

THE MEXICA EMPIRE: MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND COLLECTIONISM

“Typically, ancient civilizations turned their back on the future, but they saw the past spread in front of them as the sole reality, always as an ideal to emulate.”

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This chapter covers the four topics requested to unify the comparative analysis and the future publication. The concept that guides this text has been explained by Jacques Le Goff y Paul Ricoeur¹ summarized in the words of Alain Schnapp: “The foundation of memory is repetition: the capacity to reactivate a fading memory or rediscover a monument that erosion has disguised or nature overgrown.”² That is to say; it has been considered the monumental development formation of oral, visual, and written Mesoamerican memory that extends since 1500 (BCE) to 1521 (CE).

The political organization of the State was the motor driving the continuous process of acculturation. The kingdom or Mexica Empire, known as the *Triple Alianza*, are institutions of Toltec origin, enriched and transformed by the experiences of the kingdoms of Cholula, Xochicalco, Tula, Colhuacan, and Texcoco (900-1500 CE). In the transition from Teotihuacan (200-650 CE) to Tula (900-1200 CE), the Mexica State witnessed a reduction of the hegemonic power of the *tlatoani* (the king). But retained the ancient administrative organization, tribute collection and management of markets and domestic trade, recruitment, training and

*Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Mesopotamian Antiquarianism from Sumer to Babylon,” in Alain Schnapp (ed.), *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives*, Getty Research Institute, 2013, pp. 121-122.

¹ Jacques Le Goff, *Histoire et memoire*, Gallimard, 1988, p. 99; Paul Ricoeur, *La memoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Editions du Seuil, 2000.

² Alain Schnapp, “Conservation of Objects and Monuments and the Sense of the Past during the Greco-Roman Era,” in *World Antiquarianism*, p. 159.

organization of the army, the rectory of temples and religious cults and the messages elaborated by these institutions.

I revisit the first rule of Olmec culture (1500-300 BCE) since at this time the political, religious, social, and cultural concepts that characterize Mesoamerica emerged. Since the Olmec, the artworks made of jadeite, precious stones, wood, ceramics, bone, skins and other materials were concentrated in the royal palace, temples, and ceremonial centers: The subjects tributes to their empire as well as their most appreciated art objects converged there. The ostentatious luxury clothing and ornaments, the accumulation in the house of valuable objects, provision of hundreds of tributaries, and raw materials from numerous regions were symbols of power, richness, and prestige. The rulers consolidated these tangible signs of their rank using the cosmogony, myths, legends, and histories that consolidated them as direct descents of the creator gods or founder ancestors of noble lineages. These foundations confirmed their superior rank over other mortals, their leadership, and their hereditary rights over the land, labor, and government.³

In addition to the tribute, foreign trade, and markets were the means whereby the accumulation of wealth and artwork of the noble groups and the capital of the kingdom or empire. The case of the Olmec jadeite is exemplary, as the rough stones came from the Motagua River basin in Guatemala, hence the Olmec *heartland* (the Gulf of Mexico coast), where were polished and transformed into beautiful transportable objects. Necklaces, rings, nose rings, earrings, pectorals and masks of this material, cut and polished by Olmec artisans have been found in Veracruz, Tabasco, Morelos and Guerrero; Teotihuacan as well as in Guatemala, Costa Rica

³ F. Kent Reilly III, "Art, Ritual and Rulership in the Olmec World", in *The Olmec World. Ritual and Rulership*, The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1998, pp. 27-67; Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus, *The Creation of Inequality. How our prehistoric Ancestors set the Stage of Monarchy, Slavery, and Empire*, parts II, III and IV, Harvard University Press, 2012.

and elsewhere in Central America.⁴ Numerous studies in Mesoamerica and the Andes have shown that the exchange of artistic and cultural goods began at least about 2800 or 2000 years before, by trading long and short distance, embracing both material and cultural goods.⁵

The Olmecs and peoples after them narrated the origins of their kingdoms, created a pantheon of gods and worshiped their ancestors, as well as the natural forces of the three regions of the cosmos: the sky, the earth's surface and underworld. They believed in these spheres as in their gods and temples dwelt the forces that move the universal machine. Therefore, they strove to make sure that their major works, both dedicated to the profane and divine world, were imbued with that vital breath. They attributed particular importance to their ancestors and founding lineages, and therefore tried to keep and respect their memory in chants, codices, paintings, and monuments.

The Aztec or Mexica, as they named themselves, the last Chichimeca groups from northern Mesoamerica, entered the Valley of Mexico in the twelfth century. At this time, the Classic and Postclassic period (200-1200 CE) kingdoms had collapsed, however, they had left behind a long past, originator of a complex, multicultural and plurilinguistic civilization. The historical trajectory of the Mexica people can be divided into two stages: the period of the long migration (some sources say that spanned for 261 years), narrated in their myths, codices and memories as a miraculous event, full of challenges and misfortunes. Guided by their patron god, Huitzilopochtli, they arrived to the Valley of Mexico, where found people heirs of an ancient culture, ordered politically in the *altepetl* (plural *altepeme*), a territorial

⁴ F. Kent Reilly III, "Art, Ritual...", pp. 27. Karl A. Taube, "The Symbolism of Jade in Classic Maya Religion", in *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 2004, 16, pp. 1-28.

⁵ Flannery and Marcus, *The Creation of Inequality...*, pp. 245-246. About Mesoamerica, intellectual exchange among different ethnic groups and capitals see Gabrielle Vail and Christine Hernandez (eds.), *Astronomers, Scribes, and Priest*, Dumbarton Oaks, 2010, especially chapters 1, 6, 11, and 13.

entity seated on home soil and inhabited by groups with akin ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties⁶ (Fig. 1).

The *altepetl* included "both the urban and civic center, as the entire territory of the city, including the rural area." The territory of the *altepetl* was divided into four, six, eight, or ten symmetric neighborhoods called *calpules* facing the cardinal points. Each one of the *calpullis* composing the *altepetl* had its chief, who was the head of a lineage who held a portion of the territory of *altepetl* as a private property. The core of the *calpulli* was the corporate ownership of land, distributed among the heads of family that integrated it, who at the same time distributed those "rights" to their descendants. This was the territorial organization adopted the Aztecs when they settled in the Valley of Mexico. The prevailing Toltec tradition was adopted by their political, economic, social, and religious organization.⁷

Colhuacan, an ancient capital of Teotihuacan and Toltec descent, was the scene where Huitzilopochtli people adopted Toltec prestigious past.⁸ At that point, Colhuacan was an important cultural center and military power located in the lakes area. Admitted as tributaries and mercenaries, their halt in Colhuacan and its alliance with Azcapotzalco, the largest force in the region, changed their original appearance and transformed them into expert warriors and skilled politicians. Between 1325 and 1345, they founded their capital, Mexico-Tenochtitlan on an island nearby the lagoon. In 1428, they defeated the powerful Tepanecas, thanks to an alliance with the kingdoms of Texcoco and Tlacopan. Thus was born the Triple Alliance, which would change the fate of Mesoamerica.

⁶ James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest. A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico. Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries*, Stanford University Press, 1992, p. 14.

⁷ Pedro Carrasco, *Estructura politico-territorial del imperio tenochca. La Triple Alianza de Tenochtitlan, Tetzaco y Tlacopan*, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1996, p. 27.

⁸ Nigel Davies, *The Toltec Heritage. From the Fall of Tula to the Rise of Tenochtitlan*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

The Triple Alliance and the formation of an imperial metropolis

Recent studies confirm that each of the three city states that formed an alliance (*Excan Tlahtoloyan*, ‘government of the three *tlahtoque*’), that retained self-government and territorial autonomy. But this alliance under the leadership of the Mexica, became an imperial entity, endowed with military, political and economic power that changed the political map of the Valley of Mexico and Mesoamerica (Fig. 2).⁹ In their chronicles they pitched that their first *tlahtoani* (‘the one who speaks’), Acamapichtli (1375-1395), came from noble lineage and Colhuacan genealogy related them to the ancient Toltecs. Under the command of their *tlahtoani*, they took the form of centralized government, whose apex was the *tlahtoani*: a regime with a military command of its own that overpowered the rivalry between the heads of the *calpules*.¹⁰ Historians acknowledge Itzcoatl (‘Obsidian Snake’, 1427-1440), the fourth *tlahtoani* (Fig. 3), as the initiator of this historical change. Nevertheless, the consolidation of the imperial state is attributed to Moctezuma Ilhuicamina (1440-1469), as he reinforced alliances with other kingdoms and arose the great territorial expansion and military campaigns to provide tributes and dominated provinces of the areas of Morelos, the Gulf of Mexico shores, Coixtlahuaca in the Mixteca, Chalco in the south of the lake, and Tepeaca in the territory of Puebla. He is also credited for the renowned laws that imposed a new order in the governance, justice, and public morals.¹¹

In order to consolidate their rule over the ancient peoples attached to their traditions, the rulers of the Triple Alliance developed several strategies. Firstly, they continued and expanded the ancient Mesoamerican tradition to strengthen political

⁹ Pedro Carrasco, *Estructura politico-territorial del Imperio Tenochca*, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1996; Maria del Carmen Herrera Meza, Alfredo Lopez Austin y Rodrigo Martinez Baracs, “El nombre nahuatl de la Triple Alianza”, *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl*, no. 46, 2013, pp. 7-35.

¹⁰ Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare. Imperial Expansion and Political Control*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1988, p. 125.

¹¹ Frances F. Berdan (ed.), *Aztec Imperial Strategies*, Dumbarton Oaks, 1996, pp. 209-217.

ties through marriage alliances with the noble families of the conquered kingdoms.¹² An additional strategy was to reward nobles and captains participating in the conquest of peoples lands, the *terrazgueros* (peasants tied to the land), tributes and booty, along with a promotion in the military and political hierarchy, and more other prizes. From these rewards, the granting of land and peasants was instrumental in consolidating the economic and social position of the Mexica nobles and their adherence to the *huey tlatoani*.

The third strategy positioned the consolidate power of the Triple Alliance that combined territorial expansion with economic sustainability (Fig. 4). The route of conquest draws an expansion led to the seizure of several grounds and ecological niches, agricultural commodities (corn, cotton, cacao, etc.), raw materials, markets and trade routes for the Triple Alliance. This strategy was the dynamic that directed the creation of the imperial realm that made the Triple Alliance in less than 100 years, the maximum powerful and extensive state of their times (Fig. 5). The *tlatoque*, in order to govern the acquired extensive domains of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco and, Tlacopan, used political hierarchies established in the Basin of Mexico, adapting them to a centralized control: a system of indirect rule through indigenous lords who retained their authority in the governance of their kingdoms, as accurately described Alonso de Zorita.¹³ Conversely, a new administration was established to run and manage tribute economic relations with the conquered provinces (Fig. 6;) with a hierarchical structure of its own and a staff which was directly handled by a central authority. This imperial government was superimposed

¹² Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare...*, p. 25; Enrique Florescano, *Los origenes del poder en Mesoamerica*, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 2009, pp. 413-415.

¹³ Mary C. Harge, "Political Organization of Central Provinces" in Frances F. Berdan (ed.), *Aztec Imperial Strategies...*, pp. 17-45 and 42-45; Alonso de Zorita, *Breve y sumaria relacion de los senores de Nueva Espana*, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1963; Michael E. Smith, "The Aztec Empire and the Mesoamerican World System", in Susan E. Alcock, Terrence N. D'Altroy, Kathleen D. Morrison y Carla M. Sinopoli (eds.), *Empires. Perspective from Archaeology and History*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 129-154.

on the political organization governed by the *tlatoque* and local lords. Therefore, the collected tributes directly came to the rulers of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan to be distributed in proportion to the power and hierarchy of the three kingdoms. The provided tributes and its amounts prove that form of extracting wealth as one of the pillars that underpinned the power and imperial dimension of the Triple Alliance¹⁴ (Fig. 7).

The military protection of the conquered provinces forced into play a number of policies: the Triple Alliance troops colonization of the provinces, and military garrisons in the enemy realms borders, the retention of the conquered kingdoms in Tenochtitlan nobles heirs, and so on.¹⁵ The power of the *huey tlatoani* of Tenochtitlan over the *calpules*, the social organization, and the religious calendar and festivities celebrating the exploits of the Mexica people was completed with the provision of a coercive power: the army (Fig. 8). The demanding selection of personnel that integrated the military ranks, a rigorous testing of its members to occupy the highest positions, the experience acquired as defense strategists, and the conquering campaigns and continuous training in negotiations with the subsequent enemy kingdoms and provinces, turned the army into the most efficient political and administrative machinery of the Mexica and the Triple Alliance.¹⁶

¹⁴ Carrasco's work, described above, detail the imperial administration of the tax, chap. XXII and XXIII-XXIX. See also Frances F. Berdan y Patricia Anawalt (eds.), *The Codex Mendoza*, University of California Press, 1992.

¹⁵ Pedro Carrasco, *Estructura politico-territorial del Imperio Tenochca*, 555-559; Michael E. Smith, "The Strategic Provinces", in Frances F. Berdan (ed.), *Aztec Imperial Strategies...*, pp. 137-150.

¹⁶ The main works documenting the importance of the army in the development of these entities are those of Bernardino de Sahagun, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva Espana*, ed. by Alfredo Lopez Austin y Josefina Garcia Quintana, 3 vols., Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2000; Diego Duran, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva Espana e islas de Tierra Firme*, preliminary study by Camelo Rosa and Jose R. Romero, 2 vols., Consejo Nacional Cultura y las Artes, 1995; Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquia indiana*, ed. prepared under the coordination of Miguel Leon-Portilla, 7 vols., Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1975-1983. Among the contemporary studies already cited excels Hassig and Virve Piho, "The Aztec military hierarchy" *Acti dei XL Congress*

The new commercial networks

Territorial expansion had a dynamic economic effect: the creation of a network of interrelated markets and an increased flow of goods between regions. The two traditional markets, local and regional, forged new relationships to assert long-distance trade. As stated before, the circulation of luxury goods from remote regions was a common phenomenon in Mesoamerica and the Andean region since ancient times. But the momentum of Tenochca militarism joined the economies and the region resources under various communication networks protected by the arms of Empire and its transport safety. This circumstance and the unique environment of the Valley of Mexico, irrigated by five lakes, provided Tenochtitlan with an additional economic advantage, for transport canoes was more efficient than that of the *tamemes* (porters) to carry large volumes.¹⁷

The *Pochteca*, the name under which traders were known, modeled significant associations concentrated in Tlatelolco, Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, Tepeaca, and other cities, protected by parallel tribunals and laws. They enjoyed the privileges of carrying colorful costumes and did not have to provide personal services, but to paid tribute to the *tlatoani*, who also held control over the markets. By 1500, the Pochteca traded in regions beyond the limits of the Triple Alliance. Hidalgo, Queretaro, Zacatecas and Durango in the North end, Totochtepec, Oaxaca, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and Soconusco in the South, were regions where Pochteca people accustomed to have an intense commercial traffic. The same happened in Cimatan, Chontalpa and on the banks of rivers Grijalva and Usumacinta. For that reason, they had established warehouses and staff who dispensed the Yucatan

Internazionale degli Americanisti, 1972, no. 2, pp. 273-288. The basis of the imperial formation of the Triple Alliance is similar to the strategies developed by other empires. See for example Lindsay Allen, *The Persian Empire*, The University of Chicago Press, 2005, chap. 1, 2 and 3.

¹⁷ Ross Hassig, *Trade, Tribute and Transportation. The Sixteenth Century Political Economy of the Valley of Mexico*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1985, pp.110, 113, 125 and 146-147.

Peninsula and Port Nito in the Gulf of Honduras in Xicalanco and Acalan. Between 1428 and 1500, Aztecs had created a business empire based on sound economic political and military fundamentals, supported by a well-regulated administrative organization.¹⁸

The imperial capital and its symbolism

The Mexica continued the path to come to be Toltec following the route opened by the Chichimeca of Xolotl and Mixcoatl in their entry to the Basin of Mexico. Since elected, their first *tlatoani* hastened a continue learning from Toltec institutions and their cultural heritage. Perhaps the adoption of nahuatl was the precipitator of that acculturation that transformed the Mexica people into proud heirs of Toltec tradition. Chronic and archeological evidence indicates that between 1470 and 1500, the Toltec cultural heritage was well established in Tenochtitlan and shaped the core of Mexica identity. The calendar, astronomical and scientific knowledge, laws and political institutions, the collection of literature, the extensive catalog of the arts, the accumulation of historical traditions, the galaxy of their gods and mythologies, engineering and architecture ... the sum of the Toltec knowledge was now a Mexica heritage carefully treasured in their schools, libraries, palaces, and temples.¹⁹

Following the footsteps of illustrious ancestors, the Aztecs built in Tenochtitlan another Tollan, in its center they built a magnificent temple, which architecture and symbolism was a compendium of that immemorial worldview and an expression of Tenochca power. Like its predecessors, they mimicked the Primordial Mountain and represented the forces of water and seeds contained inside

¹⁸ For a description of the Pochteca guild and activities according to Sahagun, see *Historia general de la Nueva España*, II, ninth book, chaps. I-XIV; A. Chapman, “Puertos de comercio en la civilizacion azteca y maya”, in K. Polanyi *et al.*, *Comercio y mercado en los imperios antiguos*, Labor, 1976, pp. 163-200; and Ross Hassig, *Trade, Tribute and Transportation*, pp. 121-126.

¹⁹ Enrique Florescano, *Los origenes del poder...*, p. 469.

the mother earth. The sanctuary of Tlaloc placed in the north side of the Templo Mayor, summarizes the telluric qualities of that worldview, even when the entire building is fraught with offerings and symbols alluding to the generative forces of earth and water, including maritime waters symbol of absolute fertility²⁰ (Fig. 9). The Great Temple, the sacred mountain was Earth itself, understood as the genius of fertility and the blood-devouring monster of the ones sacrificed in his honor.²¹

Symbol of the generative powers of Earth and identity icon tutelary god of the Mexica, the Great Temple became the representative image of the political power established in Tenochtitlan. Between the founding of the city (1325-1345) and the government of Moctezuma Zocoyotzin (1502-1520), archaeologists recorded at least seven complete reconstruction of the monument, all of them parallel to the expansion stages of the Mexica military power. With Itzcoatl (1427-1440), the winner of the Tepanecs and builder of the Triple Alliance (1428), the major refurbishment of the Templo Mayor begun.²² Written sources and archaeological studies indicate that the most radical reconstruction took place during the reign of Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, who crowned his administrative reforms with the construction of a new house to Huitzilopochtli, a chronicle describes it as:

This king *Montecusuma* the first, after bringing order to his kingdom and finding himself in much prosperity, determined to build a greatly sumptuous temple to their god Utzilopuchtli. So he did by summoning all his empire and proposing them [to the lords] his attempt. He brought the temple dividing the tasks that they would have to every province. They all ran very briefly with an abundance of officers and materials. It was made in a short time, and [...] some certify that stones, many jewels, and precious gems were cast into the mix of that blending. For the premiere he made a big festivity, even greater

²⁰ Johanna Broda, "The Templo Mayor as a Ritual Space", in Johanna Broda, David Carrasco and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (cords.), *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World*, University of California Press, 1987, pp. 61-123.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²² Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, "The Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan. History and Interpretation", in Johana Broda, David Carrasco and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (cords.), *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World*, University of California Press, 1987, p. 32.

than his coronation where he sacrificed many captives [...] also giving the temple of great wealth ...²³

Ahuizotl (1486-1502) carried out another spectacular renovation of the Great Temple, culminating in the most celebrated unveiling of the monument. The chronicler related that the kingdoms, cities, and towns subjected to Mexica power

came with their tributes of gold, jewels, dressings and feathers, stones, all of high value and price,[...] so many and so much wealth that had no number or account; cacao, chiles, seeds, fruits of all kinds, birds, [animals] skins, that was a thing of wonder, all done in an orderly industry manner to show their greatness and majesty to their enemies, guests and foreign people [who had attended the celebration ...] to thereby not only was the grandeur and sumptuousness of Mexico made evident, but also these things were available for the great feast and dedication of the temple.²⁴

To display Tenochtitlan greatness to locals and foreigners was the target of the successive *tlatoque*, from Itzcoatl to the second Moctezuma, as the city had become the emblem of the kingdom. Following the example of the builders of La Venta, Monte Alban, Tikal, Copan and, Teotihuacan, the *tlatoque* endeavored significant efforts to make its capital the navel of the world, the compendium of its highest civilizational values. The Tenochtitlan military force ruled the political capital of the empire, and the Temple of Huitzilopochtli had managed to transform into a religious mecca. Both efforts were combined to make it an ornate town as a ceremonial center where over 78 buildings, each marked by an architecture that held in reserve sculptures, paintings, and precious objects, thronged jealously guarded. Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, besides undertaking the construction of the new house of Huitzilopochtli, was distinguished for providing the city with monuments and works which changed its face. The creation of the famous Stones of the Sun, which recorded the image of the solar deity and in its center a hole to store the blood of

²³ *Manuscript Tovar. Origin et croyances des indiens de Mexique*, Jacques Lafaye (ed.), Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, Graz, Austria, 1972, p. 57. A similar description can be found in the chronicle of Diego Duran, *Historia de las Indios de Nueva España*, I, chap. XVI.

²⁴ Diego Duran, *Historia de las indias...*, I, p. 400-401.

sacrificed warriors (*cuauhxicalli*),²⁵ is attributed to him (Fig. 10). The chroniclers Diego Duran and Alvarado Tezozomoc describe the manufacture of these monuments in the realms of Moctezuma first Axayacatl (1469-1481), Tizoc (1481-1486) and Montezuma II.²⁶

The memory of the Toltec wisdom is also present in a cultivated taste for plants and flowers, the foundation of gathering spaces for the diversity of wildlife, and the Mesoamerican intimate relationship with the natural environment: an inclination which appears in the Olmec first clay pots, paintings, and Mayan palaces. An exemplary representative of this tradition was Nezahualcoyotl, the *tlatoani* of Texcoco, Itzcoatl, Moctezuma, and Tlacaelel partner in the creation of the Triple Alliance. Next to the remarkable qualities of warrior, strategist, and politician, Nezahualcoyotl was famed in his time for his knowledge of practical issues of the subtle poetry, religion, and philosophy. The Mexica and Texcocan tradition chronicles mention him as the engineer who drew the aqueduct that brought water from Chapultepec to Tenochtitlan and credit him the construction of the famous "Albarrada de los Indios," the wood and masonry dam that separated the Lake's salt water from the sweet, which slowed floods affecting the city.²⁷ Recognized as the greatest poet of Nahuatl world, Jacques Soustelle calls him "the most typical and refined classical Mexican culture representative."²⁸

²⁵ Emily Umberger, "Art and Imperial Strategy in Tenochtitlan", in Frances F. Berdan (ed.), *Aztec Imperial Strategies*, Dumbarton Oaks, 1996, pp. 85-108; Leonardo Lopez Lujan y Colin McEwan (eds.), *Moctezuma II. Tiempo y destino de un gobernante*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009, pp. 133-136.

²⁶ Emily Umberger, "Events Commemorated by Date Plaques and the Templo Mayor. Further Thoughts on the Solar Metaphor", in Elizabeth Hill Boone (ed.), *The Aztec Templo Mayor*, Dumbarton Oaks, 1987, pp. 411-449. Diego Duran, *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, I, chap. XXXI, pp. 229-300.

²⁷ Jose Luis Martinez, *Nezahualcoyotl. Vida y obra*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984, pp. 67-68; Enrique Florescano, *Los orígenes del poder...*, p. 459.

²⁸ Jacques Soustelle, *La vida cotidiana de los aztecas en vísperas de la conquista*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974, p. 220. About the liking of the Aztecs for plants and gardens, see pp. 128-134; Florescano, *Los orígenes del poder...*, *ibid.*

To this Chichimeca Xolotl descendant, educated in the Toltec tradition, we owe the most advanced legal code known by Nahuatl-speaking peoples²⁹ and a new conception of urban civilization. His famous palace was an architectural work that aroused the admiration and unveiled a new organization of the state, for its many rooms were allocated to different areas of government, separate from the royal apartments. It is also admirable that this elaborate administrative design was accompanied by a zoo, "the cages for birds and fish ponds, had met all known animals in the indigenous world; the ones which were not possible to have there, were represented in the figures of precious stones and gold." Toward the southern and eastern part of the palace, "between towers and spires, gardens and recreation, fountains, ponds and ditches, real bathrooms, all surrounded by over two thousand sabinos [ahuehuetes] and rambling labyrinths in which was difficult to find the exit."³⁰

The grandeur of the trace and buildings of the ceremonial center of Texcoco rivaled that of Tenochtitlan, even when the chroniclers of the latter ignored or diminished the works attributed to the *tlatoque* of Texcoco. However, most ancient accounts agree in emphasizing the genius of Nezahualcoyotl in building palaces, urban works, and areas for recreation and cultivation of the spirit. The latter occupy a particular place: royal houses and gardens Tetzcotzinco, the hill that dominated much of the valley, a set that combined the virtues of natural scenery, a great architectural design, and the cult of *tlatoani*.

The work of Nezahualcoyotl in Texcoco explains his decisive participation in the urban transformation of Tenochtitlan at that time. Alva Ixtlilxochitl narrates that

²⁹ On the legal system introduced by Nezahualcoyotl in Texcoco see Offner, Jerome Offner, *Law and Politics in Aztec Texcoco*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

³⁰ Jose Luis Martinez, *Nezahualcoyotl. Vida y obra*, pp. 39-40. On wealth, breadth, and diversity of the gardens and palaces of Nezahualcoyotl, the author included in the notes of the pages 300-305 numerous testimonies that describe them. The most thorough and exalted description of this palace is located in Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras historicas*, II, chap. xxxvi. See also Jogsoo Lee, *The Allure of Nezahualcoyotl: Pre-Hispanic History, Religion and Nahua Poetics*, University of New Mexico Press, 2008.

although he was invested king of Texcoco, most of his time was spent in Tenochtitlan until his vassals agreed

To beg him to come to his kingdom [...] and so he arrived in Texcoco after have done great things in Mexico, and put the city to a lot of police and built the major buildings until then, specially a few palaces that he worked where he lived when he was in Mexico(Fig. 11). He made the Chapultepec forest, and brought water into the city through a sewer that until then was a ditch. And having arrived [... to Texcoco] he organized and assembled the greatest craftsmen of the land, placed them in the city for their neighborhoods, each gender for each one, as they were silversmiths, painters, lapidary and many other ways to officers, all were thirty-odd fates of officers.³¹

Aztecs fashioned their religious pantheon and built their cities and monuments to honor their gods and ancestors. They were skilled craftsmen in sculpture, painting, manufacturers of all fashions of objects in various materials, also skilled in the composition of myths, songs , legends and historical narratives following the example of their Olmecs, Maya, Zapotec, Teotihuacan, and Toltec ancestors. They inherited these traditions and celebrated them, by their preservation and recreation. We know slightly more of the memory and compilation of the Mexica past thanks to the ethnographic character the first friars and Spanish chroniclers stamped on their statements³². To them we owe the great ethnographic, linguistic, and literary collections made in terms of the richness and complexity of their culture, opening in that way avenues for our understanding. To this rich heritage has joined the flow contributed by crawlers of the antique past, experts of ancient cultures,

³¹ Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras historicas*, II, chap. XLII; Enrique Florescano, *Los origenes del poder...*, pp. 460-463. About Montezuma's palace, see Leonardo Lopez Lujan, *La Casa de las Aguilas. Un ejemplo de la arquitectura religiosa de Tenochtitlan*, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, 2006, 2 vols. I, pp. 22-23.

³² Tim Murray, "Antiquarism *of* and *in* preliterate societies. Colonial and Postcolonial Contact," en Alain Schnapp, *World Antiquarianism...*, p. 11-29, note no. 1. See also Alain Schnapp, "Ancient Europe and Native Americans: A Comparative Reflection on the Roots of Antiquarianism", in Daniela Bleichman and Peter C. Mancall, *Collection Across Cultures*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, pp. 58-76.

archaeologists, ethnographers, epigraphists and art historians, who have provided us with another image of the city and its monuments.³³

The ceremonial center and the offerings

The sacred precinct of Mexico-Tenochtitlan was a continuation of the ceremonial center created in ancient times by the Olmec, Maya, Zapotec, and Teotihuacan: the navel of the world, the knot of the political universe that united the four corners of the cosmos and the compound where they rose, the most sacred, imposing and beautiful monuments of the Aztec capital, as shown in the plane of Figure 12. This large square was a four-sided area of about 460 meters in the north-south side, and 430 meters on the east-west side. Among the many buildings that housed this enclosure stands the *Huey Teocalli* or "Great Temple", the result of 200 years of expansions. Archaeologists have documented that around this monument there were other temples and buildings, shrines dedicated to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, the god of wind, Tezcatlipoca, Tonatiuh, Chicomecoatl, and others as the ballgame, the calmecac, the House of Eagles, etcetera.³⁴ The book that summarizes the best dedicated works to the Great Temple and the *tzompantli* contains a comprehensive study of its origins, the cosmological paradigms surrounding the different parts and structures that form, the meaning of his sculptures and offerings, explaining the shrines dedicated to Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli and the general symbolism of the building, is the masterpiece of Alfredo Lopez Austin and Leonardo Lopez Lujan.³⁵

³³ An example of this can be seen in Richard F. Townsend, *The Aztecs*, Thames and Hudson, 1992; *El Imperio Azteca*, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2005; *Aztecs*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2002; Esther Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, Harry N. Abrahams, Inc. Publishers, 1983.

³⁴ Leonardo Lopez Lujan, *La casa de las Aguilas*, I, pp. 23 and 29-33; Johanna Broda, David Carrasco y Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (coords.), *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: center and Periphery in the Aztec World*, University of California Press, 1987.

³⁵ Alfredo Lopez Austin y Leonardo Lopez Lujan, *Monte sagrado-Templo Mayor. El cerro y la piramide en la tradicion religiosa mesoamericana*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia-Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 2009.

That is to say, the Great Temple was the recipient of the masterpieces of architecture, sculpture, Mexica bas relief and painting, receiver of the most precious offerings dedicated to their gods and rulers (Fig. 12), as well as the highest expression of Mexica pantheon.

Another feature of the sculptures found in the Great Temple and the House of the Eagles is their archaic character as faithfully copied the style of the sidewalks of Tula Xicotitlan (800-1200 CE) and accumulated in the various architectural layers inside the Temple offerings from all kingdoms, including works of art, ancestors relics and of the flora and fauna of the many boundaries of Mesoamerica.³⁶ This archaic drift is very pronounced in the collection of relics, in emulation of ancient sculpture and ceramics, as well as in architecture. Among these representations protrudes the picture of the Toltec warrior and the Toltec emblems of war³⁷ (Figs. 13, 14, 15 y 16.) This drifts is also present in the rites and myths as seen on the sidewalks of the Casa de las Aguilas (Figs. 13 and 17.)

The attraction for Teotihuacan antiques is present in the frequent ceremonial visits that made the Mexica *tlatoani* Moctezuma II to the temples and ruined palaces of Teotihuacan. Nor is it a coincidence that the Mexica rulers sponsor special trips to Tula Xicotitlan in search of antiques and Toltec sculptures, as recorded Bernardino de Sahagun and other chroniclers.³⁸ In the *Codice Florentino (Florentine Codex)*, elaborated with the knowledge of indigenous informants of Sahagun, it is said:

And those [Mexica] of experience [...] look for it [the precious stone and] they take it up; they carry it away...

³⁶ Leonardo Lopez Lujan, *The Offerings of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan*, University of New Mexico Press, 2005. This book is a comprehensive study of the different types of offerings deposited in the Great Temple and its symbolism, complemented by a taxonomy of them.

³⁷ Leonardo Lopez Lujan, "Echoes of a glorious Past. Mexica Antiquarianism", in Schnapp, *World Antiquarism*, pp. 273-316. In this book, there are detailed examples of relics, sculptures, benches, and architecture of the Toltec type, reproduced in the workshops of Tenochtitlan.

³⁸ [REFERENCIA PENDIENTE]

Then they dig. There they see, there they find the precious stone, perhaps already well formed, probably already burnished. Perhaps they see something buried there in either stone or a stone bowl or a stone chest; perhaps it is filled with gems. This they claim there.³⁹

Experts who have studied rigorously these representations of ancient cultures say the primary reason to collect was political and religious. Since many parts and Toltec or Teotihuacan shrines were dedicated to the worship of their gods (Tlaloc, Xochipilli-Macuilxochitl, the god of music and dance.) In the event of Toltec architecture, as in the calmecac, as it is well-known, this building was the school or institution where the Toltec nobles were taught and was chaired by Quetzalcoatl, the legendary ruler of Tula, who descended the Aztec nobility.⁴⁰

Arguably, in both cases the ultimate purpose was the political legitimation of the Mexica Empire. Mexica power based on their extraordinary talent for war, their leaders' cunning, and voracious ability to seamlessly meld their conquest ideology with the civilized characteristics of their Toltec ancestors. They incorporated into the worship of Huitzilopochtli-Tonatiuh, the sacrifice-based religion of Teotihuacan, where, according to myth the creation of the Fifth Sun took place. The ancient myth of the creation of the cosmos, and the complex worldview of the Classic period, also contributed the mythology, calendar, divinatory almanacs, seasonal renewal rites, theogony, and cosmogony of the Mexicas. The city located in the navel of the earth, on the island of Tenochtitlan, was linked to the four cardinal points, and vertically integrated into three distinct levels. The Great Temple summarized these qualities as a mass rising from the underworld, anchored to the ground yet rising to reach the sky, projected from the four corners of the cosmos (Fig. 18). Its construction was paid with the tributes collected from the empire's subjects. Offerings, representing the various seas, the diversity of plants from contrasting ecological niches, the

³⁹ Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Arthur J. O. Anderson y Charles E. Dibble (eds.), The School of American Research and The University of Utah Press, 1970-1975, 12 vols., vol. 11, 221, as quoted by Lopez Lujan, "Echoes of a glorious Past", pp. 283-284.

⁴⁰ Lopez Lujan, "Echoes of a glorious Past".

equally rich variety of wildlife, goods obtained from remote provinces, combined with the treasures of the ancient Olmec and Toltec cultures (figs. 19 y 20), the many gods of the conquered peoples, and the works of art of different ethnicities accumulated inside and around the Templo Mayor. It was an *imago mundi*, a mirror of the cosmos, and the Huey *tlatoni* was the universal sovereign.

This tradition, based on the great urban design, harmonic coupling of the city and palaces with local flora and fauna and the projection of both through the message of power was that dazzled Hernan Cortes soldiers when they entry into Tenochtitlan. The descriptions amazed Bernal Diaz del Castillo when he found the lakeside town vicinity ("we were amazed, and said it looked as the things and enchantments featured in the book of Amadis"), or a stroll through the gardens and chambers of Iztapalapa palaces or the equally admired Cortes narratives of markets and the ceremonial center of Tenochtitlan, or those splendid palaces where Motecuhzoma stayed. They are the candid testimony of the Spanish soldiers encounter with an unexpected civilization: a discovery motivated by the surprise of recognizing that these strange beings, entirely different from them, were able to create cities, palaces, political institutions, temples, gardens, and the most diverse objects necessary for life with equal or higher worth and refinement of the ones they had appreciated in European cities.⁴¹

The merger between naturalistic representation of reality, esthetic charm, and political message, is one of all characteristics of Toltec and Mesoamerican cosmo vision. A concept whose ultimate goal aspired to summarize the elusive diversity in an abbreviated capsule. Its purpose was to represent the multiplicity of the universe in the kernel of the kingdom, the city of Tenochtitlan, Templo Mayor or the *tlatoni* effigy.

⁴¹ Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva Espana*, Carmelo Sáenz de Santa María (ed.), Editorial Patria, 1983, chapters lxxxiii y xcii; Hernan Cortes, *Cartas y documentos* (Editorial Porrúa, 1963), see the second letter (1520), pp .56-60 and 72-80.

Besides the language, myths, architecture and the arts, the environment that best retained the political memory of the ancient kingdoms was the historical tradition. A tradition forged by both the oral and the written memory, as Fray Diego Duran articulates, temples and schools was customary to sing past events, even when

The royal and the lords houses were more conventional. They all had their singers that composed songs on the greatness of their ancestors and their own, mainly dedicated to Montezuma, who is the lord of whom more news they got and to Nezahualpiltzintli Tetzaco; they had comprised of their songs realms of their greatness and their victories and triumphs, and lineages of their strange riches, songs I have often heard in public dances that although were commemorating their masters gave me so much joy to hear that praise and greatness.⁴²

The weight of this legitimizing ideology was complemented by the rewriting of the past. When Itzcoatl, Tlacaelel, and Nezahualcoyotl consummated the defeat of the Tepanecas, simultaneously initiated the mentioned radical reforms, and agreed to delete the old memory of the past and write a new one: a memory that corresponded to the expectations of a victorious present. An ancient text attributed to Itzcoatl, the Mexica *tlatoani*, that combined the virtues of military strategist with the ones of a ruler and political leader, records this significant decision:

Its history was kept, but then it was burned;
 when Itzcoatl reigned in Mexico,
 a resolution was taken,
 Mexica lords said,
 not all people should
 know the paintings.
 The subject [the people]
 will rot

⁴² Diego Duran, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva Espana*, I, chap. XVI.

and the Earth shall walk crooked,
 because there are many lies,
 moreover, many of them have been regarded as gods.⁴³

The legacy of ancient Mesoamerican memory

The meaning and value of Mesoamerican cultures changed dramatically with the Spanish invasion and conquest accomplished in 1521. From that date and subsequently, dominated the Western mind the version that labeled the American peoples as "primitive", "wild", for lacking writing and therefore placed at a lower stage of civilization. This perception persisted even when Hernan Cortes and the first mendicant friars sent works of high esthetic value to European eyes; codices illustrated with paintings and hieroglyphics and other objects showing an advanced degree of civilization.

Although some of the first conquerors (Bernal Diaz del Castillo) rapporteurs (Peter Martyr) and catechetical friars (Olmos, Fray Diego de Landa), saw, or had in their hands pictographs and "books" full of hieroglyphs, the existence of this iconography and its relation to memory and writing was denied and obscured for a long time.⁴⁴ As we know, this posture denying recognition to the Mesoamerican pictographs and painted books was based "on the deep conviction that history could not be written without alphabetic writing."⁴⁵ This denial of Mesoamerican

⁴³ *Codice Matritense de la Real Academia*, quoted by Leon-Portilla in *Los antiguos mexicanos a traves de sus cronicas y cantares*, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1972, pp. 90-91.

⁴⁴ Iconography, as Erwin Panofsky explains, "is a description and classification of images" that tells "when and where certain specific subjects received a visible representation through some, and other specific reasons." See *El significado de las artes visuales*, Alianza Editorial, 1991, p. 50.

⁴⁵ One explanation for this long ignorance of the Mesoamerican pictograph and images can be seen in the following works: Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo, *Writings Without Words*, Duke University Press, 1994; W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, The University of Michigan Press, 1995; Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Stories in Red*

pictographs as ways to record, store, preserve and collect the history of these spread to other American peoples.

Nonetheless, in Europe the interest in ancient history renewed between 1560 and the seventeenth century, when works like those of Francisco Robortello, Christopher Milieu or Johannes Wolf (*Artis historiae penus*) and the stream called *ars historica* gained strength in Italy, France, Germany, Flanders, and other countries. Jean Bodin (*Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, 1566) and Tommaso Campanella, among others, proposed a story that included various forms, divine, natural and human, that included all nations, not just classical antiquity but newly discovered New World traditions. The blending of these cultures contrasted in a queue of the general history of man.⁴⁶ The very purpose underlies in the works of François Baudouin and Jean Bodin, who postulated a story that included all nations, and advocated a universal story. Baudouin also drew attention to the people considered uneducated and without memory, because it was said:

These men, with all their illiteracy, preserved in the memory of the past history of their people for many centuries, in part by certain symbols, like the Egyptians, who use their hieroglyphics; in part by songs that teach each other, and songs in their choirs; choirs the call *areytos*. Now I understand that those who lived there recorded in their written stories in these songs.⁴⁷

The new information came to Europe by means of travelers who visited the newly discovered lands played a significant role to induce Baudouin, and his colleagues think its past and the present that lived at that time otherwise. As Anthony Grafton

and Black, University of Texas Press, 2000; Elizabeth Hill Boone y Gary Urton, *Their Way Of Writing*, Dumbarton Oaks, 2011.

⁴⁶ Anthony Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, p. 207. This book does an excellent analysis of the origins, development, and outcome of the *ars historica*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 113. As Grafton noted, Baudouin took the information from the *areytos* or *areytos* from the *Historia general y natural de las Indias* of Fernando Gonzalez de Oviedo, the Spanish chronicler. In the 1851-55 edition, published in four volumes by the Academy of History of Madrid, Oviedo says: “And these songs stay in their memory, instead of books [...] and thus recite the genealogies of their chiefs and kings or lords they have had, and the works that they did.”

says, at that time "the story was dramatically extended." Tommaso Campanella was one of the first to grasp and understand this new global reality:

Read the individual stories of all nations, France, Spain, Germany, England and Ethiopia [... and] Turkey, or the one of the Moors. And also read [by other means] the news and traditions of the New World, since these peoples have no writing. Just as the Chinese, Japanese, Tartars, the inhabitants of Ceylon, Persia, India and other nations recorded in their writings and their memory the origins and exploits. The Jesuits and travelers wrote plenty about it [...]. Whatever the claims [that give us the books] universal story is not complete, is only partial.⁴⁸

Shortly before Europeans begin this historiographical reassessment in American lands, the mendicant friars promoted a radical change in the ethnographic and anthropological studies. Father Angel Maria Garibay, in his *Historia de la literatura Nahuatl* recognized in the writings of Andres de Olmos, Juan de Tovar and Motolinia the embryo of the ethnographic and historical method that allowed the friars perceive the foundation and breadth of Mesoamerican culture.⁴⁹ To praise the old and the virtues of this approach, Garibay cites the testimony of Fray Jeronimo de Mendieta, which reads:

For it is to know that in 1533, being president of the Royal Audiencia of Mexico D. Sebastian Fuenleal [...] was commissioned to Father Fray Andres de Olmos [...] that would put in a book Antiquities of these natural Indians , especially Mexico, and Texcoco, and Tlaxcala to it there is any memory, [...]. And the father said he did so, that having seen all the paintings that the chiefs and principal of these provinces had their antiquities, and having given the elders answer to everything they wanted to ask, did it all very copious book, from which three or four transcripts were sent to Spain [...] I write this having any desire to know these antiquities, has many years I went to the same Father Fr. Andres as the spring from which all the streams of information on this material have flowed [...].⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Tommaso Campanella, quoted by Grafton, *What was History?...*, p. 122; A summary of these changes can be seen in Enrique Florescano, *La funcion social de la historia*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012, pp. 66-70.

⁴⁹ The best assessment of the work of Fray Andres de Olmos is in Georges Baudot, *Utopie et histoire au Mexique*, Privat, 1977, chap. II, III, y IV.

⁵⁰ Angel Maria Garibay, *Historia de la literatura nahuatl*, Ed. Porrúa, 2 vols. 1954; Jeronimo de Mendieta, *Historia Ecclesiastica Indiana*. News of the author and work, J.

Fray Diego Duran, a Dominican, who lived in Texcoco from the age of five, faithfully followed the method developed by his Franciscan predecessors Andres de Olmos, Juan de Tovar, and *Motolinia*. Duran wrote a book that is essential to an understanding of ancient Mexico; the *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme*, which based on pictographic codices and oral tradition.⁵¹

In another region that contrasts with the Central Mexico Fray Diego de Landa, the author of the famous *Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan*, also relied on ancient Mayan codices and the information he received from descendants of priests and nobles. Landa was the archetypal friar whiny brought up in the medieval scholastic tradition who, when laced with the deeply rooted idolatrous practices of the natives, became an implacable persecutor of those traditions. But at the same time, just like *Motolinia* and Sahagun, when he delved deeper into the native culture he ended up admiring that amazing world. His work, as recognized by J. Eric Thompson, is the most significant source of ancient Maya civilization:

It is a mine of information about the customs, religious beliefs and history, which also contains a detailed explanation of the Mayan calendar, illustrated with drawings of the glyphs. This book was the irreplaceable foundation from which Mayan hieroglyphic writing has been reconstructed. It has thus come to be the closest thing to a Rosetta stone for that culture. And certainly, without this book it is doubtful that we would have been able to take any steps in the deciphering of the glyphs, and we would know much less about the Mayas. Landa, like any modern ethnologist, got his material from native informants."⁵²

Garcia Icazbalceta. Preliminary study by Antonio Rubial Garcia, 2 vols. Conaculta, 1997, vol. I, pp. 179-180. Italics added by Enrique Florescano.

⁵¹ Diego Duran, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme*, ed. by Angel Maria Garibay, Porrúa, 1984, 2 vols.

⁵² Eric Thompson, *Grandeza y decadencia de los mayas*, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1965, p. 46. The best analysis of the works of Olmos, Duran, Motolinia, Mendieta, Sahagun and Torquemada are in the books of Georges Baudot (*Utopie et Histoire*, Privat, 1977), David Brading (*The First America*, Cambridge University Press, 1991), Jorge Canizarez-Esguerra (*How to Write the History of the New World*, Stanford University Press, 2002) y Miguel Leon-Portilla (*Bernardino de Sahagun. Pionero de la antropologia*, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico-Colegio Nacional, 1999).

There were other friars in different regions of New Spain, who used codices and oral traditions to reconstruct the indigenous past (Table I). The Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagun (1499-1590), who made the collection of ancient pictographs and the interrogation of the native wise men a refined art, was an indispensable instrument for historical investigation.

TABLE I. PRINCIPAL RELIGIOUS CHRONICLERS OF THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF NEW SPAIN

Name	Order	Area Covered	Title of the Work
Diego Basalenque (¿1577?-1651)	Augustinian	Michoacan (1535-1644)	<i>Historia de la Provincia de San Nicolas Tolentino de Michoacan del orden de N.P.S. Agustin</i> (1673)
Pablo de la Purisima Concepción Beaumont (1710-1780)	Franciscan	Western and northern Mexico and Michoacan (18th Century)	<i>Chronica de la Provincia por Antonomasia Apostolica de los gloriosos apóstoles San Pedro y San Pablo de Michoacan</i> (ca. 1775).
Toribio de Benavente (1482/94-1568)	Franciscan	New Spain, central Mexico (1523-1540)	<i>Historia de los indios de la Nueva Espana</i> (1540), <i>Memoriales</i> .
Francisco de Burgoa (1605-1681)	Dominican	Oaxaca (1526-1650)	<i>Palestra historial de virtudes y exemplares apostolicos fundada del zelo de insignes heroes de la Sagrada Orden de Predicadores en este Nuevo Mundo de la America en las Indias Occidentales</i> (1670). <i>Geografica descripcion de la parte septentrional del Polo Artico... y sitio de esta Provincia de Predicadores de Antequera, Valle de Oaxaca</i> (1674).
Francisco Javier Clavijero (1731-1787)	Jesuit	New Spain, Baja California	<i>Historia antigua de Mexico</i> (1780-1781). <i>Storia antica della California</i> (1789).
Diego Lopez de Cogolludo (1610-1686)	Franciscan	Yucatan (1640-1656)	<i>Historia de Yucatan</i> (1688).

Agustin Davila Padilla (1562-1604)	Dominican	Central Mexico, New Spain (1526-92)	<i>Historia de la fundacion y discurso de la Provincia de Santiago de Mexico de la Orden de Predicadores por las vidas de sus varones insignes y casos notables de Nueva Espana</i> (1596).
Francisco Jimenez (1666-1729)	Dominican	Guatemala and Chiapas (from the time before Cortes to 1719)	<i>Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala de la Orden de Predicadores</i> (ca. 1721).
Diego de Landa (1524-1579)	Franciscan	Yucatan (from the time before Cortes to 1560)	<i>Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan</i> (1566).
Bernardo de Lizana (1581-1631)	Franciscan	Yucatan (from the time before Cortes to 1630)	<i>Historia de Yucatan</i> (1633).
Jeronimo de Mendieta (1528-1604)	Franciscan	New Spain, central Mexico (1510-1596)	<i>Historic ecclesiastic indiana</i> (ca. 1596).
Alonso de la Rea (1610-16?)	Franciscan	Michoacan, Jalisco (from the time before Cortes to 1640)	<i>Cronica de la Orden de N. Serafico P.S. San Francisco, Provincia de San Pedro y San Pablo de Michoacan en la Nueva Espana</i> (1639).
Bernardino de Sahagun (1499-1590)	Franciscan	Central Mexico (Aztec ethnography and Nahuatl language)	<i>Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva Espana</i> (1559-1580).
Juan de Torquemada (1564-1624)	Franciscan	New Spain	<i>Franciscan New Spain Monarquia Indiana</i> (1615).
Agustin de Vetancurt (1620- ca. 1700)	Franciscan	Central Mexico, New Spain	<i>Teatro mexicano. Descripcion breve de los sucesos ejemplares, historicos, politicos, militares y religiosos del Nuevo Mundo de las Indias</i> (1698).

Source: Ernest J. Burrus, *Religious Chronicles and Historians. A Summary with annotated Bibliography*, Handbook of Middle American Indians, Texas University Press, 1973, vol. 12, pp. 138-145.

The *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* is composed of three parts, which suffered a variety of fortunes in their later printings and appreciation. The part called *Codice Florentino*, considered by critics to be the most complete original manuscript, composed of the Nahuatl text, the Spanish version of that text and a collection of over 1850 illustrations. The first version of the Nahuatl text written in

1559-61 was the object of later revisions and modifications until 1569, the year in which Sahagun made a clean copy divided into twelve books. A Spanish translation of this text, finished in 1579-80, was the most widely circulated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Alfredo Lopez Austin and Josefina Garcia Quintana have recently published the best paleographic version of that text.⁵³ The entire set of the *Codice Florentino* was not published until 1979, in a magnificent facsimile edition.⁵⁴ This version made available for the first time the color photographs of the extraordinary collection of illustrations that insisted should accompany the bilingual text, which are a sample of the traditional way in which the Nahuatl-speaking recorded and recounted their history.

It can be said that the *Codice Florentino* is a type of palimpsest, the ancient manuscript that holds traces of three different versions of the Nahua past. The first release was the work of Sahagun and was in Spanish. As Father Garibay has stated, if only this version "had remained, we would still have an enduring monument of a beauty and scientific value unlike anything in the history of American culture." But as we have seen, the Franciscan was ahead of his time, and like an *avant la lettre*, ethnographer, asked the natives to write their own version of history. "He arranged—as Father Garibay has said—for the old Indians to dictate and communicate information; he had young Indians, already trained up in the western manner, to write information in their original languages and to collect from the lips of the old ones the dying ancient wisdom. And zealous about his data, he had it copied and recopied..."⁵⁵ And to all this he added the formidable collection of illustrations, which prolonged the ancient pictographic tradition of Mesoamerica in the Colonial Period (Figs. 21, 22 y 23).

⁵³ Bernardino de Sahagun, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva Espana*. Introduction, paleography and notes of Alfredo Lopez Austin y Josefina Garcia Quintana, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2000, 3 vols.

⁵⁴ Sahagun, *Codice Florentino*, ed. Facsimilar, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana de Florencia/Archivo General de la Nacion, 1979, 3 vols.

⁵⁵ Sahagun, *Historia general...*, Angel Maria Garibay (ed.), 1956, Porrúa, vol. I, pp. 10-77.

Therefore, noting that a history narrated by the natives in the Nahuatl language, a version by Bernardino de Sahagun written in Spanish, and a story told in images by Indian scribes with their own techniques mixed with those of Europeans coexist in the same work, we realize that the *Codice Florentino* is a hybrid text, the most magnificent Mestizo chronicle written in New Spain and one of the most original books human ingenuity has ever produced.

Perhaps the most unusual characteristics of the *Codice Florentino* are the extensive presence of the Nahuatl language transcribed in the Latin alphabet and the authenticity that runs throughout the Indian discourse. In an unprecedented action, a religious figure from the conquering group asked the cultural elite of the vanquished to write a complete treatise on the origins, traditions, and religion of their nation in their own language. Sahagun was not in accord with all the interpretations written down by his Indian collaborators, but as far as is known, he neither censored nor suppressed them. However, he did not ignore them. In the Spanish version of the native text, he refuted, one by one, the references to gods and religion that he considered contrary to the Christian faith.

No other work, written either at that time or later, so liberally included in its pages the surprising confluence of two such opposing, cultural traditions, nor collected with such vigor the drama of the first coming together of the ancient Indian culture and Western civilization. The *Codice Florentino* has the rare quality of holding two strange and contradictory concepts of the world in the same receptacle and at the same time being the mortar with which these two began to mix and to forge a new reality—Mestizo history.⁵⁶

Thanks to this encyclopedic collection of stories, chronicles, images and rituals, we now know how ancient peoples forged ties of identity and coexistence in their villages, tribes, peoples and kingdoms; and how they developed traditions and rituals to reproduce, inherit and maintain their culture against changes of the time,

⁵⁶ Florescano, *Historia de las historias de la nacion mexicana*, Taurus, 2003, pp. 180-206.

threats and invasions from abroad as well from the introduction of other religions and ideologies.

In terms of the gathering of this vast collection of stories and narratives and comparative studies based on them, we now have a more comprehensive view of human diversity and the effort made by these communities to set standards or codes that keep the unity of language, kinship, family, identity, worship, community relations or dealings with the outside, while coping with the changes, transitions, ruptures and adaptations to the new. The study of these remote past testimonies while opened our understanding to unsuspected cultures and lifestyles, provided us with a wealth of tools to detect, comprehend and explain languages, symbols, ceremonies, cults and beliefs that expanded the frontiers of knowledge. In the same way in which anthropological practice and theory widened methods of analysis delve into the structure and symbolism of myths, rituals, stories and chronicles, so historical research can now better understand the languages of the past and extensions in villages and modern and contemporary cultures.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Enrique Florescano, *La función social de la historia*, pp. 211-212.