any detail, but since my examination of first-generation Nahua impressions of Spanish culture takes place within that larger context, I must say something on the subject.

One of the more central aspects of the work I have been doing (and in this I am supported by the findings of a different type of research by my predecessor Charles Gibson and my contemporary William Taylor)² is to highlight the extent of the similarities between the cultural systems of the Europeans and the Nahuas (probably the Mesoamericans generally). As a people with a sedentary life, intensive agriculture, dynastic rulers and tax systems, territorial politics, a well-developed religious apparatus of pantheon, priesthood, and ritual cal-

¹ James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: 1992).

² See especially Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven: 1952) and *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford: 1964), and William B. Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford: 1972) and *Drinking, Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979). Also see Stephanie G. Wood, "Corporate Adjustments in Colonial Mexican Indian Towns: Toluca Region" (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1984); S. L. Cline, *Colonial Culhuacan, 1580-1600* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Rebecca Horn, "Postconquest Coyoacan: Aspects of Indigenous Sociopolitical and Economic Organization in Central Mexico, 1550-1650" (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1989); Robert Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991); and Matthew B. Restall, "The World of the Calt: Postconquest Yucatec Maya Society" (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1992).

huas arising from the massive written evidence they produced in their own language stands in stark contrast to the reigning image of them during the first moments of contact. In the version dominant since at least the mid-nineteenth century, the indigenous inhabitants of central Mexico were overwhelmed and dumbfounded by the Spanish advent, immobilized by fear and fatalism, expecting the Spaniards to carry out prophecies of their own doom and the disappearance of their culture. I am convinced that this by now traditional view of the matter is illusory. No only does it go against my understanding of the Nahua nature, but it is very thinly documented. Most of the little evidence for it is posterior by at least a full generation, often more, and is found in texts that, I would maintain, reflect the backward-looking imperatives of the time of writing rather than the thinking of the contact generation.

But if positive evidence is slim and flimsy, evidence to the contrary has been equally lacking. My own work, and that of other scholars studying Nahuatl materials, perforce centers on the period when they were written: the late 1540s into the 1570s. That it would be the task of a generation for a Nahuatl orthography to be devised and for a critical mass of Nahuas to learn how to use it in actual recordkeeping is not surprising. It is more surprising, perhaps, that the surviving corpus of administrative and mundane documents in Spanish concerning central Mexico in the conquest period is also very slight; one is forced back upon a few chronicles and some reports of high officials, as stingy in mentioning Nahua ideas, attitudes, and motivations as they are unreliable and uninformed in the little they do say on such matters.

I do not mean, however, to rely on plausibility and deduction alone to throw light on initial Nahua reactions to Spanish culture, but will make every effort to find and analyze the most direct evidence available on the Nahua side, though it remains far less contemporary and multidimensional than what we have for later decades. To date I have found two main approaches to the Nahuas of the first generation beyond deduction from patterns obtaining in succeeding generations and use of statements by Spaniards. These approaches rest on quite different bodies of material and use distinct methodologies, so I will present my results in two separate parts before treating very briefly the question of how the two can be combined.

The first part takes the approach of examining the ways in which Spanish phenomena are described in the earliest Nahuatl texts and dictionaries. Though the materials originate at the very end of the first generation or even a bit later, they enable us to make a systematic

reconstruction of the linguistic reaction of Nahuatl speakers. This is the one field of first-generation studies where I was able to make substantial inroads in the course of the larger project mentioned above. The section relating to language is indeed largely a summary of the relevant portion of Chapter 7 of my book, *The Nahuas after the Conquest* (Stanford, 1992). It asserts, in essence, that during the first postcontact generation the Nahuas hardly entered into the substance of Spanish culture at all, viewing it as a set of discrete sensually observable phenomena (mainly visually observable) to be integrated into their own conceptual-linguistic framework, in which no change is detectable. The denomination of Spanish things took place within the limits of the normal mechanisms of the Nahuatl language, not only in the same ways human beings in their languages have generally named new things, but the way they name anything at all, the way language evolves wherever and whenever it is spoken.

The second body of material bearing on the conquest generation is of a very different nature. It purports to speak directly of actions, speech acts, and emotions of the Nahuas during the first year or two after the arrival of the Spaniards in central Mexico. It is thus more obviously to the purpose, and as such has been copiously used by several generations of scholars; at the same time it is highly suspect, for the versions we have were written down at least a generation after the events and show many signs of legend formation, as well as other distortions – distortions, that is, if we are interested in Nahua reactions of 1520 or 1525, as opposed to the attitudes of certain Nahuas in certain places writing between 1545 and 1565 for the most part, and looking back to the events of the earlier period. The small literature of this type is dominated by Tenochtitlan, the leading power of the Triple Alliance of the Valley of Mexico, which in itself says a great deal about who reacted most intensely to the intrusion, and beyond that by writings of the Tlatelolca, the junior cousins and partners of the Tenochca and their immediate neighbors on an island base in Lake Tetzoco. The single most well-developed and well-known account is Book 12 of Sahagún's Florentine Codex, composed by Tlatelolca under Sahagún's sponsorship, and it is that on which I will concentrate.

LANGUAGE AND VISION

One of my main strategies in attempting to establish the patterns of Nahua reaction to Spanish culture has been to comb through Nahuatl texts for the presence or absence of Spanish lexical items and Spanish-

influenced phonological, syntactic, and semantic features.⁴ What emerged from such surveying was an evolution proceeding across the centuries in three quite clear-cut stages. Stage 1 – about a generation (1519 to about 1540 or 1545) during which change in the Nahuatl language was minimal, in a sense entirely absent except for the incorporation of some Spanish proper names (of which the overwhelming majority were Christian names received at baptism). Stage 2 – nearly a hundred years (to about 1640–50) during which Spanish nouns were borrowed in large quantities and fully naturalized, and a certain amount of semantic change in Nahuatl vocabulary occurred in response to common Spanish words, but change was still restricted in scope. Only nouns came into Nahuatl, and native pronunciation and syntax remained unaffected. Stage 3 – the time from mid-seventeenth century until today, wherever Nahuatl is still spoken. The barriers fell, and Spanish influence penetrated all aspects of the language. Spanish verbs and function words came in, in addition to new types of nouns. Spanish idioms were translated. Syntax was now substantially affected, and Spanish sounds were acquired. Nahuatl was still Nahuatl, but now it could readily reproduce any Spanish notion, expression, or construction.

Looking across the sweep of this centuries-long process, the conclusion I draw is that Stage 1 corresponds to and in some sense is caused by a virtual absence of routine contact between the Nahuatl-speaking and the Spanish-speaking populations. Stage 2 corresponds to corporate contact, with a prominent role for interpreters and other intermediaries. Stage 3 corresponds to massive individual contact between the two populations, with concomitant widespread bilingualism. We could say then that Stage 1, however transcendent and earthshaking the events that accompanied it, brought very little cultural readjustment, Stage 2 involved significant corporate change, and Stage 3 saw pervasive changes centered on the individual.

Stages 2 and 3 are relatively easy to study, because of the exuberant, many-sided documentary legacy the Nahuas have left us. The prob-

⁴ In the beginning, this effort was carried out in conjunction with Frances Karttunen; its main product was Frances Karttunen and James Lockhart, *Nahuatl in the Middle Years: Language Contact Phenomena in Texts of the Colonial Period*, University of California Publications in Linguistics, 85 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976). Frances Karttunen, "Nahuatl Literacy," in George A. Collier et al., eds. *The Inca and Aztec States* (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 395–417, is a succinct and readable restatement, bringing out the chronological pattern more clearly than the earlier work. Chapter 7 of Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, goes back over the whole ground in considerable detail, on the basis of further research, not only restating but extending, supplementing, and updating.

lem in studying Stage 1 – indeed one might say the *prima facie* impossibility of it – can be succinctly stated: Alphabetic writing in Nahuatl is a Stage 2 phenomenon. Although one can remain in doubt, as I in fact have, just where in the years 1540–50 to place a rough boundary between Stages 1 and 2, and it is entirely plausible to imagine that the change took place in some subregions and with some individuals rather earlier than with others, precisely those Nahuas who began to write alphabetically were the ones who had entered the second stage.

Fortunately, one large exception exists. Considerable portions of a very early set of house-to-house censuses and tax inventories from the Cuernavaca jurisdiction (in the modern state of Morelos, south of the Valley of Mexico) have come down to us. Two substantial sections have been published in transcription and translation.⁵ The records depart from the rule for Nahuatl alphabetic texts in several ways. They are written on indigenous paper, not the imported Spanish paper that was virtually universal by the later 1540s. Not only are they not assimilated to any Spanish documentary genre, they are without the date specification that is the common denominator of all Nahuatl mundane documentation. They are so early that they precede the integration of pictorial and alphabetic modes characteristic of writing in indigenous genres in early Stage 2. Estimates of their time of composition have fallen in the general range of 1535 to 1545 (they were not necessarily all done simultaneously, and some were maintained current for a time).⁶ Very close to 1540 would be my own best guess, and one must keep in mind that the Spanish impact in the relatively isolated Cuernavaca region would have been less at that time than in the Valley of Mexico or the Tlaxcala-Puebla area, so that there is every likelihood that the texts represent a very early phase indeed of Nahuatl adaptation to the Spanish presence.

The language of the Cuernavaca censuses is, naturally enough, not very discursive or elaborate, but the corpus is so extensive that variety is not entirely lacking, and some conversations and discussions of exceptional situations do occur. What stands out is the general absence of Spanish words or constructions, aside from numerous proper

⁵ Eike Hinz, Claudine Hartau, and Marie-Luise Heimann-Koenen, eds., *Aztekischer Zensus: Zur indianischen Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Marquesado um 1540: Aus dem "Libro de Tributos"* (Col. Ant. Ms. 551) im Archivo Histórico, México, 2 vols. (Hannover: Verlag für Ethnologie, 1983); S. L. Cline, ed. and tr., *The Book of Tributes: Early Sixteenth-Century Nahuatl Censuses from Morelos* (Museo de Antropología e Historia, Archivo Histórico, Colección Antigua, vol. 549), Nahuatl Studies Series, 4. (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1993).

⁶ See Cline, *Book of Tributes*, 8.

names, and the use of indigenous neologisms for the one or two Spanish phenomena that are central to the texts' subject matter.⁷ The Cuernavaca censuses thus give us a pattern strongly contrasting with the great mass of Stage 2 Nahuatl documents, a base line from which we can measure the degree of change in later times and start to explore the characteristics of Stage 1.

The greatest single resource in approaching Stage 1 language strategies is the lexical work of fray Alonso de Molina, resident in the Mexico City area from childhood and one of the most productive of the Franciscan philologists. The definitive version of his great *Vocabulario*, the one most accessible from the date of its publication through the eighteenth century and on until today (and the one I have used), came out in 1571, years into Stage 2.⁸ It was preceded, however, by an edition with only Spanish-to-Nahuatl entries published in 1555, relatively few years after the time I postulate for the transition between Stages 1 and 2. The 1555 edition contains the core of the later version, which does add and elaborate but rarely changes anything and drops little. The 1571 volume thus contains Nahuatl renderings of Spanish introductions from different time periods, sometimes in the same entry. The accretive process can be projected back to the genesis of the first edition, which must have taken many years to develop and then produce in print. Surely the collection of items must have begun in the mid-1540s, if not earlier.

Molina was one of the greatest Spanish masters of Nahuatl, spoken and written, in a time of intense indigenous-language philological activity in the mendicant orders. He did not write his dictionaries entirely by himself, however. Like all his colleagues, he relied heavily on native speakers as aides. It was essentially they who provided Nahuatl glosses of Spanish words in the project's first incarnation. Along with the cases where Nahuatl and Spanish semantics coincide reasonably – the great bulk – and a liberal sprinkling of Stage 2 Spanish loan vocabulary, one finds many entries in which new Spanish phenomena are rendered with Nahuatl vocabulary; these represent the best and most copious evidence on Stage 1 that is presently available. And despite the fact that all the different responses are side by side in the

⁷ It is true that some Spanish vocabulary is found in the corpus, a good deal of it apparently involving code switching (i.e., going over briefly to Spanish) and some of it highly whimsical, deviant loans of a type that later times were to avoid. I judge these aspects to relate to the fact that the writers had been subjected to quite intensive instruction by Spanish ecclesiastics. See the discussions in Karttunen and Lockhart, *Nahuatl in the Middle Years*, 40–41, and Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 284n.

⁸ Fray Alonso de Molina, *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana y mexicana y castellana* (1571) (Mexico: Porrúa, 1970).

same book, one can deduce something about sequence. Thus Nahuatl *maçatl*, "deer," the Stage 1 rendering of "horse," no longer appears as an independent word in that meaning in Molina, having been displaced before the time of publication by the popular Spanish loanword *caballo*, but it still is found in many compound words having to do with equine matters. From Molina alone we can confidently postulate a time when *maçatl* was dominant, entering into a large number of complex constructions as well as appearing independently. As an independent word it gave way quickly to the onslaught of loan nouns at the beginning of Stage 2, but held on for a time in larger constructions in which it had become embedded and was harder to replace.

The glosses proffered by Molina's aides can always be taken as in some sense authentic expressions of those particular speakers. But if we had the dictionary alone, we might wonder whether any of the expressions were ever current. Indeed, some have the earmarks of ad hoc solutions found for arcane words explained by Molina to the aides, probably never thought of again—thus for "corsair" *acaico tenamoyani*, "someone who robs people on boats."⁹ A certain number of Stage 1 expressions took hold and stayed in the language for centuries, appearing in texts of all time periods and confirming Molina's material as to its currency, if not as to chronology. Mundane Nahuatl documents of the first decade or so after their appearance (circa 1545–55) are a great help because they contain, along with Stage 2 phenomena, native-vocabulary names for Spanish things identical with or similar to entries in Molina. With time, such expressions largely fade out in the documentary corpus, leaving us to deduce that they were vestigial in early Stage 2 documentation, left over from the preceding stage. All through the second half of the sixteenth century, certain (usually abstract, difficult, or exotic) loanwords in Nahuatl texts are routinely found accompanied by another version in Stage 1 style; by the seventeenth century such pairing becomes rare, revealing its nature as another aspect of the transition between stages. A most useful text is Book 12 of Sahagún's Florentine Codex, a narration of events taking place early in Stage 1. Direct speeches by the actors use Stage 1 expressions almost exclusively, whereas the narrators, who wrote at various times in Stage 2, readily use Spanish loanwords, even when speaking of the same things mentioned in other terms by the actors.¹⁰

We thus have ample reason to believe in the existence of a linguistic

⁹ *Ibid.*, Spanish to Nahuatl section, f. 31v.

¹⁰ See James Lockhart, ed. and tr., *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993), introduction.

Stage 1, roughly the first generation after contact, going to approximately 1540 or 1545, and we have a fair amount of material elucidating its nature.

Presented with a Spanish introduction that was perceptibly different from anything known to them, the Nahuas of the first generation resorted to several devices doubtless already existing in their language (and common to virtually all languages, for that matter). The most straightforward strategy may be termed identification. That is, the new thing was simply called by the name of something similar, as though the two things were the same. As we have seen, horses were called deer; iron or steel was called *tepoztlī*, "copper." Such identifications are open to various interpretations. They can be taken as metaphors that became frozen (and Nahuatl was full of metaphor, though the identifications are not of the normal Nahuatl type, in which a symmetrical pair of words stands for something not fully or directly named by either). They can be taken as extensions of meaning of a more normal type. The horse, like the deer, ate grass, had hooves and soulful eyes, and was notably fleet; surely, sharing so much, the creatures could share a name. Or the identifications can be taken as the result of imagining the Nahuatl word in its generic sense rather than its specific sense. "Maçatl" would mean ultimately fleet herbivorous quadruped, the deer happening to be the only example known in the vicinity of the Nahuas. Something of this nature is especially likely to have been involved with *tepoztlī*, which by its etymology appears to have referred originally to metallic ores in general, and probably meant "workable nonprecious metal" before it meant "copper." Essentially no adjustment at all was required to apply it to iron and steel; it was used also for bell metal and the metal of printers' type.¹¹

But as subtle and ambiguous as the background of identifications is, one aspect is clear. They bear no relation to the corresponding Spanish vocabulary; they are not interlinguistic and are barely intercultural. They rest on the direct perception of a phenomenon, the appraisal of which was then formulated entirely within the framework of the Nahuatl language and the culture it bore. The great bulk of early Nahuatl linguistic reactions to the Spanish presence had the same character.

When the new phenomenon was perceived (following principles I have not yet managed to systematize) as too distinct from its local equivalent for a simple identification, one solution was to modify the word bearing the identity, noting both the sameness and the difference

¹¹ For a detailed treatment of the word see Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 272-76.

(or rather one striking difference; a name had to be succinct to take hold). This type of construction I call a qualified identification. Spanish candles were quite similar to Nahua pine torches (*ocotl*) in their purpose and effect, but notably different in appearance and in other qualities. The expression the Nahuas hit upon and used for a time was *xicoctitlaoctli*, "beeswax torch."¹² The preconquest war club, inset with obsidian blades, was a *macquahuītl* (literally "stick in the hand"). A Spanish sword was called a *tepozmacquahuītl*, a "metal war club."¹³ One of the most widely used and long-lasting expressions of this type was *tlequiquitzli*, "fire trumpet (horn, whistle)" for firearm.¹⁴ Note that the emphasis falls on the sensory impression rather than on the lethal impact.

Direct description was another way to arrive at neologisms, but many such renderings suffered from excessive length and never found favor. An appropriately compact expression could sometimes be attained by indicating function, using Nahuatl's deverbial instrumental construction, the effect of which was something like English *-er*. Thus a key was a *tlatlapoloni*, an "opener," and a lock a *tlatzaqualoni*, a "closer."¹⁵ Synecdoche also provided telling and usable expressions. A cart was a *quauhtemalacatl*, "wooden wheel," named after the outsized wheels that dominated the Spanish model.¹⁶

In language contact generally, grammar makes itself strongly felt. Nouns are the items most frequently borrowed; various kinds of constraints and morphological complexities impede other types of loans. Nahuatl in Stages 2 and 3 is an excellent example. But in the prelinguistic, hermetic Stage 1, there was nothing to keep neologisms from being verbs describing observed actions. The best known are from the religious sphere: *quatequia*, "to pour water on someone's head," "to baptize"; *quailpia*, "to tie (a ribbon on) someone's head," "to confirm"; *teflamaca*, "to give something to someone, to serve someone," "to give someone communion." The visibility, the lack of connection with the Spanish cultural framework and symbolic system, is especially clear here. In the same way, a characteristic Nahuatl expression (which

¹² Molina, *Vocabulario*, Spanish to Nahuatl, f. 24. Some of the most popular identifications may have begun with qualifications that were dropped in the name of streamlining once the new reference was sufficiently familiar. The expression for iron is sometimes found listed as *tlitlic tepoztlī*, "black copper" (*ibid.*, Spanish to Nahuatl, f. 71), but in actual texts the modifier is hardly seen.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Spanish to Nahuatl, f. 59.

¹⁴ See Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 267-68.

¹⁵ Molina, *Vocabulario*, Spanish to Nahuatl, ff. 34v, 79v.

¹⁶ *Temalacatl* was itself a neologism in this sense, an identification with the round flat sacrificial stone of preconquest times. See Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 268.

smacks of Stage 1 but cannot be tied to it with documentary evidence) was to "see" rather than "hear" mass.¹⁷

Language in general minimizes innovations, and Stage 1 Nahuatl was no different. Each successful neologism was used to the hilt, avoiding the necessity of further neologisms in that semantic vicinity. All the accoutrements of horses, firearms, carts, and the like were denominated by compounding the neologism with a familiar term, creating a complex of secondary qualified identifications. Thus a stable was a *maqacalli*, a "deer house," horseshoes *maqacactli*, "deer footwear," and so on.¹⁸

In every case, the Nahuas judged what they perceived by the criteria of their own culture, forcing the new into their own framework whether it fit well or not. A prime example is the Nahuatl reaction to European musical instruments. The Nahuas' two main categories were winds and drums, differentiated by two manners of performance, blowing and beating. These modes the Spaniards shared, but they also brought instruments in a new category, the strings (during the time period in question, plucked strings only). The Nahuas, however, recognized no new category. They took guitars and lutes to be drums, inventing a qualified identification for the purpose, *mechahuehuatl*, "cord drum," and to play such an instrument was called beating.¹⁹

The general impression of Stage 1 language adaptations is, as we have seen, of no properly linguistic contact at all. Yet the Nahuas were already picking elements of one type out of the to them meaningless chaos of Spanish speech: proper names. Even during the first generation, a large number of local people received baptism and along with it a Spanish Christian name. The mere introduction of a name, however, did not change the overall Stage 1 context; here too the story was much the same, of indigenous interpretation of something perceived within the existing framework. The Spanish personal names were opaque, not consisting of transparent lexical words like Nahuatl names, so they were close to simple sounds. Moreover, the Nahuas, as people of the world normally do in such situations, failed to hear those Spanish sounds that differed from their own, hence naturalized the names by pronouncing them with substitute sounds according to their own phonological system.

A few names of prominent Spaniards (and also the Spanish name of the famous indigenous interpreter Marina) appear to have become

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 269–70.

¹⁸ See these and other such terms in Molina, *Vocabulario*, Nahuatl to Spanish, f. 50.

¹⁹ See Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 281–83.

generally known around this time, as well as one very important place name, Castilla (Castile), the homeland of the outsiders. This too was brought within the local framework, for the Nahuas not only adapted the word to their own pronunciation, they found a place for it in Nahuatl morphology, identifying the last syllable with a common Nahuatl locative suffix. In Nahuatl the word became Caxtillan, with a *-atlan/-lan* ending as in Tlaxcallan (Tlaxcala); from this form was derived *caxtilltecatl*, "inhabitant of Caxtillan" – that is, Spaniard. Caxtillan itself served mainly not as a place designation but as a prominent element in the general Stage 1 system of naming Spanish introductions. It was heaven sent as an all-purpose modifier for use in qualified identifications. (Its only remote rival was "tepoztlil," "iron metal," which could be used with all the many new metal artifacts the Spaniards brought.) *Caxtillan centli*, "Castile maize," for "wheat," was but one of a host of such constructions. It never ceases to bemoan me that the expression is virtually the same thing, seen from the other side, as the first formulation of the English in North America for maize: "Indian corn."²⁰

The language of the first generation of Nahuas after contact, even and especially when dealing with contact phenomena, fully retained its normality and regularity. It used long-standing Nahuatl mechanisms and elements of the traditional lexicon to construct new expressions for things emanating from the Spaniards that were deemed worthy of notice. The interpretation came entirely from the Nahuas; each new thing was denominated and described in relation to existing words and concepts, as a discrete item within the unchanged indigenous framework, as with the "string drums," unaffected by the Spanish interpretive frame. The raw materials for the new lore being formed were not understood Spanish words and instructions but direct sensory impressions, visual or sometimes aural.

WRITING, SEEING, AND THE CONQUEST

If reconstructing the general Nahuatl linguistic reaction to the Spanish presence in the first generation requires a great deal of detective work, the conditions for discovering their more specific view of the Spaniards and the Spaniards' actions during the conquest epoch are even less propitious.²¹ It is notorious that opinions on cataclysmic events –

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 275–79.

²¹ Much of the following section parallels portions of the introduction to Lockhart, *We People Here*, often summarizing or casting in a different light according to the present purpose, but in several cases entering into more detail.

not only value-judgments and interpretive frameworks, but also beliefs about the narrative skeleton of what happened – evolve drastically during succeeding decades. As we have seen, Nahuatl alphabetic writing did not mature as a vehicle capable of capturing conquest narratives until twenty or twenty-five years after contact. And complex conquest narratives did not necessarily blossom the moment the technical capacity to write them came into existence. One important text, the annals of Tlatelolco, may date from around 1545, some twenty-five years after the events related, but most relevant writings are the product, in their present form, of the 1560s and 70s, and that includes the most formidable and well known of all the conquest narratives, Book 12 of Sahagún's Florentine Codex.²²

The main preconquest historical genre, by all indications, was a form that can reasonably be called annals, organized by calendar year in the indigenous system, invariably taking the home *altepetl* or local ethnic state as the arena (some hundreds of entities of this type made up the Nahua world). Dates and names were reliably expressed through pictographic writing, and some other conventional glyphs, aided by direct depiction, hinted at events and conversations which had to be kept in the recorder's mind for full oral presentation. Pictorial documents with an oral component continued to be produced after the conquest and even on into the time of alphabeticism. The writers of the very first alphabetic documents, of which very few examples remain, did not yet know how to incorporate the pictorial element. After some years, however, a mode of doing annals evolved in which the pictorial component, though stylistically affected by European artistic techniques, was somewhat as in preconquest times, accompanied by an alphabetic text transcribing the oral component. In this form, annals writing took hold all over central Mexico in the second half of the sixteenth century, and several texts have been preserved. They are of special interest in that they are in an indigenous genre and were written by indigenous people on their own initiative and for their own purposes, without the Spanish encouragement that was at least a factor in the evolution of Nahuatl notarial records or the actual Spanish supervision seen in the production of ecclesiastical texts in Nahuatl.²³

In general, however, such annals tell us quite little about Nahua views of the conquest, or rather, perhaps, they tell us much by what they fail to say. They are usually much more concerned with precon-

²² See *ibid.*, introduction.

²³ For a study of the annals genre, see Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 376–92.

quest than with postconquest happenings; their central purpose is the exaltation of the local *altepetl*, its legacy, and its rights, especially in relation to neighboring indigenous groups. Not much is made of the Spanish conquest, nor is ink lavished on the Spaniards. Portrayal of the countrywide aspect of the campaign and subsequent transformations is weak or entirely lacking. The Spaniards receive mention primarily as they physically move into or past that particular *altepetl* and later as they bring about changes in the jurisdictional arrangements of the *altepetl* or alter its tribute arrangements. Both types of changes were, and were seen as, adjustments in already existing systems. The introduction of the Christian sacraments is also recorded, again in relation to that particular entity, generally without comment (overt authorial comment was not indeed a normal part of annals style). Most postconquest entries continue to have to do with the installation, removal, or death of local *altepetl* authorities, and with other local news, a good deal of it meteorological, astronomical, or epidemiological. The overall impression is of a continuation of the preconquest entity and its autonomous governance. Concern with the Spaniards and their doings is minimal, limited to direct impact on the local entity.²⁴

We must remember that in most parts of Nahua in central Mexico, what passes for conquest involved at most brief skirmishing or no hostilities at all, and a large body of Spaniards was present for a few days or never. Small wonder that most of the Nahuas were not moved to write at length about the first phase of Spanish contact. Prolonged, bitterly contested combat and catastrophic defeat were seen only in the immediate vicinity of Tenochtitlan and its junior partner (and rival) Tlatelolco, the two island *altepetl* in Lake Texcoco which were the base of the Mexica (known to many as the Aztecs). It is only in Tenochtitlan/Tlatelolco that we find major Nahuatl historical writings narrating in some detail the events of the conquest, especially, of course, events involving the Mexica themselves (for as we will see, these texts share the overwhelmingly local orientation of the rest).

The three most salient Mexica sources are very unequal in extent and unbalanced by provenience. Book 12 of Sahagún's Florentine Codex, a full-scale treatment of how the Spaniards overcame the Mexica, is more bulky than all the rest of the relevant Nahuatl literature put together. The annals of Tlatelolco, the second most extensive source, are mainly preconquest in subject matter, with only one substantial

²⁴ See the excerpts from the annals of Cuauhtinchan and Cuauhtitlan in Lockhart, *We People Here*, and the comments on them in the introduction.

section devoted to the conquest and after. The Codex Aubin, primarily postconquest, contains only some suggestive fragments.²⁵ The two more copious texts are both from Tlatelolco, perhaps because the Tlatelolca were so intent on denying their lesser status compared with the Tenochca (a major thrust of their writings), but perhaps also because Tlatelolco was the epicenter of the massive campaign in Nahuatl philology carried on by the Franciscan order in central Mexico. Book 12 was done under frankly Spanish auspices and even ostensibly in a Spanish genre. The annals of Tlatelolco approach the traditional indigenous form more closely and bear no overt indications of Spanish participation, but given the place and the apparent time of writing, Franciscan influence must virtually be assumed. The third text, the Codex Aubin, is Tenochca; it was done independently of Spanish sponsorship, although the writer had close connections with the Franciscans. Much of the material of Book 12 was apparently first put on paper in the 1550s; it continued to evolve, however, not taking the exact form in which we know it until the 1570s. The annals of Tlatelolco, the earliest of the whole corpus, may, as mentioned above, be dated around 1545. The Codex Aubin was not begun until the 1560s; the conquest portion is material then circulating in some form that the writer collected and reproduced to all appearances quite uncritically.

The corpus left to us, then, is late, tainted with Spanish influence and participation, and comes mainly from groups atypical not only of the mass of Nahuas spread around the country in their various less affected altepetl, but atypical even of the Mexica, among whom Tenochtitlan was dominant and much larger than Tlatelolco (as it continued to be after the conquest). Yet we must use what we have, and indeed there is no reason to despair. The Mexica were, after all, Nahuas, with the same proud localism and self-absorption as the rest,

²⁵ Details in *ibid.*, introduction. See also fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 13 pts. (Salt Lake City, Utah, and Santa Fe, New Mexico: University of Utah Press and School of American Research, Santa Fe, 1950–82), especially pt. 13 (Book 12), and Sahagún, *Códice Florentino*, MS 218–220 de la colección Palatina de la Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, facsimile edition, 3 vols. (Florence: Giunti Barbera and the Archivo General de la Nación, 1979), as well as *Historia de la nación mexicana*, ed. by Charles E. Dibble (México: Porrúa, 1963), “Unos Anales Históricos de la Nación Mexicana. Teil I. Die Handschrift nebst Übersetzung,” ed. by Ernst Mengin, *Baessler-Archiv: Beiträge zur Völkerkunde*, 22. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1939), and “*Unos Anales Históricos de la Nación Mexicana*,” ed. by Ernst Mengin, *Corpus Codicum Americanorum Medii Aevi*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, Det Berlingske Bogtrykkeri, 1945). Some other Nahuatl texts from the region have passages or sections bearing on the conquest; it is not my intention to be exhaustive.

and though they bore the brunt of the Spanish attack and were the great losers, and hence cared much more intensely about the process, many facets of their attitudes, reactions, and general outlook must have been widely shared. And if Spanish friars had something to do with the records being put in alphabetic form, still evidences of authentic indigenous forms, impulses, and expressions abound. They are especially clear where a tension exists between Spanish aims and what is to be found in the Nahuatl texts.

Sahagún wanted to cap his great enterprise of an encyclopedia of preconquest culture with a volume on the conquest of Mexico, partly, as he explains, so that things unknown to Spaniards would be told, and partly to record the Nahuatl vocabulary of war. His vision clearly embraced at least all of central Mexico, as shown in one of the Spanish titles he composed for Book 12; in a spirit of realism, however, he qualified the broader thrust, admitting that the story concerned Mexico City.²⁶ But what we read in the body of the book is not even that broad; things Tlatelolcan are given the majority of the space, and the perspective is Tlatelolcan in the most pervasive manner, to the point that the Tenochca appear in a negative light more often than not. One of Sahagún's purposes, part of Franciscan political posturing, was to exalt the figure of Hernando Cortés, leader of the conquest. Yet Cortés is mentioned much less frequently in the Nahuatl than in Sahagún's Spanish translation. Sahagún had in mind the Spanish chronicles of the conquest; it was because of their influence that the work had a title at all, and he cut up the text into titled chapters following the same model. But even a cursory examination of the text shows that it existed in a more fluid form before Sahagún inserted the chapter divisions, which often conflict with the course of the narrative. One chapter break divides a war cry in two; at one point, a long chapter contains several separate major episodes.²⁷

A search in Book 12 for things congruent with the results of the general linguistic inquiry sketched here will not go unrewarded. Visuality, pragmatism, normal processes, the retention of the traditional framework are all found here as well. All older Nahuatl narrative known to us, if indeed narrative is the term, is episodic, consisting of a series of fully realized scenes rather than an even, connected flow of events. Book 12 is the same, and the manner of bringing the scenes to life is highly visual. It is, of course, the scenes involving Spaniards that most interest us here.

²⁶ Sahagún, *Códice Florentino*, Book 12, unnumbered introductory folios and f. 1.

²⁷ See Lockhart, *We People Here*, introduction.

One very suggestive episode takes place toward the end of the Spanish campaign against the Mexica, when the latter were hemmed into an enclosure on the north end of the island holding both Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco. Unable to come to grips, the Spaniards resorted to a device of siege warfare with which they had little experience, a catapult. Book 12 tells how they set it up on an altar platform, gesticulating to one another to show where to aim it, then placed in a stone, drew the arm back, and shot, missing the target. Thereupon, as the arm went back and forth like a pendulum until it righted itself, the Spaniards angrily jabbed their fingers in one another's faces. Seeing the operation of the instrument, the Mexica hit upon calling it a *quauhquemallatl*, a "wooden sling," a typical qualified identification as treated above.²⁸ Here, then, the Nahuas were by no means privy to the discussions of the Spaniards; they watched from afar, drawing their own conclusions from what they saw, on the presumption that the Spaniards were like themselves. This purely visual and deductive interpretation of Spanish actions, cast in words, represents the entire rendering of the episode, and so it is with a great many others. Sometimes the visuality (and aurality) are even more pronounced than in the first example, and the culture-free perceptions more noticeable. The passage on the first horses to enter Tenochtitlan does indeed mention the high-spirited prancing, rearing, and neighing associated in the European tradition with the noble steed, but it goes further, putting things in a quite different light by fastening on the holes made in the ground every time a horse puts its foot down, the noise like throwing stones when several go by, and their sweat lathering up so that it falls to the earth like soapsuds splatting.²⁹ Many passages are tinged with pragmatism. Observing the action of Spanish guns and crossbows, the text graphically describes their effect on indigenous boats and on individuals, distinguishing, though, between types of wounds as to their likely mortality, and goes on to explain how the Mexica soon began to zigzag, to hit the ground, and to clear out entirely when they could see a cannon (*huei tlequiquiztli*, "big fire trumpet") was about to go off.³⁰

My belief is that passages like these, that give the tone to the entire core of Book 12 on the siege proper, represent authentic oral tradition

²⁸ Nahuatl text and a translation in Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, pt. 13, 113. Also in Lockhart, *We People Here*.

²⁹ Nahuatl text and a translation in Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, pt. 13, 40. Also in Lockhart, *We People Here*.

³⁰ Nahuatl text and a translation in Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, pt. 13, 86. Also in Lockhart, *We People Here*.

preserved in relatively unchanged form from the time of events. Only someone who had actually been there and seen (though not heard) could, it seems, have originated such an item as the story of the catapult. The language of these sections is a relatively normal colloquial Nahuatl different from the elaborately repetitive style of so many parts of the Sahaguntine corpus. As I will have occasion to mention again, it is in those parts of the Florentine Codex which are most European in genre, or where we have other reasons to suspect that Sahagún or his trained Nahuatl aides/transcribers/authors intervened more directly, that this easily recognizable style makes its appearance.

The Stage 1 aura of the language of the siege sections (with a splendid example in the already mentioned name for the catapult) is another piece of evidence pointing to their eyewitness nature. A hierarchy is observable. Direct quotes from the actors are in a virtually impeccable Stage 1 Nahuatl. Third-person narrative is mainly the same, and does contain typical qualified identifications as opposed to loans, not only "wooden sling" for catapult and "fire trumpet" for firearm, but "metal war club" for sword, "metal dart" for crossbow bolt and by synecdoche for crossbow, and others. Yet the writers do not hesitate to insert loanwords of their own time (Stage 2) into their narrative. Thus the narrative usually says *caballo*, "horse," whereas the actors in direct speech always say *maçatl*, "deer."³¹ In fact however, "deer" occurs a couple of times in the third person narrative as well. When I first noticed the distinction between narrative and direct speech, I thought it meant that the writers were aware of the distinction between Stage 1 and Stage 2 and showed it in the speeches they composed for the actors. I have not given up that view of the matter entirely, but I increasingly think that the Stage 1 phenomena originated primarily with the Nahuas who, whether eyewitnesses or not, were possessed of the oral tradition going back to the events. The aides would have felt freer to use their own normal vocabulary in narrative than in direct address (on the exact and unabbreviated reproduction of which the whole Nahuatl tradition lays stress). The Stage 2 words in the narrative would thus be a superficial overlay, explaining the largely Stage 1 feel of the text.

Ironically, in view of the degree of visuality of the core of the alphabetic text, the pictorial component of Book 12, though extensive, gives every indication of not being the primary, generative kind of element that it was in the older Nahuatl recordkeeping system. The pictures (incorporating some glyphs) deserve study from many points

³¹ See *ibid.*, introduction, and Lockhart, *The Nahuas*, 283-84.

of view, study they have not yet received and which I am hardly equipped to give them, but it is already clear enough that they were made by someone who was inspired by the text, rather than having existed first, with the text as an extended commentary upon them. My contention may be a bit hard to demonstrate conclusively. The fact that the pictures contain virtually nothing not in the text and sometimes echo relatively peripheral textual details can be interpreted in various ways. Most convincing is the fact that an earlier version of Book 12, minimally different from it in its alphabetic text, lacks illustration entirely.³² Together with the annals of Tlatelolco and the corpus of early censuses from the Cuernavaca region, it hints at something we have only begun to realize, that the first alphabetic productions in Nahuatl were not yet accompanied by pictures.

There may well have been a pictorial-oral version produced by Tlatoles themselves in the years immediately after the events, and they may have drawn on it when in the 1550s they told their tales to Sahagún's aides, who wrote down some amalgam of what they heard and what they might have said themselves. But if pictures corresponding to the strong visuality of the perceptions had their part in the generation of the alphabetic text, they are now lost to us and escape analysis.

Impressive though it is to find visuality so resoundingly confirmed in the largest of the Nahuatl conquest accounts, one must ask if the lesser versions are the same. In fact, they are not exactly the same. Although the annals of Tlatelolco and the Codex Aubin do contain a revealing visual detail here and there, picturing is not among the main techniques used. These texts are, however, episodic, to an even larger degree than Book 12. The way they realize scenes is primarily through dialogue. One result is an even greater emphasis on the Nahua linguistic, rhetorical, and conceptual framework and more attention to internal matters. In both texts, a good deal of the conversation revolves around internecine struggle, pushing the Spaniards yet further into the background than they are in Book 12. In none of the texts is curiosity about the newcomers the driving force; primary interest in all cases falls on one's own group and how it fared in a context that, it is true, included the Spaniards as a major new factor. In the lesser texts, the Spaniards appear to a large extent through their words. But the words are not in Spanish; they have been translated into Nahuatl, whether by the Spaniards' ubiquitous interpreter doña Marina or by

³² The so-called Codices matritenses. See Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, pt. 1, 11–12.

someone else, and no doubt they have been further naturalized in the process of retelling. The speeches of Cortés and others in the annals of Tlatelolco – and there are not many of them – sound very much like the utterings of the Nahuas. By the time they reach Nahua awareness, they have been transformed into idiomatic, expectable Nahuatl statements, much as the visual data were interpreted, and little of anything that is specific to Spanish culture and language adheres to them. Whether the Spanish phenomena were aural or visual, words, actions, or things, they first came to Nahua attention in neutral terms shared by both populations and both cultures (else they could not have been perceived at all), and then were immediately given meaning by being placed within Nahua interpretive frames, hence changed and naturalized. Even if some of the interpreters of the first generation had an excellent understanding of both languages, which is far from impossible, no means yet existed to render culture-specific Spanish meanings and modes into Nahuatl.

The system of identifying corporate groups, whether one's own, other indigenous groups, or the Spaniards, is the same in all three of the Mexica texts we are discussing (and indeed in the whole corpus of annals and in all the documents Nahuas generated in the sixteenth century). A blanket term for indigenous people as opposed to Spaniards, Europeans, or Old World inhabitants in general is essentially missing. That such should have been the case before contact and knowledge of the existence of the rest of humanity is understandable and predictable. The arrival of the Spaniards, as in so much else, failed to bring about a quick change in the indigenous way of viewing this matter. Only in the Florentine Codex does one find any terms at all attempting to describe the generality of the indigenous population of central Mexico in contradistinction to Spaniards, and they are used only a few times, as a last resort, when the turn of the narrative renders it imperative to find some word for the distinction. Considered strictly, there is only one such term, occurring a grand total of three times: *nican ttilaca*, literally "here we-people," best translated perhaps as "we people here" or "we local people." The term *macehualtin*, "commoners," originally "human beings," is more frequent, with the clear implication that an indigenous, non-Spanish population is being spoken of, but it is always limited in its scope to the inhabitants of a specific altepetl or small ethnic realm.

It is the altepetl (or to a much lesser extent its constituent parts) that defines indigenous identity, as in precontact times, despite the Spanish presence. References to any larger ethnic or linguistic affilia-

tion are very rare and mainly limited to enemies and (indigenous) foreigners.³³ Book 12 does recognize the subordinated language group the Otomis, interspersed among the Nahuas in many parts of central Mexico, over and above altepetl organization. There are some terms for the inhabitants of whole regions, such as the *tlatepotzteca*, the "people from behind (the mountains), or the *chinampameca*, "the people of the chinampa area." Overwhelmingly, though, indigenous groups are described by the altepetl name, whether there be only one or a whole list is needed. The altepetl is also the criterion for assigning the all-important "we" and "they," "we" being citizens of our altepetl and "they" all others, whether Spanish or indigenous.

The Spaniards, on the other hand, are specifically recognized and named in all the texts. In the Florentine Codex they uniformly receive the (apparently Stage 2) appellation *españoles*, the Spanish loanword. In the other texts, as in the sixteenth-century Nahuatl corpus generally, they are variously called: *caxtilteca*, "inhabitants of Caxtillan (Castile, Spain)"; *Caxtillan tlaca*, "Castile people"; *cristianos*, (the loanword) "Christians." Of these, the first two appear to be the oldest, bearing the signs of Stage 1 processes. Everything points to the Nahuas' having granted the Spaniards a name and identity from a very early time. The question is, what sort of identity was it? Since there was no overarching indigenous identity, there is no reason to imagine that the new category was a matching overarching intrusive or alien identity.

³³ One apparently very large exception will take a bit of explaining. An altepetl group was in itself an ethnic group, with cultural idiosyncrasies, its own history, and an awareness of itself as a people. It might, however, share much of its earlier history with the people of other altepetl. A unitary conquering group might take over and re-found several contiguous altepetl, or found one from which segments would repeatedly hive off, and the whole set would recognize an affinity and share a supra-altepetl name. Thus several altepetl of the western and southwestern part of the Valley of Mexico referred to themselves as Tepaneca. Several such macro-groups existed in the Valley, of which Book 12 and the other Mexico texts make no mention. The most famous such group, however, consisted precisely of the Mexico, who are mentioned on almost every page. The Mexico merit supra-altepetl status because their island stronghold came to harbor such a formidable population, and above all because there were two Mexico altepetl, Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco, the latter having left the rest and established a separate polity on the northern part of the island after a factional dispute early in the group's history. Yet since all the Mexico were confined to one compact island in Lake Texcoco, they hardly seem to qualify as a macroethnic group in most senses. In any case, in the two Tlatelolcan texts which dominate the corpus of conquest narratives, one can detect a tendency to narrow the meaning once again. When the texts talk of the Mexico, more often than not they in fact mean the Tenochca, by the same process by which the United States tends to appropriate "American." Moreover, when the Tlatelolca call themselves Mexico, they seem more than anything else to be trying to cash in on Tenochca prestige.

The key, I think, is in the fact that, as already mentioned, the Nahuas of the contact period assimilated the Spanish word Castilla to their own altepetl names, producing Caxtillan and from it *caxtilteca* on the model of the names for many altepetl whose names ended *-tlani/-lan*. In effect, the Spaniards were viewed as constituting one more among many altepetl groups. The internal divisions, regional and otherwise, that were so important to the Spaniards themselves went unrecognized in Nahua categorization, just as the newcomers on the other side put all the indigenous people in their single category of *indios*. Nahuatl terminology did not set up a dichotomy between indigenous people and new arrivals or outsiders but retained the already existing dichotomy between members of the altepetl and all others, putting the Spaniards essentially on the level of a single, if powerful, altepetl group. No better expression of this view could be found than Book 12's frequent expression *toyahuani*, "our enemies," which includes Spaniards and their indigenous allies alike.³⁴

None of the conquest texts, neither those originating among the Mexico nor those from the rest of central Mexico, neither those made partially under Spanish supervision nor those written entirely independently and on indigenous initiative, contain any overt moralizing about the Spaniards of the kind prevalent among modern observers. This fact may be partly attributable to the noncommittal style of Nahuatl annals writing in general. But it also seems to result from the same attitude noticed before, of simply observing what the Spaniards do and drawing conclusions within one's own cultural expectations, on the unspoken assumption that the people observed are much like oneself. The texts speak in quite graphic detail of some Spanish massacres and of the execution of some Mexica leaders after the conquest, but in the same way and apparently the same spirit they tell of the Mexica capturing, sacrificing, and dismembering Spaniards. In Book 12, when defeat is near, the Mexica leaders consult about how much and what kind of tribute they should pay, taking it for granted that the Spaniards would want the same thing as the result of a martial victory that they would themselves; and they were right. I do not mean to say that Spanish warfare made no impression on the Mexica; it surely did. Especially, the first unexpected attack on the assembled celebrants during the Toxcatl festivities, the true beginning of the war between the Spaniards and the Mexica, seems to have left an indelible impression. As we will see, all three Mexica accounts essentially begin

³⁴ More detail and precise references on the terminology in the section just above in Lockhart, *We People Here*, introduction.

with that episode, which in the Codex Aubin is the occasion for the only full-page picture accompanying the conquest section.

In what has been said until now, I have been withholding discussion of one section of the corpus that I view as anomalous within it, although precisely that portion has been definitive in the rise of the general conception of the first Nahua reactions to the Spaniards. The commonly mentioned omens, prophecies, visions, belief in a Cortés as the returning god Quetzalcoatl, and a hopeless fatalism on the part of the indigenous people, especially Moteucōma, all essentially go back to the first eighteen chapters of Book 12. They received their introduction to the modern world primarily through William Prescott and have been common currency ever since, not only in the public mind but in the writings of serious scholars in several disciplines. Only in the last few years has a reaction set in.

Prescott recounts some of the omens as simple historical fact, mentions the expected Quetzalcoatl several times, and above all homes in on Moteucōma: "If we cannot refuse our contempt for the pusillanimity of the Aztec monarch, it should be mitigated by the consideration, that his pusillanimity sprang from superstition."³⁵ Book 12 of the Florentine Codex decisively shaped Prescott's thinking; though several other sources are mentioned in this connection, some of them derive from Book 12, and it was to that text that Prescott openly gave precedence in the matter of determining indigenous attitudes.³⁶ Most of his references go to the early chapters.³⁷ Prescott did not, of course, know Nahuatl, nor have most of the followers of his example, using Sahagún's Spanish paraphrase instead, but in this case the language aspect affects the results little, for the Spanish faithfully reproduces the essence of what the Nahuatl says, in terms of substance (not, needless to say, in terms of language-specific concepts and semantic ranges).

A second and more recent example is the work of Tzvetan Todorov, whose writing is far more sophisticated than Prescott's narrative, but rests on the same materials and makes much the same epistemological assumptions.³⁸ Todorov recognizes that the omens and the tales of the

³⁵ William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico and History of the Conquest of Peru* (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), 438.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 280, n. 19, has "perhaps the most honest Aztec record of the period is to be obtained from the volumes, the twelfth book, particularly, of father Sahagun, embodying the traditions of the natives soon after the Conquest."

³⁷ See especially the fatalistic speeches on *ibid.*, 289, with a note to chapter 13 of Book 12.

³⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

trembling Moteucōma are posterior, but he proceeds nevertheless to use them to interpret thoughts and actions at the time of the conquest, especially, again, in relation to Moteucōma himself. His rationale is that though a given fact in a presentation of this type may not be literally true, it must have verisimilitude. I have no objection to this principle in many contexts, and I have often used it myself, especially in deducing the nature of basic, repeating patterns. But it will not serve across genres and across generations, and it is weakest in dealing with specific exceptional episodes. Verisimilitude amounts to meeting expectations, which would be one thing in a testament, another in annals; even within annals, expectations would be one thing in realistic battle reports and another in symbol-charged, legendary material like the first part of Book 12. And what an audience will accept as literally true for its own time is not the same as what it will believe about a time two generations back. I do take the introduction of Book 12 as full of meaning for Mexica attitudes and rationales two and three generations after the conquest, but that is quite another topic.

Todorov seems to have realized that the great majority of the inhabitants of central Mexico interacted and communicated meaningfully with the Spaniards in their own at least temporary self-interest, but he ignores them, basing everything on the exceptional Mexica alone, clearly because of their relatively large written legacy. Beyond following in the tradition of Prescott, Todorov attempts stylistic and other kinds of textual interpretation. Here lack of knowledge of the language and of its genres and conventions becomes a handicap. In Todorov's view, Spaniards were more adept in communicating with people than were the Nahuas, whose intercommunication was dominated by rigid ritualized statements of received lore.³⁹ Leaving aside the Spaniards (in effect, Todorov takes the Spaniards and especially Cortés at face value about what great communicators they were), the Nahuatl speeches of Book 12 do not have the implications that Todorov imagined. One could as well say that having things written down and solidified in books hampered the Spaniards. First of all, the set speeches of Book 12 do not imply that other modes of discourse did not exist; the Nahuas had a full panoply of discourse genres, including some notably straightforward, unambivalent, unadorned speech. The Mesoameri-

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 123, asserts that indigenous people felt no need to impose their language on other groups. How does Todorov imagine that Nahuatl had come to be the dominant language of central Mexico? Even the Nahuatl annals tell of barbarous peoples learning Nahuatl along with civilization. On the other side, how is it that Portuguese, Galician, Catalan, and Basque coexist with Castilian in Iberia?

cans in general were masters of talking to each other. The reader of Tezozomoc's *Crónica mexicana* will soon see that pre-conquest wars consisted of singing, shouting, and blustering at the other side, a brief test of arms, and the weaker side subsequently running to high places and negotiating endlessly with the other.⁴⁰ Even within the ritualistic and frozen forms so full of elaborate conventions, communication goes on, for those who understand the system. Each speech is different from the last in its details, each abbreviates, expands, shades according to the situation and the audience. The Nahuas were as rhetorical as the old Greeks, sharp and subtle, in control, not overwhelmed by the formulas they manipulated so well.

It is true enough that a rhetoric must be understood within its own framework, by people accustomed to its conventions, and that outsiders may not grasp the subtleties. The problem surely existed with communication in both directions between Nahuatl and Spanish. One of the most transcendent impressions the Spaniards received (or claimed to have received) from the Mexica, that Moteucōma was voluntarily handing over his kingdom to Cortés, may have originated in a too literal interpretation of a polite convention. When a king or other high dignitary visited a foreign altepetl, the ruler of the latter greeted the visitor with a speech that in another tradition might be taken as fawning, picturing himself and his people as dust beneath the visitor's feet and the visitor as a majestic high tree overshadowing all else and protecting all around it. The visitor would be granted all facilities, virtually be offered the realm. Within the Nahua framework, this performance was anything but fawning. Not only was it simply the polite and expected thing, but the extravagance of the speech and the gestures accompanying it were actually meant in a sense to put the visitor to shame with their magnificence.⁴¹ If the translator doña Marina was at all literal in her renderings, it would be small wonder that the Spaniards could reach the conclusion that Moteucōma was giving them the empire on a platter. Even when we look at the welcoming

⁴⁰ Don Hernando [Fernando] de Alvarado Tezozomoc, *Crónica mexicana* (together with *Códice Ramírez*, both introduced by Manuel Orozco y Berra), 2d. ed. (México: Porrúa, 1975), passim.

⁴¹ *The Art of Nahuatl Speech: The Bancroft Dialogues*, ed. by Frances Karttunen and James Lockhart, UCLA Latin American Center Nahuatl Studies Series, 2 (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1987) contains some speeches somewhat in this vein; others are in Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, pt. 7 (Book Six). In *The Art of Nahuatl Speech*, see especially (154-55) the episode in which a Tetzcoacan woman refers to a splendid feast prepared for a grand occasion as putting the Mexica to shame. The ceremonial inversion of meanings was a strong element in formal Nahuatl speech (see *ibid.*, 43-45).

speech as reproduced in the first part of Book 12, where after decades of legend formation Moteucōma's intention is (apparently) actually to hand over the altepetl to the rulership of a returning divinity, one could change a very few words and have a normal welcoming address. Indeed, with the usual expectations and allowing for maximum hyperbole, one could still read the speech that way.⁴²

The welcoming address comes toward the end of the preliminary part of Book 12, before the fighting between Mexica and Spaniards begins. It is precisely this section that has, at least until the last few years, been definitive in determining modern commentators' views of early indigenous reactions to the intruders. Yet, in my opinion, it does not have the same status as the rest of the account, which by all indications substantially represents a tradition carried down by eyewitnesses and their successors from the time of the events. Rather it is the result of posterior reinterpretation and reconstruction, an explanatory process highly interesting in itself, but carried out by different people, with a different purpose, using the concepts and attitudes of a different time.

Surveying the annals of Tlatelolco, the Codex Aubin, and Book 12, one notices that the conquest-related portions of the first two essentially begin with the Toxcatl massacre, which clearly had an enormous impact on Mexica consciousness. Book 12 is apparently – but only apparently – an exception. A sharp break in style and orientation separates everything after Toxcatl from everything before it. Indeed, the break is within the episode, with the background description of the festivity belonging to the first part, and the second part beginning with the attack of the Spaniards.⁴³

The second part, on which I have concentrated in my discussions above, is, by Nahuatl standards, in a very spare, straightforward, un-metaphorical narrative-colloquial prose. The first part is preponderantly in the specific style of the Sahagún corpus that I briefly characterized above. Like traditional Nahuatl elevated speech, it is full of metaphor and repetition. But whereas extant examples of Nahuatl speeches, songs, and polite conversation tend strongly to a symmetrical rhythm in phrasing, and especially to pairing at various levels, the specific Sahagún style goes beyond pairing to a piling up of close equivalents, at times giving every imaginable lexical and grammatical variant of expressions, as though the purpose were to create a working

⁴² The speech is in Chapter 16. It is in Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, pt. 13, p. 44. Also in Lockhart, *We People Here*.

⁴³ The second part begins with Chapter 20, p. 55 in Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, pt. 13.

dictionary or language lessons. Such thoughts were in fact not far from Sahagún's mind.⁴⁴ The style is not uniformly present throughout the Florentine Codex. In large portions of the corpus, such as the set speeches of Book 6 or the stories about gods in Book 3, it is entirely absent. In other parts, such as the volumes on plants and animals, it is dominant. The connoisseur of the corpus gradually comes to expect it more in parts based on European genres, less in parts based on indigenous genres; more in materials more thoroughly processed by Sahagún and his aides, less where the presentations of Nahuas outside the Sahagún team were allowed to stand in something closer to their original form.

Following this line of evidence, I conclude that the second part corresponds more closely to a relatively older Mexica (Tlatelolca) tradition existing apart from the Sahagún circle, and that the first part, probably originating among second-generation postcontact Mexica intellectuals (a category including many of Sahagún's aides), underwent more extensive and conscious rewriting, if not full-fledged original composition. I do not mean to say that the division between the two parts is categorical and exceptionless. The Sahagún style reappears to an extent in the portions dealing with fighting the Spaniards after their disastrous exit from Tenochtitlan⁴⁵; the very fact that the action takes place elsewhere, however, is most suggestive. It would appear that the Mexica (again, specifically the Tlatelolca) knew and cared less about matters affecting them less directly. They must have retained only a very skeletal record, which Sahagún's aides or others like them and of their generation filled out in their own fashion. Even leaving this section out of consideration, the distinction between the two parts of Book 12 is not absolute. A certain amount of the characteristic padding of the Sahagún style is to be found throughout the volume; on the other hand, some widely reported details of the first part seem to go back to an earlier tradition.

The two parts also share a strong visuality. Only in the second part, however, do we find episodes like that of the catapult, where the description could hardly have originated with anyone but an eyewitness. The highly visual renderings of horses and dogs in the first part, or of Spaniards sickened by the sight of blood on food offered them, could easily have been based on observations of phenomena visible in the everyday life of the post-contact period. The supremely detailed descriptions of the gods' or priests' outfits given to Cortés, and of the

⁴⁴ See Lockhart, *We People Here*, introduction.

⁴⁵ Portions of Chapters 25–27.

the appearance and raiment of the dough image of Huitzilopochtli, complete with colors,⁴⁶ give every indication of deriving from pre-conquest-style pictorial or pictographic documents, which need not have been, and doubtless were not, tied in any way to the specific story of the conquest.

Taking it, then, that a substantial divergence exists between the two portions of Book 12 as to style and as to time and manner of origin, we would expect thematic differences as well, and they appear as expected. Omens and prophetic epiphanies are restricted to the first part, as are the general dumbfounded acceptance of the inevitability of doom, the pusillanimous, vacillating, augury-ridden Moteucōma, and the notion of the return of the god Quetzalcoatl. But these things, the reader will say, are the entire content of the version normally purveyed to us of how the population of central Mexico reacted to the coming of the Spaniards. Just so. The by now traditional view of the matter not only passes by everyone but the Mexica and fastens nearly exclusively on Book 12 among Mexica texts, but it draws only on the posterior first part, ignoring the earlier second part (actually much more to the purpose) and its decidedly more pragmatic, microethnic cast.

The omens are eight in number,⁴⁷ as one could have predicted, eight being canonical among the Nahuas for almost any set of things, from the verses of a song to the constituent parts of an altepetl. No other known Nahuatl sources mention the omens or anything like them. A few equally late sources in Spanish do.⁴⁸ Nearly all are connected in some way with Tenochtitlan; the Book 12 omens, as is normal in the Nahua annals tradition, refer entirely to the local scene. It is most telling that the Tlaxcalan mestizo chronicler Muñoz Camargo, who wrote in Spanish some years after the Florentine Codex project reached its definitive form and must have known it in some way, is reduced to quoting literally the same Mexica omens, very much against the spirit of the indigenous historical tradition.⁴⁹ Surely the omens are part of a posterior stocktaking in which the Mexica, well after the fact, tried to explain, or explain away, their dizzying fall from

⁴⁶ Chapters 4, 19.

⁴⁷ Chapter 1.

⁴⁸ See John E. Kicza, *Patterns in Spanish Overseas Encounters to 1600* (forthcoming, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press).

⁴⁹ Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala*, ed. by René Acuña (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1984), 209–212. Juan López y Magaña first pointed out to me the similarities and the probable origin of the passage in Muñoz Camargo.

dominance. Other Nahua groups had not undergone that experience and felt less need to explain.

Book 12's Moteucōma is another aspect of the same explanatory enterprise, in this case the finding of a scapegoat. All over the Spanish Indies, a reaction sooner or later set in among indigenous groups against those who led them – often seized in the course of peaceful parleys – at the time the Spaniards came. The reaction is real enough, but we must be careful not to confuse it with the attributes of the leaders themselves. We have no reason to imagine that Moteucōma was at all as the first part of Book 12 makes him. In addition to the effects of scapegoating and uninformed posterior reconstruction, the Moteucōma of Book 12 suffers from the strong Tlatelolca orientation of its writers, who not only set up their own Itzquauhtzin as a near-equal of Moteucōma in status and power but use the two as contrasts in virtue, wisdom, and popularity, needless to say to Itzquauhtzin's advantage. By a generation after contact, Moteucōma, aside from matters of how he was evaluated, had become far more important to the Mexica than he had been at the time; he had become a symbol of the conquest. For the Spaniards, the same thing had meanwhile happened with Cortés. Note that in the second part no one leader stands out; the several Tenochca and Tlatelolca who are prominent are mentioned primarily for feats of arms. Moteucōma's successor Quauhtemoc, who as the decades and centuries went on was to displace Moteucōma as a Mexica symbol, this time a positive one, appears infrequently and neutrally.

As for the notion aired in the first part of Book 12 that Moteucōma and others viewed Cortés as the god Quetzalcoatl, returning as prophesied across the eastern seas to reclaim his kingdom, recent scholarship has already cast doubt on the Quetzalcoatl identification as a phenomenon of the conquest years. Carefully surveying the corpus of relevant indigenous and Spanish writing, Susan Gillespie has come to the conclusion that the Quetzalcoatl myth only gradually took shape over the postconquest years, again as a posterior explanatory device, not reaching its full and definitive form until around the 1570s – when the Florentine Codex too was receiving the final touches.³⁰ Many Nahuatl texts having doubtless disappeared, an argument from the absence of a specific item in surviving early documents is perhaps not absolutely conclusive, but I find the evidence convincing and the sug-

³⁰ Susan D. Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexica History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), Chapter 6, especially 192–96, 200. See also Kicza, *Patterns*.

gested lateness congruent with all the other indications about the first part of Book 12.

Not that all references to the Spaniards in general or to Cortés specifically as gods can be relegated to the second generation. On the contrary, the Nahuatl word *teotl*, usually and properly translated “god,” occurs as a designation of the Spaniards in both parts of Book 12, and also in the other texts that have been discussed here. Spanish testimony on the point exists as well. The usage seems to have been an authentic feature of the conquest period, and it further seems, on the face of it, to go against the pragmatism and realism I have detected in early Nahua responses. Perhaps it really does so; I do not insist that the reaction was wholly of one piece, either in a given individual or among the Nahuas in general. But much remains misunderstood. We do not know how widespread the usage was, nor for how long a time it was current. Most especially, we do not know exactly how the term was meant. Another part of the Florentine Codex asserts that in ancient and legendary Tula, men used it to address each other, presumably in extreme politeness.³¹ In addition to denominating gods and divine things, “teotl” was used in connection with anything extraordinary, not only unusually large things, but oddities and monstrosities. Conceivably it had something of the thrust of Maya *dzul*, “outsider, non-Maya,” which became the definitive word for Spaniard in Yucatan³² (whereas “teotl” in the sense in question was current for at most a few years). Conceivably the word was meant ironically. Even if it did refer to divinity in the obvious way and, for a time, was intended seriously to recognize the newcomers as indigenous gods or their avatars, it would have been one more example of the tendency to place the new in one's own framework, using the resources of one's own culture.

At any rate, returning from my long digression on second-generation Mexica lore about the conquest, I repeat by way of conclusion that a strong congruity as to the view of the Spaniards and the conquest process exists that emerges from two very disparate bodies of evidence: texts containing aspects of the first-generation linguistic reaction to the Spanish presence, and the apparently older and less reworked portions of the relevant Nahuatl annals. In both bodies of material and in both modes of expression, the Nahuas see and assess the Spaniards, their things, and their ways from outside Spanish cul-

³¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, pt. 11 (Book 10), Chapter 29. On this whole matter see also Lockhart, *We People Here*, introduction.

³² Restall, “The World of the *Chil*,” *passim*.

ture, feeding visual and other direct sensory impressions into the normal indigenous interpretive framework. Whatever cataclysms, shocks, epidemics, or technological and economic changes were going on, that framework itself did not yet change, nor was it yet in an internal crisis. The input of the Spaniards was absorbed as individual, separate elements each of which was in some way comparable to items in the Nahuatl cultural repertory. No stark indigenous-foreign polarity arose. The Nahuatl seemed to recognize no new "other"; rather they continued to define themselves by altepetl, making the members of the altepetl "we" and all others, indigenous or Spanish, "they."

Dialogues of the deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic coast of Africa

WYATT MACGAFFEY

IF the encounter of Africans with Europeans in the early modern period is to be represented as two-sided rather than one-sided, special methodological problems must be faced. Of the other chapters in this section, four deal with Asian countries, and all of them with populations in which, at least within a short time of the arrival of Europeans, literacy was sufficiently established that indigenous chronicles were written, from which some idea of the local view of those Europeans can be gained. On the Atlantic coast of Africa, literates were relatively few until the nineteenth century, and apparently none of those who could write recorded their early impressions of Europeans in any document that has survived. The question of what Africans thought must be approached indirectly. With respect to history ("what happened"), the problem of the absence of documentation is not new in African studies, nor peculiar to Africa, but with respect to indigenous ethnography ("perceptions of the other") there has been very little discussion, largely because the indications of ethnographic knowledges among Africans have been classified as mythology and religious belief.¹

It is traditional to assume that anthropology is a science peculiar to the modern West, where it arose in response to the European experience of other parts of the world then coming under European domination. Given a narrow sense of anthropology as a professional discipline, the tradition is obviously correct; even in Europe, museums of ethnology and professorships of anthropology were created only toward the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it is reason-

¹ An admittedly cursory survey of recent books about early Portuguese commercial and diplomatic activity in West Africa discovered none in which the question of what Africans thought is even mentioned.