

Introduction

The Spanish law officials summoned the indigenous people and told them that they were going to take bread-making from them. They set a penalty on them, giving them a deadline of a day not to make bread. . . . On Monday, the 21st day of the month of September, right on the feast day of San Mateo, on Monday and Tuesday, there was already hunger. No more did either wheat bread or tortillas appear in either marketplace or shop. When anyone secretly made half a carrying frame full and took it to the marketplace, even if it was tortillas, the Spaniards just fought over it. . . . Only weeping prevailed. And then everyone got worked up, priests, Spaniards and indigenous alike, so that everyone took the side of the indigenous people.

Annals of Puebla for 1682

ON THE MORNING of September 23, 1682, the brightly colored tiles of the buildings on Puebla's town square must have been glinting in the sun, but nothing else was as usual. The previous week, a group of Spaniards had secured from the *alcalde mayor* (the highest local magistrate) monopoly rights over all bread-making in the city: they were to control not only the making of wheat bread, but even of tortillas. It had seemed to these men a lucrative scheme indeed, but within two days they had proven themselves unequal to the task. Apparently it had not been evident to them just how many mouths the city's indigenous people customarily fed. Now the town's indigenous community, normally peaceful, poured into the streets in protest. They shouted, "Bread, bread, bread, lord captain! We will starve! We will starve!"¹ Their leader presented a letter to the *alcalde mayor*. It said that if the Spaniards wanted to usurp indigenous roles, then so be it, but in that case, they could also perform labor service and meet the tribute requirements. "Let the Spaniards do whatever service there is and pay the tribute," they wrote bluntly. It seemed to the indigenous that their argument was effective. The native reporter on these events commented: "When he heard that, the *alcalde mayor* quickly ordered that a decree be issued, so that a proclamation was hastily made that the indigenous people would make bread." Then he added somewhat smugly, "And he ordered that the Spaniards be imprisoned."

Historians interested in indigenous experiences are accustomed either to reading between the lines in European narratives or to collecting native sources in dozens of bits and pieces until together, they take on meaning. It is rare indeed that a historian of early Latin America can read a first-person account of public events and find that it unmistakably offers a perspective that only a native person would have had. The historical annals of colonial Mexico, written in Nahuatl, are immensely valuable in that they do just that; they deserve far more attention than they have so far received.

The indigenous narrator who tells us of Puebla's 1682 bread riot has the power to open a door for us leading rather directly into the world he once inhabited. His was a

¹Entry for 1682, Annals of Puebla (this volume). For more on the previous regulation of wheat bread making and selling, see Loyde Cruz 1999 and López Gonzaga 1999.

complex universe, and although in September of that year he felt very angry with the Spaniards, there were of course many days when he felt that he held far more in common with them than not. Eight months later, when English and Dutch pirates attacked the relatively nearby city of Veracruz, his heart bled for his Spanish and black neighbors who had to go and fight the marauding savages. He even spared some sympathy for their tearful women and the many well-to-do families whose horses were commandeered. “They even took the poor little donkeys,” he sighed.¹ Yet two years later, his disgust with interfering legislative authorities surfaced again with a vengeance. Indigenous residents of Puebla, who were legally constrained to live in certain barrios in order to ease the collection of tribute, had for generations flouted such restrictions; now the *alcalde mayor* took it upon himself to order them to collect in their own barrios, under pain of public whipping. He promised he would distribute lands where the refugees would be allowed to reside, but he did nothing about it; chaos reigned in the beleaguered barrios. Finally the city’s indigenous governor was able to convince him to desist, ironically on grounds that it would be impossible under the circumstances to orchestrate the usual tribute collection. The governor had reason to be pleased with the end of the story: once again, indigenous people had come out on top, and plotters and planners had come to grief. He himself oversaw the writing of the set of historical annals which recorded the events in such detail.² We know of his experience and his thinking today only because of the document he produced. The Spaniards in such situations would report only that there had been a change of policy, but not allude to all the causes, some of which did not reflect well on either their own judgment or their degree of control over the populace. And this is only one of the myriad insights which such a set of indigenous annals may provide.

In recent years, scholars have made excellent use of the abundant Nahuatl sources preserved in Mexico and elsewhere. The nearly exclusive attention traditionally paid to formal texts prepared in cooperation with Franciscans and other religious has been complemented by work with more unself-consciously produced mundane documents—wills, land transfers, petitions, etc.³ Relatively little studied have been the historical annals.⁴ These were produced by Nahuas for Nahuas, without any regard for the Spanish world as an audience or any supervision by Spaniards in either the clerical or legal branches. Yet we have not turned to them with any frequency, partly because they are few and far between compared to the rich lodes of mundane sources, but also because the genre is not well understood. A reader who turns to a set of annals without any preparation is likely to find them dry, terse, even confusing. It has for some time been understood that the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century annals which treat pre-conquest subjects should not be tossed aside as inscrutable or be taken literally as

¹Entry for 1683, *Annals of Puebla* (this volume).

²For a study of the authorship of the annals, see the fifth section of this introduction, “Tlaxcaltecan in Cuitlaxcohuapan: the world of don Miguel” (pp. 29–40).

³For an introduction to the work that has been done, students are advised to consult “A Historian and the Disciplines” in Lockhart 1999, especially pp. 350–67. For a current overview of the nature of the varying projects that have been undertaken, see the introduction to Lockhart, Sousa and Wood 2007.

⁴For an early analytical synthesis of the genre see Lockhart 1992, pp. 376–92.

transparent presentations of fact, but rather analyzed as to what they reveal regarding patterns of religious or political belief, the perspectives of individual communities, negotiations for power, etc.⁵ Now it is time that we recognize as well all that the colonial annals which treat their own times may offer us, not only in terms of indigenous *mentalité* but also in terms of “hard” information on indigenous lives, the very element which seems more doubtful in the material treating bygone centuries. The annals are perhaps as close as we are ever going to come to an indigenous diary or set of letters. If we become more familiar with the ways in which the genre channels the expression of the writer, we will be able to decode much more of what such a writer has to tell us.

Furthermore, studying the indigenous annals, beyond enhancing our understanding of indigenous experience, may help us as scholars at some point to shed our own parochialism, to understand the ways in which the figures we study are both the same as and different from other peoples in somewhat comparable situations—where agriculture has fully taken hold but well defined nation-states have not yet emerged. The annals genre as it existed in early medieval Europe, for example, and the pre-colonial Marathi texts of India, are in some ways breathtakingly similar to the tradition that seems to have existed in Mexico. In the east Frankish kingdom, for the year 838, an anonymous writer of annals recorded an earthquake, the building of some ships, the passing of the kingship, the celebration of a great religious festival, disputes between two royal brothers, and the appearance of a comet; he could almost have traded places with one of his Nahuatl-speaking peers of later centuries.⁶ The Nahuas become more interesting, not less so, when they take their place on the stage of the world’s peoples.

But they themselves and their own version of an annals genre must be more fully understood before any such forays into comparative history or literature can be effectively undertaken. There is a solid basis for doing this in work that has already been undertaken on the annals produced in the vicinity of Mexico City in the sixteenth century. We have usable editions available to us of the Annals of Tlatelolco, the “Annals of Juan Bautista,” the Codex Aubin, and many other more truncated sets, culminating in the seventeenth century in the extensive works of don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, now called just Chimalpahin, the premier Nahuatl annalist who produced a large annalistic corpus.⁷ In his generation, the historical works of don Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, and Cristóbal del Castillo are also of interest, though they directed themselves mainly to a Spanish audience. To the east, a few important sets of Nahuatl annals came into being in the

⁵Examples of studies which take this approach are Gillespie 1989 and Schroeder 1991.

⁶Annals of Fulda, in Reuter 1992. Reuter comments, “The seemingly disinterested objectivity of the genre, found over long stretches even of the Annals of Fulda, whose authors were by no means dispassionate observers of events, can be very deceptive” (p.2). Hayden White (1987) wrote revealingly about medieval annals in his now classic work. A number of illustrative sets are available in print and even in translation. On the Marathi *bakhar* and its relationship to other kinds of literature see Guha 2004.

⁷Chimalpahin is the obvious exception to the general truth that the annals have been relatively little studied. See especially Schroeder 1991, Chimalpahin 1997 (Anderson and Schroeder), 2001 (Tena), and 2006 (Lockhart, Schroeder, and Namala).

sixteenth century, among them the works now known as the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (part of which could be called the *Annals of Cuauhtinchan*), the various pictorial annals covered with alphabetic writing which are also from Cuauhtinchan, and the *Annals of Tecamachalco*. Generally, however, the central valley dominated in the early production of Nahuatl alphabetic annals, and in that area, the tradition reached its apogee with the work of Chimalpahin. After him, future generations became more removed from the styles and forms their forebears had once used to keep track of history; eventually their earnest efforts to recount their history came to be marked more by ignorance of the past than by any deep familiarity with it.

The annals genre, however, did not decline as precipitously in the Tlaxcala-Puebla valley to the east, where the second half of the seventeenth century saw a remarkable florescence of the annals-keeping tradition. The Tlaxcalans' role in the conquest as an ally of the Spaniards guaranteed them certain privileges afterward, privileges which, as we will see, helped them to isolate themselves somewhat from Spanish culture. Then, too, in the course of the seventeenth century, Puebla, Mexico's second city, attained a sort of golden age, becoming known for its churches, craftsmanship, music, and wealth; the indigenous community would undoubtedly have been affected by the pride and energy that were part and parcel of the era. Thus in this region, on the one hand the retention of some knowledge of the old forms, and on the other the deep acculturation born of generations of contact leading to relatively widespread literacy and cultural enthusiasm, apparently led to the production and preservation of a remarkable number of interesting annalistic documents. Twenty-four survive, eight as original documents and the remainder as copied-out fragments. And in-text references indicate that these twenty-four were merely points of production in a wider network.¹

This book brings two of these sets of annals into print for the first time, one from Puebla and one from Tlaxcala, both manuscripts in the keeping of the *Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia* in Mexico City.² To render them as intelligible as possible, I offer an introduction in five parts: 1) a political history of the Tlaxcala-Puebla valley from the indigenous perspective; 2) background on the Mexican annals genre in general; 3) background on the Tlaxcala-Puebla family of annals; and 4) and 5) studies of the probable authors of these two particular texts and the worlds in which they lived. Armed with this information, readers should be able to make direct use of the documents for a multiplicity of purposes.

The political history of the Tlaxcala-Puebla Valley

THE NAHUAS, like most people around the world before the formation of nation-states, spent a good deal of their time forging alliances and deciding when to break them. When a group of people had been together long enough, they constituted in their own minds

¹For a nearly complete list, see Gibson and Glass 1975. Only one is thus far known to have escaped their attention, in the Archive of the Cathedral of Puebla, Volume 6 of the *Colección de Papeles Varios*. A facsimile has been published: see Gómez García et al. 2000.

²BNAH, *Archivo Histórico*, Gómez Orozco 184 (*Annals of Puebla*) and *Colección Antigua 872* (*Annals of Tlaxcala*). The former has recently been removed from the accessible collection and placed in a vault, but digital images are available on site.

what we might call an “ethnic group.” The predominant organizational form, the *altepetl* or small state, consisted of subgroups, but its people saw themselves as having more in common with each other than with anyone else in the world and generally (though not always) remained unified. For at least two centuries before the arrival of the Europeans, the complex *altepetl* of Tlaxcala constituted a variation on this theme: the four sub-*altepetl* of Ocotelolco, Tizatla,³ Quiyahuiztlan and Tepeticpac governed themselves independently, each having a separate *tlatoani* (king, literally “speaker”), but they nevertheless remained invested in an overarching identity as people of Tlaxcala and faithfully rotated duties among themselves in a fixed order. At any one time the ruler of one of the four sub-*altepetl* presided over the whole. They shared a meaningful history, having migrated together from the north in relatively recent times, vanquishing various foes along the way, most notably the Otomi, whose lands they now held, and many of whom remained in the area as a tribute-paying population. Still, they had already experienced significant internal splintering, and their shared history and common interests might not have been enough to ensure that the complex *altepetl* held together. The concomitant rise to power of the Mexica in nearby Tenochtitlan probably helped them to continue to conceive of themselves as one. In their numbers lay some strength. Unlike most of the *altepetl* that surrounded them, they were never conquered by the Mexica.⁴

When the Spaniards arrived in 1519, the Tlaxcalans, having protected their independence for many years, were at first determined not to let these well armed strangers dictate to them. After sending the Otomi in first, they themselves attacked, still hoping to repel the invaders. The battle was a draw; both sides withdrew to nurse their wounded—and the Tlaxcalans to bury their dead. A few days later, just before dawn, the people of a number of villages near the Spanish camp woke to unexpected violence: mounted and armored lancers had approached stealthily, and now galloped through town, skewering people and setting homes ablaze with impunity. Day after day, the newcomers did this in different places. Mounted behind one of them rode a young woman, “one of us people here,” as the Tlaxcalans described her, meaning that she was not one of the foreigners from across the sea. She spoke Nahuatl, and shouted repeatedly that the strangers wanted to make peace, that they would willingly ally with them in their ongoing struggles against the Mexica.⁵

Thus it was that the Tlaxcalans made their famous bargain with the Spaniards.⁶ They held to it in the succeeding years—though not without some inner turmoil the next year, in 1520, when the deadly pox broke out, and the supposedly invulnerable strangers were driven ignominiously from Tenochtitlan. Their eventual decision not to waver brought its rewards. With their help, the Spaniards defeated the Mexica in 1521, and then the

³Many scholars represent the word as “Tizatlan.” In the sources, it appears with and without the *n*. The expectable construction would be *tiça(tl) + tlah*, “place of abundance of chalk.” Thus I have used “Tizatla” (with *z* instead of the *ç* of early texts because the word is well known).

⁴For more on what can be deduced about the preconquest history of Tlaxcala, see Gibson 1967, pp. 1–15, and Lockhart 1992, pp. 20–23.

⁵See Townsend 2006.

⁶For a study of the motivations of indigenous allies of the Spaniards in this period, including the Tlaxcalans, see Oudijk and Restall 2007.

Tlaxcalans accompanied the conquerors to surrounding territories, convincing them all to put up their arms and join the new polity. Hernando Cortés has not become known to posterity as a man who paid all his debts, but he and his successors paid this one, at least to some extent. Tlaxcala was not given out in *encomienda* to pay tribute and perform labor for a particular conqueror, or worse yet, divided up by *subaltepetl* to be given to several different conquerors; rather they paid their taxes directly to the king. A Spanish magistrate/administrator and his staff came to live in their midst, but few others did; no Spanish city was established in their territory. (Instead, as we will see, the important city of Puebla, which normally would have been in the center of the Tlaxcalan territory, was established on their southern border, leaving the Tlaxcalans far less inundated than they would have been.)

The people continued to govern their internal affairs much as they always had in the decade after the Spanish victory, but they found that one important change had occurred. The *tlatoni* of Ocotelolco, the most powerful of the four *subaltepetl* at that time, was treated by the foreigners as though he had sole control over all the people of Tlaxcala, which bred significant resentment, as all tasks, including the paramount rulership, had always rotated in a fixed order. In the 1530s, when the Spaniards introduced a form of the *cabildo* (municipal council) through which they wished the indigenous sector to be governed, they ignored the traditional rotation, regularly giving Ocotelolco the governorship and other key positions. The dissatisfaction of the other three *subaltepetl* gradually grew to a crisis point, and by the mid-1540s a Spanish review committee had to be brought in to resolve the problem. In the new model, a rotating governor (himself Tlaxcalan) would serve with *regidores* (councilmen) and *alcaldes* (judges) from all the constituent *altepetl*.¹ It was agreed that the indigenous noblemen would elect a governor from among themselves for a period of two years. Ocotelolco, having had too much power of late, would pass to the rear of the line, and then the usual order of rotation would pick up where it had left off. The first governor would thus be from Tizatla, the next from Quiyahuiztlan, the next from Tepeticpac, the next from Ocotelolco again. Each *subaltepetl* would elect three *regidores* and one *alcalde* annually. The four *tlatoque* (plural of *tlatoni*) would sit on the council as *regidores* for life; thus although they would not actually govern the *cabildo*, they would remain highly influential. In keeping with Tlaxcalan traditions, the governing council would thus be a relatively large group; twenty-one men (governor, four *alcaldes*, twelve regular *regidores*, four *tlatoque*) would serve at any one time, out of a population of about 220 electors, noblemen who were particularly prominent in their communities, probably mostly the heads of lordly houses (*teccalli*).² Because the positions were rotating and elected, virtually all prominent men could thus assume that they would take part in governing their people during the course of their lifetimes—if not actually on the *cabildo* then by filling a host of lesser offices—and all noblemen of any stripe understood that they would be closely related to someone who

¹In a Spanish *cabildo*, the *regidores* were generally of higher social rank and served longer terms than the *alcaldes*. The indigenous, however, interpreted the *alcaldes* as being of greater importance because there were fewer of them in any given roster.

²See TA, pp. 5–6.

was thus participating. When those who usually held office were not serving, they used a word to describe themselves which comes close to meaning “resting.”³

The indigenous nobility had a long history of intertwined power and responsibility. Each tlatoani (king) was in reality a particularly powerful *teuctli*, or dynastic lord of a particular lineage; the remaining *teteuctin* (plural of *teuctli*) in the conglomeration were still powerful as well, with independent bases; they were the tlatoani’s advisers and supporters—and in times of strife, his greatest threats. In Tlaxcala all the *pipiltin* (the nobility, plural of *pilli*) were relatives of a *teuctli* and were members of a *teccalli* or lordly house headed by him. Their vassals, the commoners, were called *macehualtin* (plural of *macehualli*). A *teuctli* held land on behalf of his people, distributing it to all those in the *teccalli* who used it, *macehualtin* and *pipiltin*, and in some cases to *teixhuihuan*, or higher-level dependents. Often people passed those plots on to their children, but sometimes the *teuctli* had to intervene to reassign land. In the colonial period, it was debatable how much power the *teteuctin* and their family members had or should have. In the whole eastern region they often traditionally wielded more power than in the central valley, where they were more fully understood to be integrated into the *altepetl*. Still, their greater power was far from universally acknowledged. There was ongoing controversy in the courts, the *macehualtin* often arguing that their *teuctli* was essentially just an officer of their subunit, who should have little power over them, as they all belonged to a constituent unit of the *altepetl*, and the *teuctli* trying to obscure the difference between the *teccalli* and the larger unit. Yet even though the people may have resented the ability of the *teteuctin* to grow rich by collecting tribute from them, the lords did in fact often employ their growing knowledge of the Spanish language and customs to defend them.⁴

Indeed, the Tlaxcalan nobility’s volubility probably saved the people from having Mexico’s second largest Spanish city founded in their midst. The Spaniards needed a major population center between Mexico City and the port of Veracruz, for this pathway (the trunk line) was to be at the heart of the country for some time to come. Tlaxcala was the obvious choice, but the administration wanted it to be a place where Spaniards would not be as dependent on indigenous labor as they generally seemed to be, and where wheat (rather than maize) would be grown in abundance. They selected a former no-man’s land called Cuitlaxcohuapan (originally Cuetlaxcohuapan, a word of disputed and unclear etymology) between Tlaxcala, Tepeaca, and Cholula, directly south of Tlaxcala along the Atoyac River. Though the people of Totimehuacan had once laid claim to the area, since their military devastation in the preceding century, no one actually lived there; the people of nearby Cholula now held a theoretical claim to the territory. It was to be a Spanish-only settlement, and the citizens could not expect to receive *encomiendas*, only extensive lands. But this did not mean that they actually envisioned starting up a new city without any aid at all from indigenous people. The crown informed Tlaxcala that rather than paying their annual tribute in goods, they would have to send a certain number of able-

³We learn this from the most prolific of the Tlaxcalan annalists, Zapata (passim, p. 334 et alia).

⁴On the role of the *teuctli* among the eastern Nahuas and its evolution in the colonial era, see Lockhart 1992, pp. 102–113, and Reyes García 1977.

bodied men to the new settlement every week for a few years. In the spring and summer of 1531, at least seven thousand men came.

They began to build the city of “Puebla de los Angeles,” serving as carpenters, masons, woodchoppers, water carriers, domestic servants, fine artisans, musicians, scribes, and translators. For the next two hundred years the indigenous persisted in calling the place Cuitlaxcohuapan, though the Franciscan friars who accompanied them (and then the other Spanish settlers) spoke only of Puebla or the Ciudad de los Angeles. In the fall of 1532, torrential rains caused flooding which destroyed the initial clay buildings. Major labor drafts were needed once again, of course. In the hour of Spanish need, the Tlaxcalans actually petitioned to raise their quota in exchange for being allowed permanent exemption from certain other burdens—such as the crown’s request that they create and staff food-selling businesses along the road from Veracruz to the capital. By participating so eagerly, the Tlaxcalans succeeded in gaining another end as well: they kept the Spanish population within their own *altepetl* to a minimum. The bishopric had originally been set up in their city, as was to be expected, but the bishop of Tlaxcala soon complained that Tlaxcala was a poor place from which to head an archdiocese, and before long the episcopal seat was also moved to Puebla.¹

Perhaps in the rebuilding the Spaniards consulted indigenous craftsmen who were experienced in the region. In any case, they selected a better spot, along the banks of a rivulet called the San Francisco which drained into the Atoyac a few miles to the west. The place was further removed from the most fertile farmlands, but higher and drier. This time, the site took. For many years, there were more indigenous people than Spaniards in the town, though they were not at first permanent residents. They came from Tlaxcala, Cholula, Tepeaca, and elsewhere in the region. For over a decade the crown continued to renew the demand that the indigenous provide what they called temporary *ayuda* (aid, succor, support). But then, in the early 1540s, at the time of the passage of the reforming New Laws, the royal government at last ended the arrangement, much to the Spanish Pueblans’ chagrin. Indigenous people were now to be allowed to settle in the city; they would be free of tribute demands, except that they would be responsible for certain public works (drainage systems, public festivals, etc.) and would have to be willing to hire their labor out to Spaniards. The city was already becoming known for its *obrajes* (shops, works, proto-factories), where textiles and ceramics were produced. Over the remaining years of the sixteenth century, numerous extended families responded to this offer, pulled up stakes in their homelands and moved to the city of Puebla de los Angeles.²

The new city was truly a collective effort, dependent on the contributions of a variety of corporate entities. The *traza*, or planned central section of the city, was just to the west of the rivulet that cut through town. The Franciscans’ convent looked down on it from a hill on the east bank. Almost all of the Tlaxcalans lived in the area immediately

¹See Hirschberg 1979. The bishop claimed that he wished to protect Tlaxcala as a purely indigenous community from the influence of the Spaniards, but that explanation would seem to be an example of giving the king the reasons he wished to hear.

²Some of their motives may be deduced by studying the problems they faced in the surrounding countryside. See Prem 1988.

surrounding the fathers, known as the *barrio* of San Francisco. Not long after, a second indigenous *barrio* of Santiago Apóstol was constructed on the far west side of the city, and there settled most of the Cholulteca and their cousins the people of Tepeaca and Huexotzinco. They came in large numbers, due to the proximity of their home cities. The Augustinians were their spiritual shepherds. A third, much smaller indigenous *barrio*, San Pablo de los Naturales, was founded just to the north, somewhat nearer to the central Spanish part of the city. Some of its residents apparently came from Tlatelolco and Tetz-coco, people who had been part of the “Aztec” Triple Alliance and who now provided some of the most acculturated artisans in the country. The Dominicans, not to be outdone by the other friars, took responsibility for them and allowed some of them to live near their own church so they could reside near to where they worked and sold their goods. The sector under the protection of the Dominicans included another community of Tlaxcalans as well, people who had come in the first wave of migrants and settled on a substantial territory—which they apparently owned—just north of the city on the road to Tlaxcala. Sometimes their *barrio* was called Santa Ana—or increasingly San Antonio, after the local monastery— but when the name was mentioned at all in official documents it was paired with San Pablo de los Naturales, under which it was politically subsumed.³

Each indigenous community largely governed itself, and thus in time each came to envision itself as an *altepetl*, divided into varying ethnic neighborhoods or *barrios* (the Nahuatl word *tlaxilacalli*, the usual term for subdivisions of an *altepetl*, does not surface in the annals included in this volume). Each group acquired its own *alguacil* (constable), who, as time went on and the population increased, was asked to take on more and more responsibility.⁴ The *alcaldes* and *regidores* normal for an *altepetl* were apparently still lacking. The *fiscal* (indigenous church steward) also spoke for the *altepetl* on certain public occasions, we learn from the annals.⁵ Sometimes there were problems between the

³Marín Tamayo 1989 (pp. 66–72) has studied the origins of the original *barrios*, based on Puebla’s early *cabildo* records, housed in the Archivo del Ayuntamiento de Puebla. He could find no official mention of the indigenous settlers of San Pablo being from Mexico City, which was asserted by early chroniclers, but there are archival references (see Altman 2000, p. 213, and López de Villaseñor 1961, p. 444). On the question of the Dominicans allowing them to lodge nearby, see Zerón Zapata, pp. 84–85, and Marín Tamayo 1989, p. 62. The Tlaxcalan community called Santa Ana had an interesting history; the Franciscans originally established a tiny chapel dedicated to the saint next to their convent, but in 1550 it was moved to the northern neighborhood, and lands were granted to the Tlaxcalans who were to live there. Don Juan Bautista, who would later serve as first indigenous governor, owned an orchard in the vicinity. See Leicht 1967, p. 363; López de Villaseñor 1961, pp. 147, 438, 446; Marín Tamayo 1989, p. 67; Toussaint 1954, p. 210. For a budding study on Cholula’s relationship with the satellite community of migrants who moved to Puebla, see Gutiérrez 2008.

The study of the whole topic of the internal organization of the indigenous sector in Puebla and its evolution is still in gestation. It is likely that some of the facts I have reported above, making my best judgments from the existing literature, will be challenged or appear in a different light as future research continues to get closer to the sources.

⁴On the early mentions of these *alguaciles de barrio*, see Marín Tamayo 1989, pp. 72–75. Through the ambiguities of the word *barrio* one cannot ascertain whether there was an *alguacil* for each smaller *barrio* or only one for each of the larger proto-*altepetl*.

⁵Annals of Puebla, entry for 1565; the term *altepetl* is already used.

various groups relating to communication issues and the need to find a way to divide public service tasks equitably. In the 1590s, the Spaniards began to refer to one don Juan Bautista as the *gobernador* of the whole indigenous community. He seems to have been from Tizatla and to have had connections with the altepetl of San Pablo de los Naturales.¹ Apparently, the other indigenous neighborhoods would accept his authority only if a traditional indigenous-style rotation of office was established, for in the earliest years of the seventeenth century, just such an arrangement was formalized. Together, the three neighborhoods established a cabildo of their own, with all the usual offices, through which power and responsibility for assigned tasks would be shared and rotated in perfect Nahuatl tradition. In 1601, the first official regidores and alcaldes were installed as cabildo members, and in 1610, a grand public ceremony was held to mark the occasion of the formal recognition of the three constituent groups as altepetl and their political unification as one greater altepetl.² Thus a miscellaneous group of indigenous immigrants operating inside a major Spanish city had over time reconstituted the typical Nahuatl organizational form of a complex altepetl, much the same as Tlaxcala, only with three subaltepetl instead of the canonical four.

The formation of a well organized and fully legitimated indigenous conglomerate to ensure fairness and order must have delighted no one more than the people of the barrio known as “San Juan del Río,” the oldest part of San Francisco. In Nahuatl the quarter was called Tlaxcaltecapan (“the place where the Tlaxcalans are”).³ It sat perched on the banks of a rivulet called Almolyan which ran down to the Río San Francisco. Many of the people worked in textile mills powered by the surrounding waters. They maintained a very old chapel and a newer church, both dedicated to San Juan Bautista (John the

¹Spanish documents of the 1590s mentioning don Juan Bautista as indigenous alcalde are noted in Leicht 1967, p.178. Since an entry for 1601 in the present Annals of Puebla gives that year as the date of the first appointment of three alcaldes, one for each altepetl, he may have first been alcalde for the whole community and then formally or informally attained the status of governor. The present annals, so punctilious in naming the governors and their order, cannot help us here, because the years 1580 to 1600 are missing in all related sets. (Apparently some borrower of the original pages never returned them.) Although otherwise no one repeated in the office in the time recorded by the text, it seems extremely likely that in the time before traditions jelled, don Juan Bautista the first governor was the same person as the third governor of the same name who is mentioned in the entry for 1610. If so, he was from Tizatla in Tlaxcala. He owned land in Puebla located between San Pablo and Santa Ana (López de Villaseñor 1961, p. 147), which was the only other barrio where Tlaxcalans lived in any numbers at that time (see above.) Later, a large population of Tlaxcalans would make Analco its home, but in the year 1600, Analco was considered little more than an offshoot of Tlaxcaltecapan.

²Entries for 1601 and 1610, Annals of Puebla (this volume). It is possible that the need for an arrangement that would satisfy the entire indigenous community was heightened by the fact that in this period the Spanish authorities were demanding major *congregaciones* in the region, forcing natives scattered in small hamlets to settle in larger population centers so that tribute might be more easily collected. Certain Mixteca migrants were being resettled in Puebla, and other uprooted individuals may have landed there as well. See Hoekstra 1993, pp. 108–18. It was also a period when the obrajes were expanding considerably, with the attendant labor requirements. See Altman 2000.

³In the Annals of Puebla it seems that Tlaxcaltecapan at times means San Juan del Río specifically and sometimes the larger entity of San Francisco. See n. 2, p. 32.

Baptist). On the street running from the church down to the Almoloyan, the people had built a public washhouse channeling the flow of three gushing springs, and they took good care of the structure.⁴ The author of our present Annals of Puebla, who lived in the community, proudly records the formation of the tripartite indigenous cabildo: “The cabildo session was held in the *sala real* (royal chamber, central feature of Puebla’s main governmental building).” It was before his time, but the detail suggests that a predecessor, possibly even a relative, was actually present and perhaps first wrote the entry. The keeper of the annals (or one of his predecessors) evinced a particular interest in Tizatlá, perhaps indicating that he understood his forebears to have migrated from that part of Tlaxcala. The connection was very much alive in his mind. In some ways, of course, the experiences of those who had remained behind in Tlaxcala diverged sharply from their kin who had taken an alternate path and settled in Cuitlaxcohuapan. After all, in the former they lived in relative isolation, and in the latter they lived side by side with people of different languages and cultures, not only Spaniards, but also Africans and indigenous people from a variety of other places. In some ways, however, the world views of the two groups, those who stayed at home and those who left, remained very much of a piece. An exploration of the histories they each kept elucidates both aspects of their reality.

The Nahuatl Annals Genre

IN THE ANCIENT TRADITION of the *xiuhpohualli*⁵ (year-count, or yearly account), as far as we understand it, a timeline was marked out, each segment labeled according to the ancient Mesoamerican calendar with standard year signs (One Reed, Two Flint-knife, Three House, Four Rabbit, etc). Next to the line unfolded a set of glyphs, designed to elicit from trained readers an impressive oral performance narrating the events of that year that were important to the altepetl as a whole.⁶ Sometimes the year-count was intended to reify a relationship between two or more entities, and different glyphs telling their somewhat different stories might appear on either side of the line or in areas of the document designated by distinct place-name glyphs. Circumstantial evidence indicates that in performances, more than one *xiuhpohualli* would often be presented in quick succession, representing the different elements of the corporate political entity being celebrated. These year counts might be short and report the events of a single tlatoani’s reign, or they might be long, extending for centuries, with certain time periods stylistically foreshortened for practicality’s sake. We cannot know with absolute certainty how

⁴For a study of the streets as they were mentioned in contemporary documents, see Leicht 1967, pp. 12–13. On the churches and chapels in the barrio, see Toussaint 1954.

⁵This was the term most often used, but in fact there existed a range of conceptions of the form, and thus different designations. We sometimes see *xiuhtlacuilolli* (year painting, or year writing) or *xiuhamatl* (year paper) or even *altepetlacuilolli* (altepetl painting or writing). See Lockhart 1992, p. 376.

⁶The best entrée into the literature on the surviving pictorials is Boone 2000. We need a great deal more work on what can be deduced from the alphabetic annals about the verbal performances. As a step in that direction, see Townsend 2009. There I study a 1550s courtroom drama that relied on traditional usages of the *xiuhpohualli*, and I give careful consideration to what the more verbose sixteenth-century annals may demonstrate to us.

much latitude the performers or reciters were allowed –whether they adhered strictly to a pre-set script, or were encouraged to take some initiative and develop themes of interest to their audiences. The latter seems far more likely, however, as will be seen. No pre-conquest pictographic annals survive. The images that art historians have studied all date from the mid-sixteenth century or later, and though some scholars have proven very successful in gleaning from them a sense of how the Nahuas understood history, they cannot bring us any closer to an understanding of the actual oral performances. For that, our only clues must come from the alphabetic annals that were produced well after the conquest.

Almost as soon as they arrived, the Spanish friars began to take indigenous students, teaching them not only the Christian faith but also the Roman alphabet, in order that they might be more effectively instructed. In this regard, it stood the indigenous in good stead that, having a long tradition of living as sedentary agriculturalists, a class of noblemen had attempted to organize society and bolster their authority by keeping and interpreting a rich painted tradition—for they immediately saw the utility of an alphabetic system.¹ In the 1540s and 1550s, the Roman alphabet spread throughout central Mexico; numerous men became literate in every sense of the word.² They wrote what their Spanish teachers asked them to write; but they also wrote what they wanted to write themselves. They recorded legends and songs. They turned the tradition of making a statement as one lay dying into the tradition of leaving a will. They wrote down property settlements. They went to court with petitions when they disagreed about what had been decided.

Some also did their best to transfer the surviving *xiuhpohualli* into alphabetic texts. This was easier conceived of than accomplished, however, in that they had to find a way to recreate both the oral performance and the painted record, and relatively few of them were experts in either skill. The earliest extant set of annals dates from the 1540s; it is, not surprisingly, the Annals of Tlatelolco, where the Franciscans' Colegio de Santa Cruz, the first school for indigenous youth, was located. It is a purely alphabetic text; any visual artifact the speaker had referred to as he performed has disappeared beyond recall. Little by little, certain talented men learned to blend the two traditions, and we find sets of annals that consist of some traditional glyphs alongside alphabetic renderings of what the glyphs are meant to convey and hint at. Soon it became more difficult for young men to make head or tail of the old pictorials. In the 1560s, one frustrated student of his people's traditions who lived in the Tlaxcala-Puebla valley simply wrote about the year 1442 "and

¹Precontact Nahuatl writing, though highly pictorial, had the capacity to indicate sounds in terms of syllables. When necessary any proper name could be expressed syllabically. In principle anything in human speech could have been represented. The system as it existed in central Mexico at contact, however, did not reproduce speeches, songs, or any actual utterances, tasks for which the Roman alphabet was well adapted.

²There is ongoing discussion concerning the question of whether or not Native American forms of expression constituted true literacy. See Boone and Mignolo 1994. I would like to bypass this debate, as it seems to me clear that the indigenous in the precontact era were indeed communicating with each other using writing, but that at the same time, they stood in danger of losing their ability to communicate in the traditional fashion as long as the glyphs remained the domain of a select few and were largely restricted to conveying names, dates, quantities, details of costume and ritual, bare events such as death or accession to the throne, etc., and much was left to oral narration.

in that year a great many things happened.”³ He, like numerous others, did not even try to illustrate his own set of annals.

Nahuatl annals have been known for their terseness, but this is probably only because we are often looking at materials dating from this era of confusion, when the writers were well aware they should put down more, but did not know what exactly to put. The surviving early alphabetic annals give every indication that performers had traditionally included relatively lengthy or dramatic speeches: at moments of conflict, where we find dialog, and at moments of ceremonial resolution, where we find grave pronouncements. Examples are literally everywhere, beginning with the earliest set, the Annals of Tlatelolco. In the beginning of that text, the people leave the Seven Caves and wander for thirteen years, eating snakes and rabbits, prickly pear and cactus. The leader makes proclamations regularly. (“I will guide you”; “Daughter, go with this man,” etc.)

When the people attempt to settle in the lands of the Culhuaque, social conflict reaches a fevered pitch—and the dialog becomes extensive. The Culhua ruler sets the Mexica to do virtually impossible tasks, which they manage to perform anyway. At each stage there is verbal exchange. After each event, the astounded and impressed Culhuaque ask questions reminiscent of other accounts, essentially asking each other in various ways, “Who *are* these Mexica, anyway?” Finally a resolution is reached—at least temporarily—through a great dialog. The Mexica ask the Culhuaque for some land to build their houses, and request that the ruler give one of his sons to become their own ruler, to establish their own royal line. “Yes,” says the king’s mother. “Give them my precious pearl, my quetzal feather, my grandchild.” The ruler comes to see their new town once the houses are constructed. And he says, “O Mexica, you have attained great merit [have earned land].” He faces the thought of leaving his son with them as an independent king. And he weeps, in typical Nahua ceremonial style. Then follows a long period of years in which there is relatively little conflict, and relatively little dialog. The Mexica continue to march forward through time, their power ever increasing. (The great battle between the Tenochca and Tlatelolca that occurred in 1472 is passed over with as little comment as possible, of course, as their defeat was an embarrassment to the Tlatelolca.) Then the Spaniards arrive. Conflict ensues. And with the conflict once again comes dialog. The story of the years 1519 through 1521 is told in great though intermittent detail, the action propelled forward through verbal exchanges. This same phenomenon occurs in every one of the known sixteenth-century alphabetic annals: periods of quiet, usually recorded in relatively terse language, are interrupted by periods of crisis, represented in vivid dialog.⁴

The pattern was not restricted merely to the Central Valley, for we see it in the best-developed eastern text of the era as well, the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, in effect the Annals of Cuauhtinchan. In the beginning we find the lists of people who have departed from the Seven Caves and are on the move through the landscape. The ones whose story the audience is following arrive in the region of Tollan, and the newcomers experience conflict with those who are already settled there, and hence with each other. Speech erupts almost immediately. When a king demands a certain wife, warfare breaks out that

³The Annals of Tecamachalco in Celestino Solís and Reyes García 1992, p. 20.

⁴The Annals of Tlatelolco in Barlow 1948, pp. 37–47.

involves several kings and their peoples. “Said Ixcicohuatl, said Quetzaltehueyac, ‘Why is there fighting? Why are the Toltecs being destroyed? Did I start it? Did I demand the woman for whom we are now confronting each other, for whom we are making war?’” Most such rhetorical questions were meant to be answered with a resounding “No!” Certainly the leader was underscoring the fact that this disaster was not his fault. He finished grandly: “Let Huemac die, who made us fight!”¹

Eventually, having traveled quite far to the east, and having endured bad treatment for long enough, the leaders of the people hold a great meeting and decide to fight back. They make a grand statement, having come to this resolution, and they cry: “‘Will it eat us? Or will it eat them, the arrow and shield of the Olmeca-Xicalanca?’ Then they wept, Ixcicohuatl, Quetzaltehueyac.” Unfortunately, their ritual weeping is in vain. This does not turn out to be the all-important moment of settlement after all. The people experience some military success, but are forced to move on not long after. Eventually, they give up their wandering life of sleeping in fields and caves and make a permanent home. A great proclamation is made—several times, in fact. Years pass without great conflict, and without speech incidents, until the people attempt to reject a Tlatelolcan-born prince who is being foisted on them. “When they found out who would be king, then a Chimalpaneca woman named Nanotzin got angry. She said, ‘Will he be our king? Is [our king] not Ayapancatl? It will not be.’”² Dialog continues after the Tlatelolca meet their own nemesis in the persons of the Tenochca, and Axayacatl (king of the victorious Tenochca) begins to send his minions to the region to arrange affairs in Cuauhtinchan as he pleases. The constant verbal accusations and negotiations effectively end only when the Spaniards come and replace the Tenochca ruling government.

Interestingly, the extant early annals offer evidence that kernels of important speech exchanges were memorized verbatim, but that performers also amplified as they chose. In the Codex Aubin, for example, a set of annals from San Juan Moyotlan—one of four subaltepetl in Mexico City—dating from the 1560s and 70s, elements of particular speeches appear that are much expanded in material copied out by Chimalpahin forty years later. In the days when the Mexica are still weak, the leader Huitzilihuitl is defeated in battle by the Tepaneca and the Culhuaque. He and his daughter are brought before Coxcoxtli, king of Culhuacan. “Huitzilihuitl felt great compassion for his daughter, since not even a little [clothing] was on her. He said to the king, ‘Grant some little thing to my daughter, O King.’ And [the king] said to him. ‘I do not consent. She will stay as she is.’”³ The same story appears in Chimalpahin’s work in much fuller form. Yet in the midst of the more detailed account, almost exactly the same speeches are uttered.⁴

¹Historia Tolteca Chichimeca in Kirchoff et al. 1976, p. 155.

²Ibid., p. 219.

³The Codex Aubin in Dibble 1963, pp. 31–32. “Yn uitzilliuhtl yn ichtpoch cenca quitlaocolti yn atle ma ytla ytech uetzia quilhui yn tlahtouani Ma ytlatzin xictlaocolli y nochpochtzin tlatouanie auh niman quilhui camo nĩa çan iuh yaz.”

⁴Chimalpahin 1997, 2: 76. “Auh in yehuatl yn huehue huitzilliuhtl ynic quihuicaque yn ichtpoch cenca quitlaocoltia yn atle ma ytlatzin ytech huetzia quilhuitacic yn tlahtouani coxcoxtli yn huitzilliuhtl tlahtouanie ma ytlatzin ximotlaocollili y nochpochtzin auh niman quinanquilli quilhui camo nĩa çan iuh yaz.”