

APPENDIX

How Scholars Study the Aztecs

FOR MANY YEARS, scholars accepted the idea that very limited sources were available for the study of ancient Native Americans. They examined the buildings and objects uncovered in archaeological digs,¹ as well as the words of Europeans who began to write about Indians almost as soon as they met them. Columbus, for instance, wrote in his log on the first day he met some Taino people in the Caribbean in October 1492, and Hernando Cortés in Mexico lost little time before he started sending letters home.² These sources weren't nearly enough, yet researchers made do because they thought they had no choice. These texts were what was available.

Over the years, two groups of scholars came closer than others to hearing what ancient Native Americans themselves had to say, at least in Mesoamerica. Mayanist epigraphers worked tirelessly, attempting to read the glyphs carved on ancient stelae and on buildings. Eventually they realized that certain elements were phonetic and that they would need to learn Mayan languages in order to make sense of the writing.³ What had once been thought to be the highly individualized spiritual expressions of artists and priests turned out to be political narratives about the births, marriages, and deaths of kings and queens. One long statement began, for instance, "At 29 days, 14 yaxkin [on July 7, 674], she was born, Lady Katun Ahau, noblewoman from the place called *Man*."⁴ Meanwhile, art historians and anthropologists carefully studied the sixteenth-century painted codices prepared by the Aztecs (and other Mesoamerican peoples), often at the request of curious Europeans and usually

with accompanying written text in Spanish.⁵ These scholars, too, found political narratives of kings and conquests and detailed delineations of past peregrinations, as well as images of clothing people wore or the objects they used before the Spaniards arrived. The texts also included answers to questions posed by the newcomers. “Whom did you sacrifice, and when did you do it?” the Spaniards would ask. And the Nahuas would respond, “This chapter tells of the feasts and blood sacrifices which they made on the first day of the first month,” or “This chapter tells of the honors paid, and the blood offerings made, in the second month.”⁶

Neither the ancient, highly controlled carvings nor the sixteenth-century codices prepared collaboratively with Spaniards gave vent to full, open-ended, or spontaneous language. They offered no meandering and revealing tales, and precious few poems, jokes, innermost fears, or flashes of anger. The texts largely told what Mayan kings wanted posterity to know about their lineages and what sixteenth-century Spaniards wished to believe about the people whom they had conquered. Nevertheless, there was copious material for talented scholars to work with. They combined their knowledge of the codices with studies of archaeology and of Spanish accounts, and produced impressive books about Mesoamerican peoples. Many of their works are highly recommended.⁷

The Aztecs, however, did write a great deal more in the sixteenth century after they learned the Roman alphabet from the Spaniards—and eventually, beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, a number of scholars began to take those writings seriously.⁸ At first, scholars looked at the ways indigenous students used the phonetic alphabet to answer questions put to them by the Spaniards about their religion, or to help the friars invent Nahuatl phrases that could be used to teach the people about Christianity (referring to the Virgin Mary, for instance, as “forever an unmarried daughter”) or to write such things as Nahuatl-language confessional manuals and religious plays. It didn’t take many years for scholars to look beyond the religious works and to realize that native writers also helped their people with more mundane tasks such as recording the public ceremonies held at the time of land transfers, or writing down a dying man’s perorations as to how his land was to be divided among his children. Historians and anthropologists who learned the Nahuatl language could read these sources; in the 1980s and 1990s they began to produce insightful studies on how the indigenous people interacted with Christianity⁹ and with the Spanish political system.¹⁰ It had previously been thought that the indigenous people were overwhelmed, even devastated, by these two aspects of Spanish culture; once scholars

translated what the people actually said in the earliest generations' interactions with the newcomers, they learned that the indigenous took a rather pragmatic approach to change.

Yet even in the midst of all the revisionism, few asked what the Aztecs talked about in private—what they thought about their own history or dared to hope for when they considered their future. Who were they, in short, when there was no Spanish interlocutor? That project remained neglected. It wasn't for lack of sources, for there were documents in existence that revealed such things. The *xiuhpohualli*, or "yearly account," went back many generations, and examples were eagerly recorded by some of the young Nahuas who learned to manipulate the Roman letters. Dozens of those *xiuhpohualli* transcriptions survived and ultimately became part of libraries' rare book collections, where they were gradually discovered in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. From the beginning, scholars referred to these texts as "historical annals" as they bore a resemblance to a medieval European genre of that name. They were difficult to understand, and not always directly relevant to questions of interest to outsiders, so investigators rarely worked with them. In the multicultural world of the late 1990s and early 2000s, one might have expected that such sources would be rapidly seized upon, read aloud, and translated, and thus made to speak their secrets to the wider world. But this could not happen immediately. First, a major breakthrough was needed in outsiders' understanding of the relationship between clauses in this far from well-known language.¹¹ Next, scholars had to learn to read Nahuatl easily enough to be able to translate unpredictable and wide-ranging statements (different from repetitive wills or Christian texts); those scholars then had to read enough of the histories—written without any regard for Western conventions—in order to be able to understand what they were getting at. It took quite some time to make real headway.¹²

And there was another problem—namely, that even many academics seem to have thought that learning Nahuatl wasn't worth the trouble, that we already knew enough to render the work unnecessary. We had learned a great deal from looking at objects and images, and from listening to Spaniards or to Indians who were answering Spaniards' questions. We had in many ways already decided who the Aztecs were. Perhaps we didn't need to eavesdrop on their private conversations. Or that, at least, is what people said in an implicit sense. What they said explicitly is that it would be disrespectful, even imperialistic, to work with the few surviving, crystallized moments from what was once a vibrant, oral tradition. But since people did not stop talking about the Aztecs, and continued to rely on the former sources, the real reason may

perhaps have had more to do with an unwillingness to challenge all that we thought we knew.¹³

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WHAT SHOULD NOW BE CLEAR is that scholars themselves sometimes disagree about the best way to proceed with a difficult set of issues. They prioritize different subjects for research and have different understandings of what is visible in the existing sources. The study of any history is fraught with multiple tensions. “The past is a foreign country,” the historian David Lowenthal titled his now-classic book.¹⁴ When we go back in time, just as when we travel to far distant places, we face multiple cultural barriers, some that we are looking for, and some that are unexpected and therefore hard to recognize. We are all products of the culture or cultures to which we were exposed as young people and have difficulty envisioning other modes of thought. But what exactly does “have difficulty” mean? This is an area where historians often disagree. Some argue that peoples foreign to us in space and time are, and must always be, unknowably remote. We can struggle to understand them on their own terms, but to some extent we will always be trapped within our own worldview and unable to grasp theirs. Other scholars would argue that although people’s cultures vary to an immense degree, we are all nevertheless human in the same ways; what makes us feel loved, for example, may vary, but the desire to be loved does not. Or what makes us feel afraid may differ, but the need to find some degree of security is a constant. In this book, I take it for granted that both schools of thought are absolutely right, and that good history explores the tension between them. The Aztecs I have come to know are both profoundly different from me and mine, and yet at the same time, deeply similar.¹⁵

Not only should historians explore the tension between these two different kinds of truth, but in their work they must decide what kind of reminders they themselves and their readers most need and then offer them frequently. If I were writing about the Founding Fathers of the United States, it might behoove me to nudge us all to remember that they lived and thought within a framework utterly different from our own, far more so than we often care to consider when we invoke them. However, I am not writing about a topic we have rendered familiar but rather about Moctezuma and his people. We are accustomed to being afraid of the Aztecs, even to being repulsed by them, rather than identifying with them. So perhaps we need to remind ourselves from time to time that they loved a good laugh, just as we do.¹⁶

The *writing* of history is in some ways as complex as the study of history. There are numerous registers within which historians work. At the one

extreme, in the written exchanges that unfold between scholars in their journals and monographs, historians talk to each other about their sources—where they found them, how they interpret them, and how past interpretations have been affected by prior assumptions that caused people to miss certain elements. Scholars include not only a discourse (which offers knowledge about a subject) but a great deal of metadiscourse (which gives an analysis of how it is they know whatever they know about that subject). At the opposite extreme, in the case of most textbooks and popular history books, historians tell a story directly and authoritatively, including absolutely no “metadiscourse” whatsoever, as if the present state of knowledge about a field has always existed. It is assumed in such cases that this is not the place for thinking aloud about how we know what we know. There is a value in both kinds of writing. In this book, I have tried—as do many historians—to strike a balance between the two extremes.

Counterintuitively, perhaps, I have found that people have less tolerance for a book without metadiscourse when they are reading about a topic they themselves know little about. We tend to like a seamless, authoritative discourse better when we are reading about topics we think we know quite well already and can determine whether to trust the author. On topics where we do not have enough expertise to judge the discourse on our own, we need signposts about the relative importance of different aspects and the larger reasons why certain elements must be tended to, or else we cannot follow the argument or know whether to trust the speaker. In writing this book, I have assumed that many of my readers know very little about the Aztecs, and that if I tell their story in a purely textbook style, I will be ineffective. I have therefore tried to offer enough material about the sources we have and the ways in which I read them, so as to be believed.

Yet at the same time I have tried not to spend so much time on such matters as to overwhelm the reader. Those who wish to know exactly where the assertions of any particular paragraph come from can—and hopefully will—turn to the notes, where I engage directly with difficult issues. At the end of this essay is an annotated bibliography of the existing annals. These texts are not mysterious “ancient documents” that ordinary readers have no way of accessing. Each one is a real manuscript written in Nahuatl and stored in a particular library or archive, and almost every one of them has been translated into a European language and published at least once. Some of the translations are better than others, and some editions are simply more accessible than others; those are the ones I have listed.

There is one scholarly argument regarding the Aztecs that must be addressed directly because I am taking a side on the matter on nearly every

page. While studies of the Aztecs traditionally were based only on archaeology and European sources, the partial and ad hoc inclusion of partly misunderstood Nahuatl histories did become a part of some works, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus the use of Nahuatl-language annals has a history of its own. At first, scholars were delighted to be exposed to them and quoted large chunks of them as material to be taken quite literally, even if the annals were recounting events that had occurred several hundred years earlier or were telling obviously apocryphal stories. From there, the pendulum of scholarly opinion understandably swung away from taking such indigenous texts literally at all. In this view, they revealed cultural mindsets and propagandistic efforts but did not illuminate events.¹⁷ It began to be thought that we have no way of knowing what actually occurred during the reign of the Aztecs, except what can be gleaned from the study of archaeology.

Today, however, some historians would argue that the Nahuatl annals tell a great deal about the hundred years or so prior to the conquest.¹⁸ Ironically, while other scholars have sometimes discounted the Nahuatl annals as history, they have unselfconsciously continued to quote Spaniards (especially the friar Diego Durán) and Spanish-influenced texts (e.g., the *Florentine Codex*, the *Codex Mendoza*) with abandon. In fact, it is generally these Spanish-derived sources that are culturally dissonant and thus suspect. Yet we have drawn conclusions from them about the Nahuas' pre-conquest political patterns or cultural beliefs for which there is little to no Nahuatl-language evidence.¹⁹ In the field of history, if we see contradictions between a source like Diego Durán and a set of Nahuatl annals, we often conclude that the sources confound us, and that there is no way to know what happened. But if we do not allow the Spanish sources to distract us and take notes only on what the sixteenth-century indigenous annals say, we find that they generally agree on the core points.

Sometimes the details do confound us. When the annals speak of Acamapichtli, the Aztecs' first ruler, for example, they tell of a woman in his life named Ilancueitl (ee-lan-CWEY-it, Elder Woman Skirt). Some said she was his mother, some his wife, some that she mothered his children, and some that she was barren. But we shouldn't get caught up in such minutiae: What all sources agree on was that she was from the area's most powerful town, the one that had to agree to allow the wandering Aztecs to establish their little settlement if it was to happen at all. Now we begin to understand something about the political process at play: an alliance was being established through a marriage. If we put this puzzle piece next to another comparable one, a comprehensible picture begins to emerge. Over the years, it has become abundantly clear to me that we can indeed recount a relatively accurate

version of Aztec history from a few generations before the conquest, and I have done so here.

For very ancient times, I do not think we can tell the history, except from what we learn from archaeology and from a study of the cultural tendencies revealed by the annals. But I am convinced that careful study does bring forth a coherent narrative for approximately one hundred years prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. At each point, I have aligned all the indigenous annals that treat the era and were written within about eighty years after the conquest, and if I find consensus among them, I assume that we are learning something we can consider “real.”²⁰ I do not take sides among them if one insists on the importance of a particular battle or marriage and others do not, but I may mention the matter if the difference of opinion is illuminating. For the pre-conquest period, I have carefully excluded Spanish sources, as they almost always introduce a different vision. For the years after the conquest, I often rely partly on Spanish sources but only where they are revelatory of events that occurred. For indigenous thoughts and perspectives, I continue to turn to Nahuatl-language sources from that era.

The payoff of many years of patient reading has been immense. Studying all the annals that still exist—or attempting to, as I undoubtedly missed some—has taught me much about the wider context of Aztec life, which can in turn sometimes help me make sense of the specifics mentioned in a particular set of annals. If we belittle these documents as sources, we will continue to miss a great deal. They are well worth examining. The following guide is intended to help readers launch their own investigations.

Annotated Bibliography of the Nahuatl Annals

Note: All major Nahuatl-language texts with substantial annals-like content are noted here, as well as a few early Spanish-language ones, which are in effect commentary on annals-like pictographic sources. The language is Nahuatl unless it is specifically noted as Spanish. Entries are listed alphabetically by author if the author is a well-known individual, otherwise by the title’s first major term. (Ignore articles as well as the typical opening words that are part of the names of virtually all such texts—“history” or “historia,” “book” or “libro,” “annals” or “anales,” and “codex” or “códice.”) More information on all of these texts and on the attributions given here (several of which are based on new research) can be found in Camilla Townsend, *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Anónimo mexicano

This unsigned early eighteenth-century Nahuatl-language history describes waves of Nahua migrants arriving in central Mexico. It is written in European-style chapters rather than employing Nahuatl annals format. However, it draws its information from a number of Nahuatl sources, including the annals of don Juan Buenaventura Zapata y Mendoza. Despite its title, research has recently demonstrated that it is likely the work of don Manuel de los Santos Salazar, a man from an indigenous noble family of Tlaxcala who attended university and became a priest. It is housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris as *Méxicain* 254. A published edition is Richley Crapo and Bonnie Glass-Coffin, eds., *Anónimo Mexicano* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005).

Codex Aubin

Named for a French collector, this text should more properly be called something like *Annals of the Mexica*. An indigenous resident of the San Juan Moyotlan quarter of Mexico City wrote a combined pictorial and alphabetic text in the 1560s and 1570s. We know little about the author, but textual elements indicate that he was apparently an artisan plasterer, had a Spanish surname (López), and had been trained by the Franciscans (or possibly by someone trained by them). He does not seem to have moved in the noble circles of the writers of the *Annals of Juan Bautista*. He begins with the ancient history of the Mexica and then moves through to the history of his own day.

The original is held by the British Museum; they have made images of the beautifully colored pages freely available online. A printed facsimile and transcription, presented together with related documents, is Walter Lehmann and Gerdt Kutscher, eds., *Geschichte der Aztekan: Codex Aubin und verwandte Documente* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1981). There are published Spanish translations, but a newer one is needed, as is a full translation into English. The best available at this point is probably Charles Dibble, ed., *Historia de la Nación Mexicana* (Madrid: Porrúa, 1963).

Bancroft Dialogues

In the 1570s, a highly educated resident of Texcoco transcribed a variety of formal speeches on different occasions—when a new chief took office, when

a nobleman was married, when grandchildren came to visit their grandmother. The text was almost certainly prepared for the benefit of a “philologically-minded Franciscan stationed in Texcoco,” to use the words of James Lockhart. Later, the text was put to use by the well-known Jesuit Horacio Carocho; the copy we have was probably his, as it bears a variety of his markers. One might argue with justification that this text does not belong in a listing of annals-like sources; however, I would say that it belongs among them for two reasons: first, one of the speakers, an elderly woman, recounts certain historical events that she remembers as if she were offering dialogue at a *xiuhpohualli* performance, mixed with her own idiosyncratic commentary; and second, a number of the ceremonial speeches mark the type of occasion often included in annals (such as the seating of a chief or his marriage).

The manuscript is housed in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. A peerless edition is Frances Karttunen and James Lockhart, eds., *The Art of Nahuatl Speech: The Bancroft Dialogues* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1987). Lockhart later made adjustments to his earlier translation, which are available in electronic form.

Cantares Mexicanos

In the 1560s, fray Bartolomé de Sahagún began to encourage the Nahuas to transcribe the lyrics of some of their songs. He abhorred the pagan nature of the songs, so presumably he wanted the task to be accomplished so that he and other linguists might study them and use them to undermine the old religion. However, he could only go so far in that direction, as the songs were very difficult for him to translate (and they remain so for us today). Chimalpahin in his “Seventh Relation” explains that in the preconquest world, songs were recycled over the years; an old chestnut might be called up and reused with the names changed if its themes were applicable to a current event. Because the songs therefore occasionally reference *Dios* or the Virgin Mary or the name of a Spaniard, and because their transcription was inspired by a Franciscan, people who do not know the tradition well have often mistakenly assumed that they show deep Christian influence. However, nothing could be farther from the truth. There are no other Nahuatl texts in existence that show such a wide array of old forms in both a grammatical and metaphorical sense. Although the songs certainly are not annals, they are profoundly complementary in that they often were performed on the same occasions and often dealt with comparable themes—such as the rise and fall of particular leaders, pride in the altepetl, and concern for its future.

There are two manuscripts in existence—one known as the *Cantares Mexicanos*, in the Biblioteca Nacional in Mexico, and another dubbed the *Romances de los Señores*, in the Nettie Lee Benson Collection of the University of Texas at Austin. John Bierhorst has published excellent transcriptions of both, together with partially useable translations into English. See John Bierhorst, ed., *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985); and *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain; The Codex Romances de los Señores de la Nueva España* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). Sadly, Bierhorst was convinced that the songs were of the same tradition as the ghost songs of the American Midwest and adjusted his translations accordingly whenever he needed to in order to retain that paradigm. Miguel León-Portilla has also published full transcriptions, together with translations into Spanish. See Miguel León Portilla, ed., *Cantares Mexicanos*, 3 vols. (Mexico City: UNAM, 2011). He follows Angel María Garibay, a mid-twentieth-century scholar, in assuming that the cantares should be divided into short lines, like western poetry, and that they were authored by individuals. Peter Sorenson is presently preparing a more up-to-date translation of key songs and a full study of the genre.

Cristóbal de Castillo

We know very little about this author of sixteenth-century Nahuatl histories. He used a chapter format, not a timeline, and mused aloud about the religious errors of his forebears, so he was certainly educated by friars. Yet much of his language reflects ancient Nahua traditions; political difference, for instance, is expressed through dialogue. His words at one point imply that his people came from Texcoco, yet most of his text concerns the Mexica. In short, though Castillo signs his name and says that he is finishing his work as an old man in July 1599, he reveals almost nothing about his background. All we have are copied-out fragments of his work housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, as *Méxicain* 263 and others. An excellent study, transcription, and Spanish translation is Federico Navarrete Linares, ed., *Historia de la venida de los mexicanos y otros pueblos* (Mexico City: INAH, 1991).

Don Domingo de San Antonio Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuānītzin

The indigenous historian who styled himself “Chimalpahin” (after an ancestor) was known to others in his own day as don Domingo de San Antón. He

was from a noble family of Amaquemecan, a sub-*altepetl* of Chalco, but as a young person in the 1590s he came to live in Mexico City and soon took a position as the manager of the church of San Antonio Abad. He researched and wrote history in his spare time. His extensive works fall under four divisions:

1. The *Diario* or the *Annals of His Time*: a year-by-year record of events in Mexico City from the 1570s through 1615.
2. The *Eight Relations*, a set of detailed texts that should really be called Various Annals of Chalco and the Central Valley.
3. *Codex Chimalpahin*, a bound volume containing various works, some authored by him and some copied by him, which at one point was in the keeping of Ixtlilxochitl's family.
4. A full-length, annotated Nahuatl translation of a biography of Hernando Cortés written by his secretary.

Tragically, in the century after his death Chimalpahin's papers were scattered. Most of the *Diario* (or more properly, *Annals of His Time*) is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Paris, as *Méxicain* 220, but the opening pages are at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), in Mexico City, as *Colección Antigua* 256B. The *Eight Relations* are also at the BNF as *Méxicain* 74. The writings contained in the *Codex Chimalpahin* surfaced in the 1980s at the British and Foreign Bible Society Library at Cambridge University; in 2014, Cambridge sold the volume to the INAH, where they are justly regarded as a national treasure. Rafael Tená has produced excellent Spanish translations of most of the work: see his edited editions of *Ocho relaciones y el memorial de Colhuacan*, vols. 1 and 2 (Mexico City: Conaculta, 1998); *El Diario de Chimalpahin* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2001); and *Tres crónicas mexicanas: Textos recopilados por Domingo Chimalpahin* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2012). Susan Schoeder has spearheaded translations of two of the major works into English; see James Lockhart, Susan Schoeder, and Doris Namala, eds., *Annals of His Time: Don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuānitzin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006) and Arthur J. O. Anderson and Susan Schoeder, eds., *Codex Chimalpahin*, vols. 1 and 2 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997). Currently there is no English translation of the *Eight Relations*. The surviving copy of Chimalpahin's translation of the biography of Cortés is located in the Newberry Library of Chicago; an excellent edition is Susan Schoeder, Anne J. Cruz, Cristián Roa-de-la-Carrera, and David Tavárez, eds., *Chimalpahin's Conquest: A Nahuatl Historian's Rewriting of Francisco*

López de Gómara's *La conquista de México* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

Codex Chimalpopoca

See *Annals of Cuauhtitlan*

Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca

See J. F. Ramírez

Annals of Cuauhtinchan

See *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca*

Annals of Cuauhtitlan

Textual references within the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* indicate that the work was composed in the 1560s and 1570s by someone living in Cuauhtitlan (just north of Mexico City) who was intimately familiar with the projects of fray Bernardino de Sahagún. There was indeed such a person—Pedro de San Buenaventura, a former student of Sahagún who moved to Cuauhtitlan and continued to correspond with him. He is probably the author. This extraordinarily detailed narrative weaves together the histories of peoples throughout the central valley, focusing particularly on Cuauhtitlan and Tenochtitlan.

A surviving copy of the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* was formerly located in the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City. The document was bound to another Nahuatl-language text, an origin story now known as the “Legend of the Suns,” as well as a statement in Spanish labeled “Breve Relación de los dioses y ritos de la gentilidad” (“Brief relation of the gods and rites of the gentiles”). The handwriting and certain stylistic elements indicated that the documents were copies dating from the seventeenth century. On the inside of the binding appeared a genealogy of the Texcocan writer don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, indicating that the volume was likely in his family’s possession at some point. A note dated 1849 labeled the whole set of eighty-four pages the “Códice Chimalpopoca” (*Codex Chimalpopoca*) and that name has stuck in some circles. In the early 1940s, the Mexican scholar Primo Feliciano Velázquez took photographs of each page and then published

a facsimile edition: *Códice Chimalpopoca: Anales de Cuauhtitlan y Leyenda de los soles* (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1945). By 1949 the originals had been lost, so all further work with the text has depended on the facsimile. There is a recent edition in English (John Bierhorst, ed., *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca* [Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992]) and another in Spanish (Rafael Tena, ed., *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* [Mexico City: Cien de México, 2011]).

Florentine Codex

This is by far the most famous sixteenth-century Nahuatl-language source in existence. The work consists of an encyclopedic twelve-book effort to create an enduring record of Aztec culture; it was intended that the information be used to help proselytize indigenous people more effectively. The Franciscan provincial fray Francisco de Toral (see *Annals of Tecamachalco*) ordered fray Bernardino de Sahagún to begin the work in the 1550s. He started the project in Tepepolco, working with a number of indigenous aides, including a young man from Cuauhtitlan, Pedro de San Buenaventura (see *Annals of Cuauhtitlan*). Sahagún and members of his entourage continued to work on the codex for the next three decades—collecting information; organizing, editing, and copying; placing the material in columns to include translations or glosses; and adding illustrations. After the Council of Trent (1545–63), the work came to be seen as dangerous and was stopped; it was collected by the Crown and never published in its own day. There are annals-like elements in several of the books; and the second half of Book 12, about the experience of the conquest by the Spaniards, is a month-by-month account effectively in *xiuhpohualli* format.

In recent times, scholars have had heated arguments over the worth of the *Florentine Codex* as a source of information about Nahua culture. On the one hand, it is as a whole evidently the product of a European imagination and demonstrates the use of questionnaires and heavy editing by Sahagún. On the other hand, it is a richly detailed set of comments provided by dozens of Nahua people who still remembered the “old days” of forty years earlier. Sometimes the text includes statements that were obviously designed to satisfy Spanish expectations. (Did the bloodthirsty devil-gods demand excessive numbers of human sacrifice victims? Yes, indeed they did. Did your doctors engage in dreadful, superstitious practices? Yes, indeed they did.) But at other moments the text includes elements that no European could possibly have planned to elicit. Used judiciously and in conjunction with entirely Nahua-authored

sources, the *Florentine Codex* is invaluable. It is only because so many scholars have relied almost entirely upon it as regards some subjects that it has become problematic.

The original text is in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (hence the work's modern-day name). There have been facsimiles published, but these became obsolete in 2012 when the text was placed in the World Digital Library. Because Sahagún included Spanish glosses, there has not been a serious effort to translate the Nahuatl text into Spanish; this is unfortunate, as the glosses only partially represent what the Nahuatl actually says and have frequently misled scholars. James Lockhart underscored this point by doing separate English translations of the Nahuatl and the Spanish of Book 12 in his *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). A full translation of the Nahuatl into English is Bernardino de Sahagún, ed., *General History of the Things of New Spain: The Florentine Codex*, vols. 1–12, edited by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles Dibble (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950–82). Anderson and Dibble inject a “high” tone, using “thee” and “thou” in their translation, terms that do not exist in Nahuatl, but their work is nevertheless mostly excellent. Many of the earlier notes collected by Sahagún and his aides still exist in the Libraries of the Real Academia and Real Palacio, both in Madrid. A partial facsimile of this early material—which is itself rare—is Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, ed., *Historia de las Cosas de Nueva España: Códices matritenses*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Hauser y Menet, 1906–7). A small part of the earlier work, including all the pictorial images but not most of the written text, has been published in Thelma Sullivan et al., eds. *The Primeros Memoriales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

Libro de los Guardianes

The full title of this work is *Libro de los guardianes y gobernadores de Cuauhtinchan*. In the late nineteenth century this text was discovered in Cuauhtinchan's municipal archives in an old rawhide binding, and after a period of private ownership, it was donated to the Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, in Mexico City, where it remains. This is an original set of annals begun in the second half of the sixteenth century by people known to the writers of the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca*, and then maintained by a series of people (with different hand-writings) mostly in Nahuatl but sometimes in Spanish, continuing until the 1630s. A transcription and Spanish translation can be found in Constantino

Medina Lima, ed., *Libro de los guardianes y gobernadores de Cuauhtinchan (1519–1640)* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1995).

Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl

Born ca. 1580 to a Spanish father and a noble Texcocan mother, the young don Fernando grew up bilingual in Spanish and Nahuatl. He was well educated and as an adult made it his mission to write extensive histories in Spanish (with an eye to a Spanish audience) about the history of Texcoco. Although some scholars have taken him at his word and simply call him “indigenous,” and others imply that he was in effect a Spaniard and thus a fraud, the reality was complex: he was truly proud of his indigenous heritage, lived partly within its traditions, and collected all the indigenous pictorial and Nahuatl-language sources he could. (For a detailed study of what is known about his life, see Camilla Townsend, “The Evolution of Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s Scholarly Life,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 23, no. 1 [2014]: 1–17.) Scholars have recently taken to calling him “Alva” on the understanding that it was his patronymic, but in fact, it, too, was a taken name, added later in life in honor of a godparent; his father’s surname was actually Paraleda. The man clearly wished to be called Ixtlilxochitl, and we should respect that, just as we do Chimalpahin’s choice of name.

Ixtlilxochitl’s writings, like the *Florentine Codex*, are very useful if approached with caution. When he says that an old king with dozens of wives died with only one possible heir, we know that he is adjusting matters to distract Spanish readers from his ancestors’ practice of polygyny. On the other hand, when he mentions, for instance, the ferocity of a certain war in particularly evocative language, we have no reason to doubt that he is looking at an old source or has heard it mentioned in such terms. Ixtlilxochitl also left posterity the most impressive pictorial Nahua history in existence, the *Codex Xolotl*. Normally it has been thought that his writings were profoundly influenced by it. Yet the text is so unusual—so different from the traditional timelines generally employed by the Nahuas—and Ixtlilxochitl was so clearly a promoter of his people, that one is left wondering if he created it himself: choosing to use old-style glyphs in brilliantly creative ways to narrate events he knew (or thought he knew) from prior studies. On the Project Xolotl, see Jerome Offner, “Ixtlilxochitl’s Ethnographic Encounter: Understanding the Codex Xolotl and Its Dependent Alphabetic Texts,” in *Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl and His Legacy*, edited by Galen Brokaw and Jongsoo Lee (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016).

For centuries, the whereabouts of Ixtlilxochitl's original manuscripts were unknown; scholars worked only with copies that had been found in various libraries. Then in the 1980s the originals surfaced in England, along with some collected writings of Chimalpahin (see *Chimalpahin*). They have now been repatriated to Mexico, to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Remarkably, an earlier edition based on the known copies has proven to be quite reliable; it includes only a few errors and continues to be in widespread use by scholars: Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras Históricas*, 2 vols., edited by Edmundo O'Gorman (Mexico City: UNAM, 1975–77). An English translation of one of Ixtlilxochitl's more remarkable narrations is Amber Brian, Bradley Benton, and Pablo García Loaza, eds., *The Native Conquistador: Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Account of the Conquest of New Spain* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015).

Annals of Juan Bautista

This extraordinary history provides an unusually direct window into Mexica thinking. In the 1560s, the Tenochca residents of Mexico City were struggling to avoid having to accept a new head tax to be levied on all of them, in effect reducing them to a fully conquered people. In traditional annals performance format, the authors placed side by side the views and memories of different segments of San Juan Moyotlan (the quarter of Mexico City where the royal family had once predominated). The language is rich and evocative, not terse at all. The writers were scribes and artisans who worked for the friars—they had been children at the right age for training in the 1520s and 1530s—but they clearly had no intention of showing this document to their ecclesiastical supervisors. It was evidently intended for their own posterity, so they would be forgiven for having failed to fend off the change in their legal status. “Juan Bautista” is a misnomer; that was the name of the owner of a tax collector's notebook, which was repurposed to copy out this set of annals.

The original is located in the archive of the Biblioteca Lorenzo Boturini of the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City. A facsimile edition with Spanish translation is Luis Reyes García, ed. *¿Cómo te confundes? ¿Acaso no somos conquistados? Anales de Juan Bautista* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2001). A complete English translation and full study of this remarkable work is in preparation by Celso Mendoza.

Legend of the Suns

This is not primarily a set of annals but rather an origin story describing the eras of the five suns; yet it ends in an annals-like segment on the Mexica kings. It is an important and oft-cited text. However, it may have been written later than is often assumed; its style is frequently truncated, as though the writer had somewhat lost touch with earlier oral performances. Richer versions of several segments of the narrative can be found in the *Florentine Codex*. On its whereabouts, see the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan*.

Codex Mendoza

In the 1540s or 1550s, someone within the state apparatus of the Audiencia of New Spain requested that the city's indigenous people create a sort of visual encyclopedia of their past lives that would be annotated in Spanish and then sent to Spain with the annual spring convoy for the Crown's perusal. The Spanish-language text called the *Codex Mendoza* came into being as a result of that endeavor. It has traditionally been assumed that the viceroy (who was Antonio de Mendoza until 1549) made the initial request, but there is no documentary evidence for that. The second of three sections portrays in exquisite images the tribute that the Mexica king received from each conquered region, using preconquest-style glyphs; the third section provides a sort of anthropological guide to different categories of people in the old regime, calling to mind European genres rather than indigenous ones. The first section, however, is in effect a set of annals. A repeating timeline bearing glyphic representations of the years runs along the left margin. Each Mexica king is portrayed next to the year in which he attained power, and there follows a glyphic representation of each and every altepetl conquered in his reign. This segment provides a marvelous tutorial on the pictorial system once in use. Occasionally some additional drama is introduced beyond the listing of defeated towns: Moquihuixtli falls from the pyramid at Tlatelolco, or an army of canoes approaches from the four altepetls of Chalco. The original is housed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, which has made this beautiful text accessible online. A full study of the document is in preparation by Daniela Bleichmar.

Annals of Puebla

In the 1670s and 1680s, an indigenous craftsman named don Miguel de los Santos wrote the zestiest set of Nahuatl annals still in existence. He was a

Tlaxcalan-descended resident of the city of Puebla de los Angeles; as such, he was intimately familiar with both high Nahua culture as it survived among Tlaxcalans (See *Annals of Tlaxcala*) and with the Spanish baroque culture that flourished in his city (in the form of music, art, preaching, and bookmaking). His text reflects both worlds: the material from the 1680s is a uniquely vivid record.

After don Miguel died, apparently in the epidemic that swept Mexico in 1692, numerous relatives or other connections copied his work. Four of their versions survive as nineteenth-century copies (see Ramírez) and two as originals. One is under the protection of the archive of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia as GO 184 (it has been moved to the national vault), and one is conserved in the archive of the Venerable Cabildo of the Cathedral of Puebla, vol. 6 of Colección de Papeles Varios. The former has been transcribed and translated into English in Camilla Townsend, ed., *Here in This Year: Seventeenth-Century Nahuatl Annals of the Tlaxcala-Puebla Valley* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); the latter is reproduced as a facsimile in Lidia Gómez García, Celia Salazar Exaire, and María Elena Stefanón López, eds., *Anales del Barrio de San Juan del Río* (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2000). The first has longer and richer text, the latter more impressive visual elements.

José Fernando Ramírez

This nineteenth-century director of the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia collected annals that had been copied out by the indigenous scholar Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca. He placed them in a massive volume he titled *Anales Antiguos de México y Sus Contornos*. The material is still found in the library of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Because the annals are nineteenth-century copies (and sometimes copies of copies), part of the material is riddled with errors or inexplicable elements. However, most of the sets of annals appear to be relatively complete and seem to be products of the eras that they reference. Several of the documents have been printed in Mexican publications, but these versions are even further removed from the originals.

Annals of Tecamachalco

This set of annals was written by don Mateo Sánchez, a nobleman from Tecamachalco, near Cholula (east of the central basin), over the course of his

lifetime and then continued by younger relatives. Don Mateo was born a few years after the conquest and educated by the Franciscans; he had a close connection with fray Francisco Toral. Because the annals cover many years from the perspective of one man, the document offers unique insight into such things as a surviving individual's experience of loss over the course of the sixteenth-century epidemics.

The original text is held by the Nettie Lee Benson Collection of the University of Texas at Austin. A facsimile and Spanish translation is available in Eustaquio Celestino Solís and Luis Reyes García, eds., *Anales de Tecamachalco, 1398–1590* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1992). An English translation of key passages can be found in Townsend, *Annals of Native America*, 99–105.

Codex Telleriano-Remensis

In the years after the conquest, Mexica writers and artists produced a number of glyphic timelines with brief accompanying written commentary in Nahuatl or Spanish, sometimes on their own initiative and sometimes at the behest of Spaniards. These works (e.g., *Codex Azcatitlan*, *Codex Mexicanus*, *Codex en Cruz*) have been well studied by art historians. The *Telleriano-Remensis*, as the most extensive, is the only example included in this bibliography. It was completed about 1560, just before the political cataclysm that rocked the Mexica world. (See *Annals of Juan Bautista*.) Following two calendrical sections, this work contains a substantial annals segment (twenty-three folios, front and back). The images are fascinating. However, the commentary is in Spanish, demonstrating that the work was designed for a Spanish patron, and it offers only truncated explanations, nothing like the complex history found in Nahuatl alphabetic annals. Still, because the written text is simple and in Spanish, and the illustrations quite rich, the *Telleriano-Remensis* provides a good entrée for beginners. It is suggestive of the kind of painted timelines narrators once used as mnemonic devices in giving historical performances. The original is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, as *Méxicain* 385. A full facsimile with commentary is Eloise Quiñones Keber, ed., *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: Ritual, Divination, and History in a Pictorial Aztec Manuscript* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

Texcoca Accounts of Conquest

Among the material collected by Chimalpahin there are some invaluable mid-sixteenth-century statements authored by people from Texcoco. They

include detailed statements of events as they unfolded during the period of the Spanish conquest, replete with the complexities faced by the divided altepetl as well as a letter by a disinherited nobleman, don Juan de San Antonio. A classic set of annals was written by the Texcocan nobleman don Gabriel de Ayala, but he was a resident of Mexico City and his work actually focuses on the Tenochca. See *Codex Chimalpahin* under “Chimalpahin.”

Don Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc

Tezozomoc was a scion of the Mexica royal family. He was the son of don Diego Huanitzin, chosen as the first postconquest indigenous governor of Mexico City; through his mother he was a grandson of Moctezuma. He wrote (or possibly dictated) detailed genealogies of the Mexica royal family, which he then gave into the keeping of Chimalpahin for use in his work. After the posthumous dispersal of Chimalpahin’s papers, the segment that Tezozomoc narrates in the first person was copied out as the *Crónica Mexicayotl* (the title is an odd mixture of Spanish and Nahuatl); in 1949 Adrián León published a well-known edition of the work that solidified the sense of Tezozomoc’s authorship. Later, in the 1980s, the original version of the same text, embedded seamlessly in a longer work drawn together by Chimalpahin, was found in England. Today there is debate among scholars about which man should have authorship ascribed to him. It is clear that Tezozomoc wrote or narrated a statement, but we cannot know how much of the overall work is his; moreover, it is pointless to try to pull out of Chimalpahin’s work every embedded statement initially authored by someone else, since it was his *modus operandi* to weave together various accounts, in keeping with ancient Nahua tradition. See Susan Schroeder, “The Truth About the *Crónica Mexicayotl*,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 20 (2011): 233–47. For the text’s venues of publication, see *Codex Chimalpahin* under “Chimalpahin.”

Annals of Tlatelolco

This was probably the first set of Nahuatl annals recorded in the Roman alphabet. It has sometimes been dated to 1528, as that year appears on a surviving copy (in another, later handwriting). However, that date cannot possibly be accurate, as the friars had not yet fully learned the Nahuatl language nor had they begun to train a cadre of students systematically; that date must have

been the later copyist's guess. A great deal of circumstantial evidence puts the creation of the text in the 1540s. It was clearly authored by students at the Franciscan school in Tlatelolco, or perhaps by other Tlatelolcans who were taught to write by them, but more than that has been impossible to deduce. It contains highly traditional language and material, and also reveals close knowledge of Spanish concepts and objects (the Spanish term "espada" is used to refer to a sword, for instance).

There are two extant copies, both in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, cataloged as *Méxicain 22* and *Méxicain 22bis*. *Méxicain 22* is written out on indigenous paper and is the only set of annals for which that is true. *Méxicain 22bis* is clearly a copy, and the handwriting is seventeenth-century in style. It includes additions not found in the older work. A facsimile edition of both versions is Ernst Mengin, ed., *Unos annales [sic] de la nación Mexicana* (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1945). A recent Spanish edition is Rafael Tena, ed., *Anales de Tlatelolco* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2004). James Lockhart transcribed and translated into English the section about the Spanish conquest in Lockhart, ed., *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). In his introduction to that work, Lockhart included a thorough discussion of the dating of the older manuscript.

Annals of Tlaxcala

The region around Tlaxcala, east of the central valley, boasted a particularly vibrant community of indigenous scholars who maintained annals throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Don Juan Buenaventura Zapata y Mendoza (see Zapata) was the only writer who signed his work, but many other men (and conceivably some women) exchanged annals with each other, copying and adding as they saw fit. There are twenty-three known texts from the greater area, eight of them from Tlaxcala itself. All eight of these texts share a large proportion of their entries up to the year 1538, so there was probably one author who launched the tradition not too long after conquest. Besides Zapata's text, there are six works that survive as nineteenth-century copies (see Ramírez) and one other that exists in its original form in the archive of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Colección Antigua 872. That one has been transcribed and translated into English in Camilla Townsend, ed., *Here in This Year: Seventeenth-Century Nahuatl Annals of the Tlaxcala-Puebla Valley* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca

This rich and aesthetically beautiful text contains a number of genres within it, including an origin story and a record of town boundaries, but it is primarily a set of annals from Cuauhtinchan (an altepetl east of the central basin) spanning more than four hundred years. The project was orchestrated in the 1550s by a Cuauhtinchan nobleman, don Alonso de Castañeda (his indigenous name was Chimalpopoca), who had a son or other young relative who attended the Franciscans' school at Tlatelolco. A 1540s experience in a Spanish courtroom seems to have convinced him of his people's need to record their past using a phonetic transcription system. He also included in this text some extraordinary artwork, largely but not entirely in indigenous style.

The original is housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, as Méxicains 46–50, 51–53, and 54–58. A facsimile and Spanish translation can be found in Paul Kirchoff, Lina Odena Güemes, and Luis Reyes García, eds., *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca* (Mexico City: INAH, 1976). An excellent study of the work from an art historian's perspective is Dana Leibsohn, *Script and Glyph: Pre-Hispanic History, Colonial Bookmaking and the Historia Tolteca Chichimeca* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2009).

Annals of Tula

This text is a timeline with traditional year-glyphs running from 1361 to 1521. More glyphs as well as western-style illustrations occasionally appear above and below the line, as does text in Nahuatl explaining what happened in that year. In effect, this set of annals correctly documents the ties between Tula's ruling family and Itzcoatl (of Tenochtitlan) and Nezahualcoyotl (of Texcoco), as they made a successful bid for power in the early fifteenth century. Both the images and the written content indicate the influence of Franciscan training on the creator.

The document is in the archive of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. A transcription and Spanish translation, together with select images, were published by Robert Barlow, "Anales de Tula, Hidalgo, 1361–1521," *Tlalocan* 3, no. 1 (1949): 2–13.

Codex Xolotl

See Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl

Don Juan Buenaventura Zapata y Mendoza

Born to a Tlaxcalan noble family in the early seventeenth century, Zapata began to write a detailed set of annals in the 1650s. He started his text in the ancient period, using various Nahuatl-language sources at his disposal through family connections, and then maintained the record in some depth during the period of his own life and work on the indigenous *cabildo* of his *altepētl*. Probably because relatively few Spaniards settled in Tlaxcala, aspects of traditional Nahuatl high culture, including knowledge of the *xiuhpohualli*, seem to have lasted longer in this region than was generally the case. After Zapata died, his work passed to a young family friend, don Manuel do los Santos Salazar, an indigenous priest. He added certain elements, including a frontispiece with the title “Chronología de la Muy Insigne Noble y Leal Ciudad de Tlaxcala.”

Zapata’s two-hundred-page book is held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, as *Méxicain 212*. A published transcription and Spanish translation is *Historia cronológica de la noble ciudad de Tlaxcala*, edited by Luis Reyes García and Andrea Martínez Baracs (Tlaxcala: Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, 1995). A sample two-year period (1675–76) has been translated into English in Townsend, *Annals of Native America*, 175–180.

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