

# CONQUEST AND AFTERMATH: Center and Periphery in Colonial Mexico

*Sarah Cline*

*University of California, Santa Barbara*

- RELATOS AZTECAS DE LA CONQUISTA*. Edited by Georges Baudot and Tzvetan Todorov. (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1990. Pp. 483.)
- THE SLIPPERY EARTH: NAHUA-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO*. By Louise Burkhart. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989. Pp. 242. \$40.00.)
- CHIMALPAHIN AND THE KINGDOMS OF CHALCO*. By Susan Schroeder. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991. Pp. 264. \$40.00.)
- EL GRAN NAYAR: COLECCION DE DOCUMENTOS PARA LA HISTORIA DE NAYARIT III*. By Jean Meyer. (Jalisco: Universidad de Guadalajara and Centre d'Etudes Mexicaines et Centraméricaines, 1989. Pp. 291.)
- EL GRAN MICHOACAN: CUATRO INFORMES DEL OBISPADO DE MICHOACAN, 1759-1769*. By Oscar Mazín Gómez. (Zamora: Colegio de Michoacán, 1986. Pp. 457.)
- THE CONQUEST OF THE SIERRA: SPANIARDS AND INDIANS IN COLONIAL OAXACA*. By John Chance. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. Pp. 252. \$34.50.)
- MAYA RESISTANCE TO SPANISH RULE: TIME AND HISTORY ON A COLONIAL FRONTIER*. By Grant Jones. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989. Pp. 365. \$39.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- THE LEVERAGE OF LABOR: MANAGING THE CORTES HACIENDAS IN TEHUANTEPEC, 1588-1688*. By Lolita Gutiérrez Brockington. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989. Pp. 245. \$42.00.)
- PUEBLA DE LOS ANGELES: INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY IN A MEXICAN CITY, 1700-1850*. By Guy P. C. Thomson. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989. Pp. 396. \$43.00.)

Just as the Columbus quincentennial is focusing less on discovery than on encounter, studies of the conquest and colonial society are now viewing the indigenous peoples as subjects of history rather than as objects. Although the books under review are diverse in terms of the regions, time periods, and genres studied, virtually all of them provide insight into the ways in which Indians shaped not only the military and spiritual conquests but also the forms of colonial economic and social

structure. Central Mexico has consistently received the most attention, but increasingly the periphery commands historians' attention as well. While the documentation in Spanish and native languages is richest for the center, studies of the periphery based on much sparser material nevertheless manage to tell complex and sophisticated stories.

Books on the conquest as a military event have not been in fashion recently, but new questions are being asked of previously available accounts. *Relatos aztecas de la conquista*, edited by Georges Baudot and Tzvetan Todorov, contains a number of native accounts of the conquest that have been published previously and are readily available. Baudot, however, has provided new translations of the Nahuatl texts (although not the originals). Given the fact that Arthur Anderson and Charles Dibble together have twice translated Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's conquest history (Book XII of the *Florentine Codex*)<sup>1</sup> and other translations of this Nahuatl text are in the works, this account evidently continues to capture a good deal of interest, and its inclusion in this collection is no less than mandatory. Also worthy of note are new translations of the *Anales históricos de Tlatelolco* and *Códice Aubin*. Baudot's preface to the Nahuatl and Spanish texts indicates the provenance of the writers and any relevant biographical material that is known.

Todorov's interpretive essay deals with the "modalities" of the narrative—narrators, genres, and styles—and discusses the histories themselves. As is well known, no unified native account of the conquest exists because different polities participated in different ways, as allies or enemies of the Spaniards. Obvious examples of differing points of view are Diego Muñoz Camargo's *Historia de Tlaxcala* and the conquest chronicle of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco compiled under the direction of Sahagún in the *Florentine Codex*. Todorov notes that there is no exclusively Tenochca chronicle.

Recent studies of the conquest have gone beyond analyzing the differences in narrative of events to focus more on the manipulation of conquest accounts for contemporary colonial purposes for Indians as well as Spaniards. Native allies of the Spaniards used conquest history to try to get a better deal with their colonial rulers, while the defeated Indians tried to explain away their defeat. As Susan Gillespie has shown with royal histories, natives were willing and able to manipulate historical "facts" to suit contemporary purposes.<sup>2</sup> And Spaniards too manipulated native conquest history. Although Sahagún's version found in the *Florentine Codex* (1579) is well known, his 1585 revision of the conquest chroni-

1. Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950–1982).

2. Susan Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexican History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989).

cle, a paean of praise to Cortés, has been largely ignored.<sup>3</sup> The Franciscan revised this work to counter trends in Spanish policy restricting the privileges of the first generation of conquerors and the regular orders.

Although these native texts on the conquest are important, they were not produced by most Nahua polities but were generated only by the major participants in the conquest. For most native towns, the conquest was not the pivotal event depicted in the works of Sahagún, Diego Durán, or Muñoz Camargo. The great Nahua annalist of Amecameca, Domingo de San Antón Muñoz Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuántzin, gives only cursory notice to the conquest. In most of the *relaciones geográficas* of the late sixteenth century, the section on native polities' participation is usually a brief summary. Thus it is evident that conquest did not loom large universally.

Native conquest narratives are therefore more a means for gaining insight into the native worldview than for constructing a historically accurate chronicle of events. Todorov's essay examines some interesting questions about these native texts. The Nahuas had both a strong tradition of oral history before the conquest and a tradition of written record-keeping. In the sixteenth century when the conquest narratives were composed and recorded, the oral tradition was still strong and the written texts show evidence of its influence. The repetition of information in slight variation obviously comes from the oral tradition. Todorov points out other evidence of the oral origins of the conquest accounts, such as the lack of references forward and backward in the text. He also notes the relative lack of autonomy of the Nahuatl texts. Written texts generally stand on their own because the author is not present to aid the reader with unclear passages. With oral texts, however, the speaker can intervene. Overall, this collection of conquest texts reminds scholars that "events" should not be ignored in focusing on the slow and long-term historical processes. The conquest of Mexico is certainly an event worthy of note. But conquest accounts provide new insights into historical processes, and much can be gained from examining well-known texts.

A welcome volume is Louise Burkhart's *The Slippery Earth*, her account of the difficulties Spaniards had in transmitting Christian doctrine to Indians (in this case, the Nahuas). The classic study of the "spiritual conquest" was done by Robert Ricard in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Recent work by Jorge Klor de Alva<sup>5</sup> and now Burkhart has modi-

3. Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Conquest of New Spain, 1585 Revision* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989).

4. Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966).

5. See the following works by J. Jorge Klor de Alva: "Spiritual Conflict and Accommodation in New Spain: Toward a Typology of Aztec Responses to Christianity," in *The Inca and Aztec States*, edited by George A. Collier, Renato I. Rosaldo, and John D. Wirth (New York:

fied the earlier view, which presented the evangelical effort as the friars themselves would have framed it. The revisionist works emphasize the extent to which Nahuas and Spanish religious misunderstood each other in the encounter but also how the natives themselves shaped the exchanges. Burkhart's knowledge of Catholic doctrine and Nahua religious belief and her ability to read the original Nahuatl texts give her analysis great authority. She acts as much like a literary critic decoding the narrative as like a cultural anthropologist.

The texts produced by the Spanish (mainly Franciscan) religious are key to Burkhart's exegesis. Although the friars' task was enormous, they went about the conversion of the natives with faith, zeal, and also practicality. To preach Christian doctrine in the native languages (Nahuatl in this case), the friars had to find points of intersection in belief that could be expressed in the native language. Translation of religious concepts meant traversing a cultural gulf. And much was lost in translation, Burkhart persuasively argues. The friars were confronted with natives who had a completely different worldview, and when such Christian principles as sin and evil were expressed in Nahuatl, something very different from European doctrine emerged. As Burkhart notes, the concept of sin was replaced by that of damage (*tlatlacolli*), "changing the latter concept from the cause of universal human guilt into a basic principle of the cosmic process" (p. 44).

Regarding concepts of time and space, Burkhart finds that Nahua and Christian concepts vary less than those of abstinence and excess. In terms of time and space, Christian views of center and periphery tended to reinforce Nahua concepts. Concerning abstinence and excess, however, Nahua views and practices diverged considerably from Christian standards. According to Burkhart, the Nahua notion of moderation in all things applied to sexual continence and sobriety as well. For the Nahuas, absolute abstinence from behaviors to which the friars objected was as dangerous as continuous indulgence. The subtlety and sophistication of Burkhart's analysis represents a major step forward in understanding the dynamics of the spiritual conquest. Not only were the natives "converted," but the friars were "missionized."

A significant native writer whose work transcends conquest history is Chimalpahin, an annalist who wrote in his native language at the end of the sixteenth century. Much of his work has not been easily available. Some of it was only recently discovered in the collections of the

Academic Press, 1982), 345–66; "Language, Politics, and Translation: Colonial Discourse and Classic Nahuatl in New Spain," in *The Art of Translation: Voices from the Field*, edited by Rosanna Warren (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 143–62; "Contar vidas: la autobiografía confesional y la reconstrucción del ser nahua," *Arbor*, nos. 515–16 (1988):49–78; and his work in progress entitled "The Confession of the Other: Aztec Sins and the Birth of Anthropology."

British and Foreign Bible Society (reinforcing the hopes of colonial historians that even richer collections will turn up in obscure places). Chimalpahin wrote to glorify the history of his home polity of Amaquemeca (modern Amecameca). Susan Schroeder's analysis in *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco* focuses on his pre-Hispanic history of the Chalco region, particularly sociopolitical units, migrations of the Chalca people, and rulership. Like Burkhart's study, Schroeder's contains lengthy passages in Nahuatl with English glosses. In both cases, the aim is to provide the original text in order to give the expert reader access to material not readily available. Although Burkhart is able to wrest meaning from difficult passages in good part because she is dealing with Nahuatl coming in some fashion from the Spanish world, Chimalpahin was writing in Nahuatl for a native audience and his terminology is particularly resistant to translation. As a result, Schroeder's text abounds with terms in the original language that have no English or Spanish equivalents. This outcome underlines again the difficulty of translating texts when one is translating cultural concepts. As Charles Gibson demonstrated years ago, the Spaniards succeeded in grasping some essentials of the Nahua system of rulership and political structure in order to rule the Indians.<sup>6</sup> Schroeder's discussion, however, shows how many fundamental categories never reached the Spaniards' consciousness and reemphasizes the importance of understanding native categories within the indigenous context.

Regarding the Nahuas, it should be noted that several scholars are working on native texts other than the formal accounts just discussed. A large amount of local-level Nahuatl documentation exists in the archives, and it was often generated for indigenous purposes. Until recently, this material was a largely untapped source for Nahua history. While Gibson's *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* has served as the standard work on colonial Nahuas, Gibson used mostly Spanish-language sources arising from the interactions between the colonial government and the Indians. As complex and important as his work is, the natives are presented in it as objects as much as subjects. This problem is now being addressed by using native-language documentation. Recent publications of major collections of such local-level Nahuatl documentation include a volume of early-sixteenth-century census data from the Cuernavaca region, *Aztekischer Zensus*, a compendium of municipal records, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, and the largest extant collection of sixteenth-century wills, *The Testaments of Culhuacan*.<sup>7</sup>

6. Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1964).

7. James Lockhart, Frances Berdan, and Arthur J. O. Anderson, *The Tlaxcalan Actas: A Compendium of Records of the Cabildo of Tlaxcala, 1545-1627* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986); S. L. Cline and Miguel León-Portilla, *The Testaments of Culhuacan*, Nahua Studies Series no. 1 (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1984); and *Aztekischer Zensus: Zur indianischen Wirtschaft und der Gesellschaft im Marquesado um 1540, Aus dem "Libro de Tributos" (Col. Ant. Ms. 551) im Archivo Histórico, Mexico*, 2 vols., edited by Eike

The periphery has been the subject of fewer publications, whether collections of documents or major monographs. Oscar Mazín Gómez's *El gran Michoacán: cuatro informes del obispado de Michoacán* and Jean Meyer's somewhat more wide-ranging *El Gran Nayar: colección de documentos para la historia de Nayarit III* provide insight into conquest and evangelization of diverse native groups. Evangelical efforts of this later period presented different challenges from the early effort at the center, and its history can be written only from Spanish sources. The mission reports nonetheless bring alive many aspects of the native world. A particularly arresting example from Meyer's Nayarit collection is an account of three human cadavers that were held in great reverence by the natives. In attempting to combat idolatry, the Spanish religious collected a great range of information on native religious practices. Although the religious were attempting to extirpate such beliefs and practices, they did secular scholars the favor of preserving the traces of old beliefs.

An important new monograph is John Chance's latest work on Oaxaca, *The Conquest of the Sierra: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Oaxaca*. He has shifted his focus from the center of a peripheral region (Antequera) to its periphery (the Sierra Zapoteca) to show the seemingly paradoxical integration of such a remote region into the colonial economy and ultimately the world system. The Sierra Zapoteca is an ethnically mixed and isolated area of Oaxaca that became a major producer of cotton textiles and cochineal (a red dye made of dried insects), particularly in the eighteenth century. The area did not attract major Spanish settlement for a variety of reasons, primarily its lack of mineral resources. The difficulty of the terrain also limited native population, whose political structures were not easily adapted to colonial rule. Overall, the population was more diverse ethnically and less stratified or diversified occupationally, and there seemed little to lure Spaniards to the region. No major town developed in the Sierra Zapoteca, the main settlement being Villa Alta, where a small Spanish population lived.

Although Villa Alta might well have disappeared entirely in the early sixteenth century, by the end of the eighteenth century, it was considered a lucrative post for the *alcalde mayor*. Forced commerce and production (the *repartimiento de efectos*) became the motor of the economy, a mechanism already examined by Brian Hamnett.<sup>8</sup> Mexico City or Ante-

Hinz, Claudine Hartau, and Marie-Luise Heimann-Koenen (Hannover: Verlag für Ethnologie, 1983). Analyses of Nahuatl society based on native-language documentation include S. L. Cline, *Colonial Culhuacan, 1580-1600: A Social History of an Aztec Town* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Robert Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991); and James Lockhart, *The Nahuatl after the Conquest* (Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

8. Brian Hamnett, *Trade and Politics in Southern Mexico, 1750-1821* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

quera merchants advanced goods and cash to the *alcalde mayor*, who distributed them to the Indians to produce cotton cloaks and cochineal. The *alcaldes mayores* were able to make the system work because they were crown officials with the full power of the state. Thus a commercial monopoly was created. From the native perspective, the only ones who gained at all were the *caciques* because enforcing the *repartimiento* allowed them to establish and maintain greater distance in status from commoners. Because the *caciques* became dependent on the colonial government for maintaining their status, they became effective functionaries in the repressive system. Thus rather than serving as protectors of the native communities, the native civil rulers became an integral part of the exploitative system. Although the outlines of the *repartimiento* were traced by Hamnett, Chance brings to this sorry story a wealth of information on the system as it affected the Indians. His account does not include documentation in the various native languages (none may exist) nor does it provide sharp insight into the lives of individual Indians, but his analysis nevertheless advances understanding of how peripheral regions become integrated into the larger economy.

Another area of sparse Spanish settlement was the Yucatecan frontier, described by Grant Jones in *Maya Resistance to Spanish Rule: Time and History on a Colonial Frontier*. Maya studies in recent years have been enriched most by Inga Clendennin's probing of the conquest of the Maya and Nancy Farriss's large-scale study of Yucatecan Maya.<sup>9</sup> These two earlier works deal with the more densely populated northern Yucatán. Jones focuses instead on the southern frontier, which includes parts of what is now Belize. As is well known, the conquest of the Maya was neither uniform nor quick. The existence of a frontier gave the Maya the opportunity to resist colonial rule by fleeing. Jones's work, basically a narrative history of the conquest with much detail on the *entradas* (expeditions of exploration and conquest), probes conditions on the frontier that allowed it to persist as such for an extended period. Resistance took various forms, the most salient being active resistance to military engagement with the Spaniards and passive resistance through flight. Although Jones worked from Spanish documentation, he is concerned with making the native worldview the center of the narrative. He charts the course of Spanish conquest in terms of native *katun* cycles, which link prophecy and history.

Another view from the periphery is Lolita Gutiérrez Brockington's *The Leverage of Labor: Managing the Cortés Haciendas in Tehuantepec, 1588–1688*. Little work has been done on Tehuantepec, and what is particularly interesting about this account is how small a role the Indians played in the

9. Inga Clendennin, *Ambivalent Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Nancy Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

labor on the Tehuantepec estate. A fuller picture of the situation in the region can be found in Judith Zeitlin's recent study.<sup>10</sup> Brockington examines the Cortés Tehuantepec haciendas from their establishment in the early sixteenth century through their sale by Cortés's Naples-based descendants in the early nineteenth century. The study is divided into two distinct but interrelated sections: one on the hacienda, mainly treating its structure and management, and the other on labor, both free and slave.

The Tehuantepec haciendas developed as regular suppliers of livestock, cattle, mules, and burros to other Marquesado properties (the far-flung entailed holdings of the Cortés family, concentrated in Morelos and Oaxaca). Periodic exportation of livestock (known as *las sacas*) established the rhythm of economic life. In the sixteenth century, the Cortés estate kept close watch over the Tehuantepec properties and maintained direct administrative control with the aid of colonial government. At this early point, the Tehuantepec unit was quite profitable and an important part of the Cortés holdings. Gradually, however, other regional units of the estate (like that in the Bajío) became larger suppliers of livestock, and the Tehuantepec holdings were consigned to the *arrendatarios*, an indirect and generally less satisfactory financial and administrative arrangement. This later period was marked by poor management, labor difficulties, and low profitability, although the periodic sacas continued.

Brockington compares the Cortés Tehuantepec haciendas with those in other regions and with other large-scale enterprises in Mexico, notably the Jesuit haciendas. Although some might object to her comparison of enterprises that are separated geographically and temporally, such comparisons situate the problems and solutions of the Tehuantepec estates in the larger context. She emphasizes the separate structure of the Tehuantepec estates but also their place within the Cortés estate. As with other large-scale enterprises, the Tehuantepec haciendas operated with a profit motive and attempted to expand the number of legal landholdings, maintain a steady source of permanent and seasonal labor, and produce goods for internal consumption and sale elsewhere.

Labor on the Tehuantepec haciendas is particularly interesting in that what emerged was a system dependent on black slave and free mulatto labor. Indian labor seems to have played a negligible role in the overall structure. In Tehuantepec, positions that in other regions were usually filled by Spaniards were staffed by nonwhite labor. Thus marginal social types had a greater chance of obtaining positions of responsibility in peripheral regions, although wage scales were clearly tied to racial classification. Mulattos, blacks, and Indians were all paid less than whites for the

10. Judith Francis Zeitlin, "Ranchers and Indians on the Southern Isthmus of Tehuantepec: Economic Change and Indigenous Survival in Colonial Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (Feb. 1989):23-60.



same work. Although black slave labor constituted a major source of labor in Tehuantepec, the ability of the haciendas to retain these laborers despite ample opportunities for escape suggests that working conditions were not intolerable. The relative scarcity of labor in the region meant that wages represented a significant cost to the estate and that labor was in a favorable position. Thus Brockington gives a couple of whacks on the dead horse of colonial debt-peonage.

A new volume on the central Mexican region is Guy P. C. Thomson's *Puebla de los Angeles: Industry and Society in a Mexican City, 1700–1850*. This work differs from the others under review here in a number of ways. First of all, the period covered spans two political eras. This approach is a virtue, for too often scholars confine themselves to one period or the other, with either a brief updating or summary background. *Puebla de los Angeles* devotes equal time to both. Second and most pertinent here is that although Thomson's focus is socioeconomic, he largely ignores the native population of Puebla (declining but still dense) and the dynamic between the city and the surrounding countryside. To add these dimensions, readers should consult Bernardo García Martínez's recent analysis of colonial Indian pueblos in northern Puebla.<sup>11</sup>

The colonial section of Thomson's work is comparable in scope with the studies by David Brading and Peter Bakewell of northern Mexico, where Indians were less densely settled or less important.<sup>12</sup> Thomson provides a good deal of information on urban elites like merchants and prominent artisans, their corporate organization, and their attempts to achieve and maintain economic prosperity.<sup>13</sup> His coverage of the less privileged Hispanic or Hispanicized population is less copious, but he finds significant distinctions between the income and status of different types of artisans and adds to the general understanding of class, caste, and status. Thomson also offers interesting insights into the place of women in economic life.<sup>14</sup>

Because Puebla was not well located to be a supplier to the northern mining areas, the long-term economic trend declined. After its founding in the sixteenth century, Puebla became a major provincial center on the Mexico City–Veracruz axis. Puebla's initial advantages of location and early establishment as a major producer of wheat, livestock, and textiles

11. Bernardo García Martínez, *Los pueblos de la Sierra: el poder y espacio entre los indios del norte de Puebla hasta 1700* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1987).

12. David A. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763–1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); and Peter Bakewell, *Silver Mining and Society in Colonial Mexico: Zacatecas, 1546–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

13. For comparison with Mexico City merchants, see John Kicza, *Colonial Entrepreneurs: Families and Business in Bourbon Mexico City* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

14. For another study that spans two eras and deals specifically with women, see Silvia Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985).

attracted Spanish settlement to the area. This early prosperity eroded, however, because Puebla lacked mineral deposits and because other areas developed in New Spain and overseas to compete with Puebla's main products.

By the eighteenth century, Puebla's elites were seeking ways to restore it to prominence and prosperity. Thomson traces the shifts in elite ideologies between 1700 and 1850, which culminated in a firm belief in protectionism. Economic liberalism was not perceived as promoting the prosperity of Puebla, for by the 1830s it had few advantages even within the Mexican economic system, much less in comparison with external competitors. Elites who were able to garner fortunes from a single type of enterprise in the sixteenth century had to diversify their activities to maintain their fortunes from the mid-seventeenth century on. An index of the economic trends in Puebla was its decline in net population during the period due to emigration as well as epidemics. Thomson's analysis suggests the notion that geographically central areas could function as peripheries, an insight that is even more important to obtain the fullest picture of the economy and society, including its indigenous population.

The books reviewed here demonstrate that the field of colonial Mexican history continues to thrive. The center still holds historians' interest. But the Mexican periphery now is commanding new attention.