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## **From Pictoriality to Alphabetization: Comments on the Evolution of Nahua Visual Memory, 1570 to 1740**

### **1. Mesoamerican Writing Systems**

Pre-Columbian Nahua, Mixtec, and Maya “books” were fig-bark (*amatl*) screen-folds of paintings, visual “texts” painted on deer skins, and *lienzos* – large-size cotton cloth that were still being used in Mesoamerican towns in the late 19th century. Among the Nahua, Mixtec, and Maya societies such histories were scattered in different and distinct forms of records, complementary to each other. Local rulers, their nobility, and the professional classes usually relied on distinct pictographic fragments of past episodes, related to specific operations and acts such as annexations and successions to a throne, recurring rivalries, droughts, and migrations. In the pre-Columbian and early colonial period, pictography was also used by priests and conjurers to obtain important information regarding fate, and rituals, and the prognosis of events. Visual information was used to elicit formulas for ritual reenactments. The 260-day calendar and sequence of the *veintenas* were the tools used for these purposes.

In his classic work, *La escritura del idioma nahuatl a través de los siglos* (México: Editorial Cultura, 1948), Ignacio Dávila Garibai noted that phonetic elements in a rebus were employed in the Nahuatl to represent names of persons and places. Two or more signs could be combined to make a name based on sound, e.g., *Coatlan* (= *coatl*, snake; *tlantli*, teeth). By 1560 these were transliterated into Roman characters (Croft 1950). One of the best examples of hybridized, combined use of pictorial and an alphabetic text during that time was the *Códice Cozcatzin* (1572). The codex retains the entire stock of Nahua pictograms (representations of objects and actions) depicting native insignia, land parcels, and households, ideograms (qualities, attributes, or concepts associated with the object depicted), and pictograms indicating toponyms – side by side with their Latin letters, Arabic numbers and the text in Spanish.

The transition from the traditional pre-contact systems of writing and recording to an alphabetical means of communication undoubtedly played a major role in the transformations of the native society in Mesoamerica under Spanish colonial rule and Christianization. Part of this process can be attributed to the extirpation carried out by the Church to eradicate all remnants of what they considered idolatrous (Ragon 1988).

During the first half of the 16th century, the use of Spanish was generally confined to the Nahua area, where Spanish first and second names were adopted, and neolo-

gisms were created “to describe important objects” (Lockhart 2001). By the 1560s, the Christian upbringing of members of the native elite in convents and the growing reliance upon Spanish legal norms of representations of individual lords and entire towns gave rise to a new culture of Western-oriented, alphabetized texts. By the later part of the 16th century, modes of recalling and recording the past had undergone profound changes that were the direct outcome of the rise of a written culture. The shift from non-written, oral-pictorial modes of recording to a written culture, together with the process of internalizing Christianity and the passive and active adaptation to religious change, have greatly affected the nature of *how* memory was inscribed among the Nahua, Otomi, Matlazintla, and other ethnic groups in Mexico. Inside and outside the convents, members of the Nahua and Mixtec elite learned at first to write Nahuatl in Latin script while the use of pictorial text continued, but by the last decades of the 16th century pictorial texts have progressively faded from Native traditional forms of recording and narration. In his essay on the evolution of the indigenous languages during colonial times, Matthew Restall (Restall 1997) noted that in the lowland Maya areas the process of complete replacement of pre-conquest tradition by alphabetization was far more rapid than in the Mixtec, Nahua, and Otomi areas because the Maya did not have a purely pictographic tradition. Mixtec pictography was even more deeply entrenched than the Nahua, and by contrast with the Nahua codices remained unchanged for a longer period of time.

European influence on native visual expressions was already present as early as the 1540s, as is clearly attested in Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’s *Primeros memoriales*. Ellen Baird (1995: 40, 44) observed that “Although the format of the book is European, the drawings are predominantly native in subject matter, motifs, and style. Very few indications of European style are present and European influence is primarily limited to conventionalized representations...”. By contrast, the paintings of the *Florentine Codex*, painted sometime during the 1570s, already reflect the deep penetration of European conventions. We must bear in mind, however, that this work was intended for European readers and not for the indigenous population of Mexico. Nevertheless, the most substantial process of Europeanization of indigenous visual forms of expression occurred between in the mid 17th and the mid 18th centuries, corresponding to what James Lockhart (Lockhart 2001) called Stage 3 in the evolution of the colonial Nahuatl. It was during this phase that much of the pictorial context and essence of indigenous manuscripts of the Central Plateau underwent a process of alphabetization and the crucial, ideographic component of these writing systems, which conveyed the verbal mode of reference, degenerated. The complex forms of recording history, ritual practices, genealogical ties, and routes of migration, as well as all verbal components rapidly faded away from the Mesoamerican writing systems, until their complete disappearance by the 1680s. By that time, sparse scenes of historic migrations and settlement, holy, historic battles, and the figures of historic rulers and lead-

ers, commissioned by mesticized masters, were already deeply invaded by the European-Baroque style.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, pictography was already despoiled of its key function as a writing system and a recording tool. In this process, a[t]-tepe-tl-based historical chronologies, sources such as town Annals, cadastral histories and sacred books such as the *Popol Vuh* of the Quiche Maya in Guatemala (ca. 1554-1558) became divorced from their pictorial records and contents (Boone 2000: 198-199, 244; Christenson 2003: 33, 65n34, 97n178, 133n290, 196n479, 480). The most crucial elements lost or divorced in this process were predominantly the cosmological and mythological traditions, the gods, prognostics, and calendars (*ilhuitlapohualamoxtli*); ethnographic sections dealing with sacrificial and funerary practices, and acts of foundation. Through a process of transliteration, significant events, historic personalities, and godly figures were lost or disengaged from their traditional contents. Furthermore, interpretative part, translated into alphabetic text, became fragmented and severed from the pictorial context. Nevertheless, some segments of the earlier, pictorial contents survived, in their transformed form, within the new framework of the alphabetic text.

## 2. From Pictorialism to Alphabetic Modes (Lockhart's Stage 1 to Stage 2)

As the vast spectrum of indigenous records attests, throughout most of the period between 1531 and 1570 the use of images as a means of inscribing and recording events and developments, boundaries between towns, land cultivation, as well as ritual activities and prognostics was still common. During the mid 1520s and 1530s, Franciscan and Dominican friars applied Nahua ideograms to their catechisms and catechism classes conducted in the newly erected convents to simplify the learning and understanding of the rudiments of Christian faith for the recently-baptized indigenous lords. The four prayers were translated into traditional pictography, and native ideograms were used to convey the verbal component as nearly as possible to the original Latin words. But these attempts to bring content closer to Nahua forms of recording and comprehension were abandoned when the Franciscans and Dominicans realized that such methods could mistakenly lead the neophytes astray, back to idolatry. As already

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1 European influence was already present as early as during the 1540s, as is clearly attested in Sahagún's *Primeros memoriales*, but the invasion of this style and the near disappearance of the pure indigenous components occurred only by the mid seventeenth century. See also the important essay by Baird thus observes that, "Although the format of the book is European, the drawings are predominantly native in subject matter, motifs, and style. Very few indications of European style are present and European influence is primarily limited to conventionalized representations...". In sheer contrast are the paintings of the *Florentine Codex* painted somewhere during the 1570s and reflect already the deep penetration of European conventions. However, one has to bear in mind that this work was intended for European readers and not for the indigenous population of Mexico (Baird 1995: 40, 44).

noted, parts of these visual expressions were viewed as harmful and idolatrous by Spanish church officials. Others, however, were considered efficient tools for evangelization, as highlighted at the time in the *Códice Franciscano* attributed to the Franciscan, Motolinía (Fr. Torbio de Benavente). The *Códice* places special emphasis on the native lords' traditional modes of recording spiritual contexts, which could be effectively used by the Franciscans as memory primers for enhancement of the new faith among native neophytes, beginning at the earliest age.

I believe it is the right thing to do with these people, as we have seen from experience that where Christian doctrine has been taught through paintings, the people of those pueblos understand better the matters of our Holy Catholic faith, and they are more deeply versed in them... Through these paintings, the mysteries of our faith would be explained to the children in their tender years, as what one perceived in those years becomes naturally imprinted in the memory, and we already know that the indigenous population perceive it best through the medium of painting... (Motolinía 1971).

Within the framework of law, pictorial forms, such as cadastral “maps” and pictographic title-deeds, were still very much prevalent. There is also ample evidence that during this period several prominent jurists in the *Audiencia* in Mexico City encouraged the native litigants to bring pictorial representations into court. For example, in 1560, on his visit of inspection in the Mexico Basin, the Spanish royal Council of the Indies' special envoy, Judge Alonso de Zorita, addressed the issue in a direct way. He brought to the attention of the local judges of the *Audiencia* the crucial role of the native Annals, in their painted form, in the verification of testimonial evidence in court. He also called upon the secular and regular priests in their assigned towns to assist the court on such inquiries and search the indigenous towns' local repositories for such records:

In addition to the information that you secure from witnesses you will cause to be brought before you any paintings, tablets, or other records of that time that may substantiate what is said, and you will cause the religious to search and ask for such records among the native lords. You will also secure information about all matters from such religious and all other persons who have some knowledge of them (Zorita 1965; 1999).

Cadastral histories and *lienzos* brought into the Spanish-colonial court of the *Audiencia* by litigating indigenous towns and displayed before the Spanish judges were seen as acceptable tools for interpreting or reinterpreting former claims presented in testimony in the colonial court. The pictographic text and its accompanying alphabetized interpretation would be used both by the scribes (*escribanos*) and the notaries (*procuradores*) as effective mnemonics to “make the following witnesses' memory more lucid”. In this context, Elizabeth Boone claimed that “the Nahuas and Spaniards saw the pictorials as the documentary foundation itself; the oral explanations were accessory and explanatory” (Boone 1998). Communicating pictorial texts through the mediation of the interpreter (*nahuatlato*) at different levels of the judicial discourse

(transmission, translation, and verification of the testimony by oral and written means) was accepted as a legitimate form of legal expression and communication. As part of the verification process of the pictorials presented, the court notary would add the *nahuatlato*'s interpretation of the native noblemen's allegations. A good example comes from the Guerrero area (1540). Visual depictions of local hierarchies of power among feuding towns (Tixtlan, Tzompanco, and the adjoining *a[t]l-tepe-tl*) and local genealogical information about the ruling dynasties in the Guerrero area were at the center of the lawsuit fought in the court of the *Audiencia* in Mexico City (*Archivo General de Indias*, Sevilla, Justicia, leg. 127, 1537-1561, fols. 167v; 603v-604r). During the late 1560s, in the local court of Tlaxcala, for example, in civil lawsuits over land and inheritance, the parties would still bring genealogical illustrations and *lienzos* showing the lineage and seniority of their Chichimec ancestors and the partition of their patrimony (Sullivan 1987). For the Mixtec area, Mary Elizabeth Smith (1973: 122-147, 170, 336-337) showed how three pre-Columbian and early colonial Mixtec pictorial manuscripts, the *Códice Colombino*, the *Lienzo de Jicayán*, and the *Lienzo de Ocotepéc*, were transformed into legal, alphabetic documents. These were presented in court as part of a litigation over land. In their later versions as legal documents they still retained some of the glyphic annotations and toponyms that indicated the limits of the lands.

The *Chiquatzen Tecuihtli* (Six Obligations) *Land Map* is a solid example of the use of visual expressions during Stage 1 to resolve local conflicts. It was probably part of litigation presented at the *Audiencia*. Its origins are unknown, but it is possible that it was composed by the head of a dominant lineage in the peripheral settlement (*cal-maitl*) of a *nuu*, in the Mixteca-Puebla area, inhabited by Nahuatlized Mixtec lineages. This is indicated by the *yy* prefix, usually reserved for Mixtec noble men and women. We find this affix in the name given to Lady Yolotzin's younger daughter, Yyoxiucoatl. The noble prefix is attached to her *xiuhcoatl* Nahuatl name (below), and her noble mother must have traditionally borne the title *toho dzehe* and was named *yya dzehe tonine* (Terraciano 2001: 135-136). The Land Map is preserved at the Ethnologisches Museum in Dahlem (Berlin), mounted on deteriorated *amatl* or fig-bark fiber paper. Its size is 93.5 x 60.5 cm. The map contains a historical narration (progressing through time) and a cadastral part recounting the division of land among the various lineages/noble houses in this cluster of settled households. The narration, or more exactly the *tlalnamiconi* memorandum, represents the past rather than the present, as clearly attested by the great temple, the classic royal buildings (*añine*), etc. that were in place when the Spaniards arrived in the area. There is no mention anywhere of the *terminus post quem* of this state of affairs.

The *lienzo* may have originally been drawn to defend native rights over lands in the face of the growing threat of Spanish intrusion and settlement in the area, and the subsequent takeover of local lands by haciendas. Alternatively, it may have been initi-

ated as part of an ongoing power struggle between the major noble houses represented here: 1) the Cuauhtli lineage, identified by its senior leaders, Quauhtzintecuhtli and Cuauhtli (Eagle), both shown seated on a small stool,<sup>2</sup> and 2) the coatl (Snake) lineage, represented by its senior member, inside his house, facing a lavish palace (*anine*). The Land Map was possibly drawn to prove the former position of predominance and preeminence of the lineage and to gain recognition and prerogatives from the Spanish crown. But it is also possible that it was part of a land survey used to determine the tax-exemptions of local noble families. In what appears to be a conjunction between Latin script and the remaining modes of native expression, the names of native places and rulers are depicted with their ideograms. Individual heads of noble households linked through kinship (heads painted next to conventionalized, T-shaped houses), next to the Nahuatlized name of the lineage (e.g., *coatl* [Snake]), are clearly drawn to represent the principal household groupings or compounds of domestic units. The names of the latter are followed by the phonetic sign of the house (*calli*) and a pictogram of the property (*callalli* = the household's land parcel). The anthroponym of the head of the household is followed by his name in Latin script. This map, as others of its type in the last decades of the 16th century, represents an unbroken maintenance of native traditional patterns, side by side with the sparse Spanish elements that had already been incorporated into the local tradition.

During the 1560s, the question of whether to continue using the visual modes of writing and recording caused an internal debate that erupted among the indigenous nobility throughout Mexico. The famous lawsuit over the inheritance of the supreme rule of Tilantongo in the Mixteca Alta area offers a rare glimpse of such a debate and the deliberations about the transformation of the traditional forms of recording and memorizing the past legacies that helped sustain the old contexts and challenge the changes that have already occurred in their society under colonial rule. The overall significance of the debate recounted below is in the challenge to the customary, pictorial means of recording the past in favor of the new, alphabetic one adopted from the foreign culture of the "other," at least within the realm of Spanish legalism and power.

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2 In Nahuatl, *in cuauhtli in ocelotl* was believed to be the *nahual* of the gods and considered to be a guide and protector of the community, as its patron. Therefore, valiant lineage heads were ordinarily given such names, as in the example of *Cuauhten* of Huexotzingo, who appears in the *Matrícula de Huexotzinco*.

**Figure 1: The Chiquatzen Tecuihtli Land Map**



Source: *Land Map of Chiquatzen Tecuihtli*, Courtesy of the Staatliche Museum zu Berlin, Preußisches Ethnologisches Museum, Dahlem.

On 20 June 1566, on his deathbed at the local Franciscan convent, don Pedro de Osario dictated his last will to a notary. He was the native governor of Tepozcolula in the Mixteca Alta, in the Northwest part of the present state of Oaxaca, Mexico. The Alcalde (mayor) and his confessor, Fray Juan de Aponte, witnessed the event. Two interpreters commissioned for the affair translated the discourse from Mixteca into Nahuatl and then into Spanish. The will and what followed reflect the uses of manifest memory of ancient rules of succession to the throne in the Mixteca Alta, and the feasibility of such memory in quickly changing times under colonial rule. According to the ancient conventions, when there were no male heirs to inherit in Tepozcolula, the succession passed the “senior” town of Tilantongo. Following these rules, don Pedro had chosen don Felipe de Austria, the governor of Tilantongo and husband of his daughter, Doña Inés de Osario, as his immediate successor. He had also left don Felipe all his possessions. As dictated by custom, the council of elders of the town of Tepozcolula approved the act. But don Diego de Mendoza, the governor of the nearby town of Tamazualhuapa, who was married to don Pedro’s half-daughter, Doña Catalina de Prelata (Doña María de Zarate’s daughter from a former marriage), disputed the nomination. He argued that his wife, older than her half-sister, was the only natural heir of her father’s estate and therefore he, as her husband, should be the succeeding governor of the town. He filed a civil lawsuit in the Audiencia of Mexico, in which he disputed don Felipe de Austria’s right of succession and his inheritance of don Pedro’s estate (Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Tierras, vol. 24, exp. 6).

On March 30, 1568, in the courtroom of the *Audiencia* in Mexico City, and in the course of his claim to his patrimony, don Felipe de Austria, represented by his attorney, produced a series of pre-Columbian pictorial records. He substantiated his claim for the customary sovereignty of his town, Tilantongo, over that of Tepozcolula and of himself as the natural heir to rule Tepozcolula. The pictorial records, going back to the 14th century, depicted the ruling genealogies of the Mixteca Alta, indicating the customary rules of succession inscribed in the 11th century (*Codex Nuttel*) and the order of seniority among the different polities in the area. These pictorial records in the form of a *Códice* later became known as the *Bodleian Codex* and were deposited by Lord Kingsborough at the Bodleian Library at Oxford (Caso 1960). In the course of the court hearings, don Felipe’s use of the pictorial records revealed the thorough clash between the two litigants and between the changing and traditionalist world-views concerning language, memory, and customary authority. Don Felipe’s legal representative discussed the importance of custom and precedent, the justification and legitimacy of present actions with reference to the past, and the concept of “time immemorial”. Through his legal representative, don Felipe made a powerful statement advocating the continued necessity of using both the ancient and the more recent pictorial records (*pinturas*) concerning the history of the royal Mixtec lineages. He argued that



the ancient pictorial records, the *Códices*, were indispensable tools for the recording and recalling of time immemorial, and they complement the literal European conventions for recalling the past. Through his attorney (*procurador*) and interpreter, he argued that these paintings were still preserved in the archives of their towns, primarily as proofs of the towns' origins (in Nahuatl: *yn itzinpehucan ynin toaltepeuh*, meaning: "the origin of our community") and as repositories of ancient knowledge concerning various traditions, land distribution, and related subjects. Here stood "time immemorial", "frozen" in the visual testimony of the customary writing-system, using pictograms/ideograms and supplemented by the oral testimony of living witnesses.

The conceptualization of memory endorsed by don Felipe was leaning heavily on the past, which was essential for interpretation of the actions and changed norms of the present. In contrast, don Diego de Mendoza endorsed the position of "progress" relying upon the Spanish conquest and Christianization as the point of departure. In his conception there was no reaching back into the pre-conquest past, and only what Christianization and alphabetization contributed to indigenous culture was worth remembering. Well aware of the changes that have occurred since the conquest, don Felipe proposed a compromise between the two conflicting modes of memory by establishing two complementary systems for recalling the past, with a 40-year time lapse separating the two. One system relied on records that belonged to pre-Columbian times, the other upon events and customs that were no longer observed as purely (un-Christian and un-Hispanicized) Mixtec. He thus set apart what is termed in Roman law *memoria contrarii*, that which exceeded a 40-year span. Beyond this period lay what was adopted and internalized by the following generations as inseparable from their cultural memory, what "they were accustomed to memorize" – *mos maiorum* – "the ancestors' sayings".

Nearly two years later, on March 17, 1568, the other litigant, don Diego de Mendoza, also referred to the pictograms as tools for recalling order, descent, and inheritance, but linked the use of the traditional pictorial records to self-interest, pagan practices, and "false memories". Despite the powerful rhetoric of don Felipe de Austria and the convincing testimony of the pictorial evidence of his ancient genealogy, the Audiencia ruled in favor of stripping him of his inheritance and transferring the estate to don Diego de Mendoza, the husband of the senior heir, Doña Catalina. Don Diego's triumph can also be regarded as having a more general cultural ramification. But even more significant for the contemporaneous native nobility was the sharp imprint of a process in which the traditional mode of using and combining the oral and pictorial forms of representation/writing as the basic channel for recording and memorizing past episodes was gradually being contested by the Spanish-European historical consciousness, even if it may appear to have been adopted here merely as rhetoric, for the sake material gain.

In sum, by the 1560s and 1570s the legal representation in the *Audiencia* of individuals and of entire towns was giving rise to a new culture based on alphabetic memory, i.e., alphabetic wills and land-titles, as opposed to the oral and pictorial modes of representation that were still in operation.

### 3. Combined Modes of Recording – the Intermediary Level

The best examples of hybridized form during Stage 1 are the *Vergara* (ca. 1545), the *Ovando*, and the *Kingsborough* (ca. 1555) codices. Using a combination of pictorial and alphabetic forms, these codices presented specific indigenous complaints and allegations against Spanish *encomenderos*, city officials, and magistrates who exploited and oppressed them. In 1565, Philip II sent Gerónimo de Valderrama as a visiting judge to New Spain. He inspired the composition of major pictorial codices presented by the native population in the Valley of Mexico before the *Audiencia*. One of the most immediate outcomes of this external initiative was the *Códice Osuna* (ca. 1565). The evidence was to be dispatched to the Royal Council of the Indies in Spain as a dramatic and unique testimony recording and recounting Spanish atrocities committed against the native population. The *Osuna Codex*, completed in April 1565, originally comprised 462 leaves, of which 40 are extant. It was already in the European style, that is, not arranged according to the native conventions of the *amatl* or fig-bark screen-folds. The complaints were presented to Valderrama by the native town councils of the San Francisco and Santiago barrios of Mexico City, and by the town council of Tula (Codex Osuna 1878).

The following examples are of the juxtaposed phase during which texts still composed in both pictorial and alphabetic forms were used by native lords to bring to light an affliction or grievance. The *Códice de Teteltzingo* (State of Guerrero) of 1557, belonging to the mixed pictorial and alphabetized genre of native *relaciones* of this period, is another good example (Barlow 1954; Noguez 1986). It is an account delivered to Viceroy Luis de Velasco by don Tomás de Tapia, *principal* of Tepeaca and judge in Oapan. Don Tomás de Tapia was probably called by the Spanish *corregidor* to serve as an arbitrator in the conflict that arose between the two towns, with Teteltzingo refusing to adhere to the traditional forms of coercion that existed between the two. Tomás de Tapia described how he reformed the system of services and tribute levied by the governor and lords of Oapan from the people of Teteltzingo, keeping apace with the New Laws, abolishing the unpaid for local *repartimiento*. On the left side of the leaf appears the same description in ideograms, with several Spanish glosses below them. The document, signed by don Luis de Velasco, demonstrates how these intermediary documents, in their mixed pictographic and alphabetic form, conveyed the old, familiar patterns that were by then in a state of transition and change, for example, traditional forms of labor recruitment, tax levying, measurement of the land, weighing, etc. Similarly, in the *Documento de Ohuapan*, from the same package, the figures of

the local governor and the *alcalde* are seated upright in the traditional way on an *icpalli* reed mat throne, with the *alcalde* holding a *bastón* as an insignia of authority. The *casa de la comunidad* is also painted in the traditional form of a T-shaped structure with a thatched roof. Above, to the right, is the Ohuapan toponymic glyph: *ohuatl* = *caña dulce*, and the additive *tepetl* = mound.<sup>3</sup>

One of the best examples of hybridized, combined use of pictorial and alphabetic text during this period is the Codex *Cozcatzin* (1572). The codex retains the entire stock of Nahuatl pictograms (representations of objects and actions). It depicts native insignia, land parcels, and households; ideograms (qualities, attributes, or concepts associated with the object depicted), and pictograms indicating toponyms, side by side with the Arabic numbers and the text in Spanish. Don Juan Luis Cozcatzin, the *alcalde ordinario* and *principal* of the barrio of Coyutlan, San Sebastián, in Mexico City presented the Viceroy with a petition in which he asked for the restitution of lands alleged to have been expropriated in 1557 by don Diego de Mendoza, governor of Tlatelolco, between 1549 and 1562. The *Cozcatzin* case involved a total of 55 land titles arranged in the same format of four large, rectangular sections. On the left side were the pictogram and toponym of the claimed property and name in Latin characters. To the right appeared the phonetic signs of the anthroponym of the original property owner in 1439, when King Itzcoatl had formally divided these lands, and at the time of his descendants who later claimed the rights to their ancestors' lands. The measurements of the claimed lands were in the same region. By 1560, owners from the Ixhuatepec had been removed from their lands by don Diego de Mendoza de Austria, Motecuhzoma Huitznahuitliltlac Inauhyantzin, the acting governor of Tlatelolco. Cozcatzin sought to prove that these lands had been held by the same owners for the preceding 118 years (Valero de García Lascurán 1994).

#### 4. The Inner Working of the Process of Transliteration (the late 1560s)

To follow the inner workings of the process of transliteration from the traditional Nahuatl writing system of pictography and ideograms into an alphabetic one, I analyze here one exemplary court text from the town of Tenayuca (Tenayocan) near Mexico City (AGI, Patronato No. 181: R.2). During this period, the deepening of various forms of colonization in the area of Tenayuca have caused disintegration, economic and cultural pressures, and exploitation.

During the August 1567, the lawsuit of the governor and lords of Tenayocan against Francisco Magariño, a Spanish *refector*, appears to be an ordinary, local procedure about maltreatment and injustice inflicted upon the native population by a

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3 *Códice de Teteltzingo* (1700: 183). The three documents are located at Tulane University, Middle America Collection, New Orleans.

Spanish official. But the Tenayocan case also illustrates the *modus operandi* of indigenous social memory of past events and grievances, as it was being transformed into an alphabetic recording, a process in which it changed both in content and context and assumed a new and fragmented form of representation. During the *residencia* (review of office) of Francisco Rodríguez Magariño, witnesses from the towns of Tenayocan (Tenayuca) and Tlalnepantla were summoned to provide testimony regarding Magariño's handling of the affairs of his office in the area. There were apparently long-standing charges against Magariño by the native lords and by Spaniards from the towns of Tacuba (Tlacopan), Teucalhuyacan, and Tenayocan. They all described massive robbery of money, wheat, maize, and cattle, as well as the killing and maltreatment of local inhabitants. Magariño had apparently been accused in the past of corruption, illegal trade, and misuse of personal services (in the form of *tlamemes*) during his period of *residencia* as the *Corregidor* of Totolapa, for which he was made to pay a fine of 1,000 pesos to the royal treasury, and which he did not pay. During August of 1567, the lords of Tenayocan presented their case before the *Audiencia* of Mexico City. Their litigation began as follows: "While serving as the *corregidor* of Tenayocan, Francisco Rodríguez Magariño had robbed them of more than 10,000 golden pesos' worth of cattle, mules, wheat, and maize, and other materials."

What we have at first is what Alonso Hernández de Anovez, *defensor de los indios* (the public attorney on behalf of the indigenous litigants) dispatched as a memorandum to the royal Court in Spain. He begins by commenting that "The inquiry was long and thorough. As usual, the native inhabitants were never compensated for what had been seized from them" (en pleitos y negocios nunca fueron desagraviados ni satisfechos de lo que les robó y llevó). The second extant text is a pictographic-ideographic account transcribed into alphabetized form, layer by layer. It is entitled *Lo que hurtó Magariño de los indios* (what Margariño had seized from the indigenous population). On 5 September 1567, in the town of Teocalhuyacan, the local *tlaquiloque* [scribes] and notary, who had originally drawn up the allegations against Margariño, provided an account of the pictograms they had drawn. (They commented that they would not elaborate beyond the "facts" already recorded in the paintings themselves). The two texts are followed by the presentation of the four pictograms. Their content shows the different aspects of their grievances. It also demonstrates the process of recording and memorizing these events, which had taken place in these communities long before the case was brought to court.

Figure 2: The First Pictogram. Margariño's Case



This first pictogram can be seen as being divided into six parts. The *first part*, top center, shows an outline of a plot of land demarcated by agave plants, and within it a local noble's house. The *second part*, below and to the left, shows the figure of Margariño pointing with his hand to the text above describing his misdeeds. The text reads as follows: "fue Margariño a Coatepec, y siendo unas tierras baldias, hizo un testamento de ellas y dio a Juan Bautista de Marin, criado que marcó; que valián más que 500 pesos de tepuxque" (Margariño went to Coatepec, having been there some uncultivated lands he made a bill of sale (*carta de venta*) of those lands and gave it to Juan Bautista de Marin, a servant; the value of these lands was more than 500 *tepuxque*). Below the text, to the right, is a glyph that presumably indicates a land title and the pictorial indication of a pronouncement. In the *third part*, to the left, we see a large house (presumably that of the local governor) and two additional noble houses to its right. Above the houses is again the looming figure of Margariño, holding the staff of office. The houses are surrounded by agave plants. The text to the right says:

Aqui las casas que dió Margariño a Juan Cano, unas tierras, que eran de los macehuales porque lo pagó y las quales tomó de los dichos macehuales sus huercos de pan y quedaron desquitados y de pobreza y no pueden tributary valian las tierras más que 500 pesos de oro.

(Here are the houses that Margariño gave to Juan Cano, some lands that belonged to the *macehuales*, their plots, and they were left in poverty and they can no longer be taxed; the lands were worth more than 500 pesos de oro.) The *fourth part*, on the left, shows Margariño holding the staff of office and pointing with his hand in the right direction to a combined glyph that presumably designates the land title and "a pronouncement".

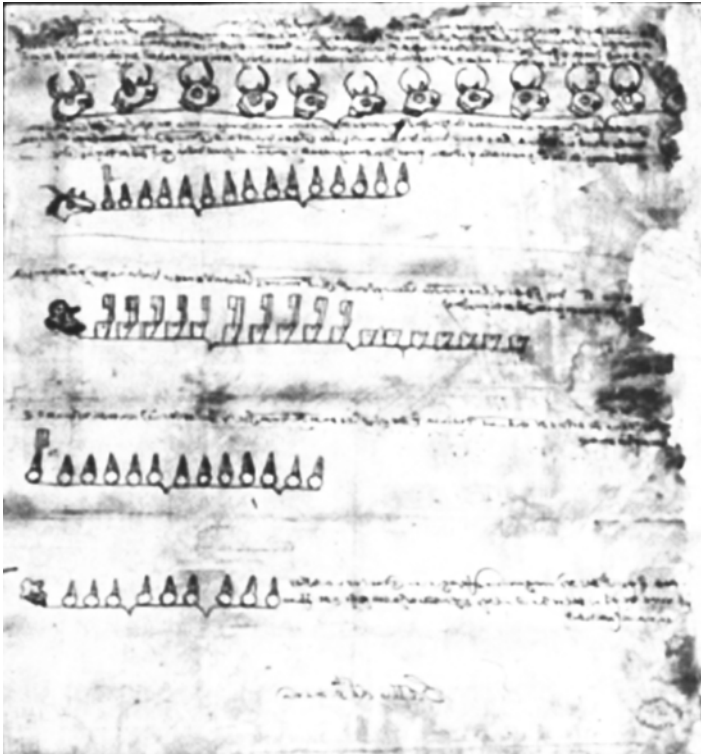
In the *fifth part*, on the right, the land title and gesture of a pronouncement are followed by the figure of Margariño mounted on a horse, holding a lance. He is facing a staff of office broken in half and a native lord wearing a Spanish cap, his name indicated by the anthroponym attached to his head. Above them, to the right, is the text preceded by a three-*tecpantli* glyph [flag], each one representing the quantity of twenty (*cempohualli*),  $20 \times 3 =$  sixty (*yepohualli*) according to the traditional vigesimal system of counting. In the pictorial manuscripts, the *tecpantli* glyph is usually reserved for rows of twenty persons, preceded by their *tecpanpixqui*, the man in charge. Here, the flags possibly refer to the number of lands expropriated from the nobles, as indicated in the text. The text reads as follows:

Having seized from the nobles of Tacuba a large quantity of land, Baltazar de Aguilar tied their ears together and dragged them to an alcalde by the name of Juan de San Antonio and he had also broken the alguazil mayor's staff of office; they had complained about him to

Margariño in Mexico City, who acted in the same manner as Baltazar de Aguilar and in the former's absence refused to provide them with a judge.<sup>4</sup>

In the *sixth and last part*, at the top left, the figure of a Spanish scribe is writing a land title. To his right is a quantity of 500 golden pesos multiplied by two plus 400, together with two sacks of money to the left. To its right is the grand figure of Margariño holding the staff of office and facing the money.

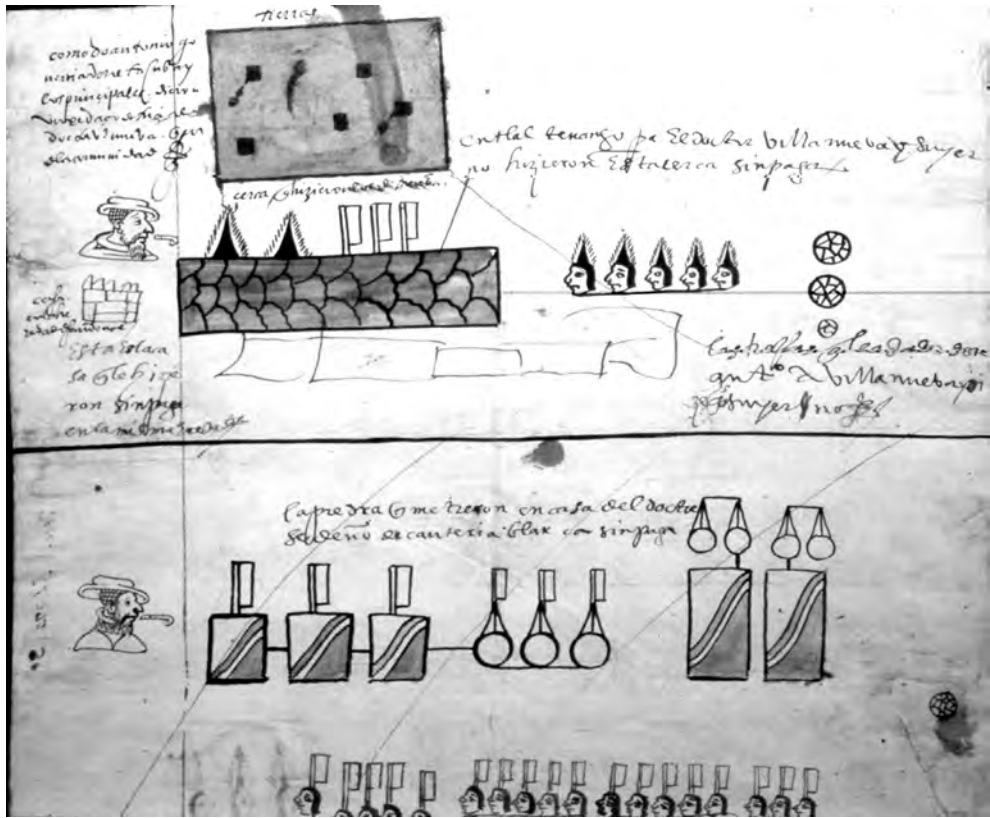
**Figure 3: The Second Pictogram. Margariño's Case**



*Glyphs*: Eleven oxen (for a value of) fifteen golden pesos; ten horses; thirteen fanegas of maize nine fanegas of wheat. This pictogram is very similar to its contemporaneous *Denuncia vs. J. Cerón*, Mexican 30 BNF, referring to “ancient paintings” gathered in the Chalca province by a commission of inspection headed by Francisco Muñoz during viceroy Velasco’s second term of office (Scholes/ Adams 1959, 5: 100).

4 “Que haviendoles Baltazar de Aguilar tomado mucha cantidad de tierra de los principales de Tacuba les uño las orejas y aporró a un alcalde que llama Juan de San Antonio y a un alguazil mayor le quebró la bara y sobre ello pidieron a México a Margariño y hizo ninguna de las por ser lo mismo es Baltazar de Aguilar y al mismo del Margariño en su ausencia y no quiso proveer juez.”

Figure 4: The Third Pictogram. Margariño's Case



This pictogram is divided into two parts.

**First Part**

Top left: "Como don Antonio governador de Tacuba y los principales dieron... de la tierra de la comunidad."

Top middle (upper right): a glyph of *talmilli* (cultivated lands); minuscule ideogram of a land holding; below it is the enclosure (*tepantlalli*?) that the *alcaldes* of Tacuba had made.

Top right: "En Tlaltenango, para del doctor Villanueva y su mujer no hicieron el tal cerca sin pagar" (In Tlaltenango, they would not make such an enclosure for Doctor Villanueva and his wife without being paid).



Lower left: Anthroponym of Margariño with an “instructions” glyph; below his figure, an illustration of a Spanish-style house, the house inherited by Sandoval. This is the house they made for him without being paid, on the same inherited land.<sup>5</sup>

To the right of Maragriño: glyphs of 2 x 400 (*tzontli*), and 20 (*cempohualli*) x 3 = 860 land measures; to its right, 5 x 400 = (2,000) men of service; to their right: two plates of small turquoise stones; below that, a text connected by a thin line to the above enclosure.<sup>6</sup>

## Second Part

On the left: Maragriño’s head (giving instructions facing right).

To the right: “La piedra que metieron en casa del Doctor Sedeño de cantería blanca sin paga” [The white stone they rolled up to doctor Saleño’s house without any payment]. Below, glyphs of 20 x 3 large stones + a calculation of 20 x 3 (60) small round stones, followed by glyphs of four oversized stones.

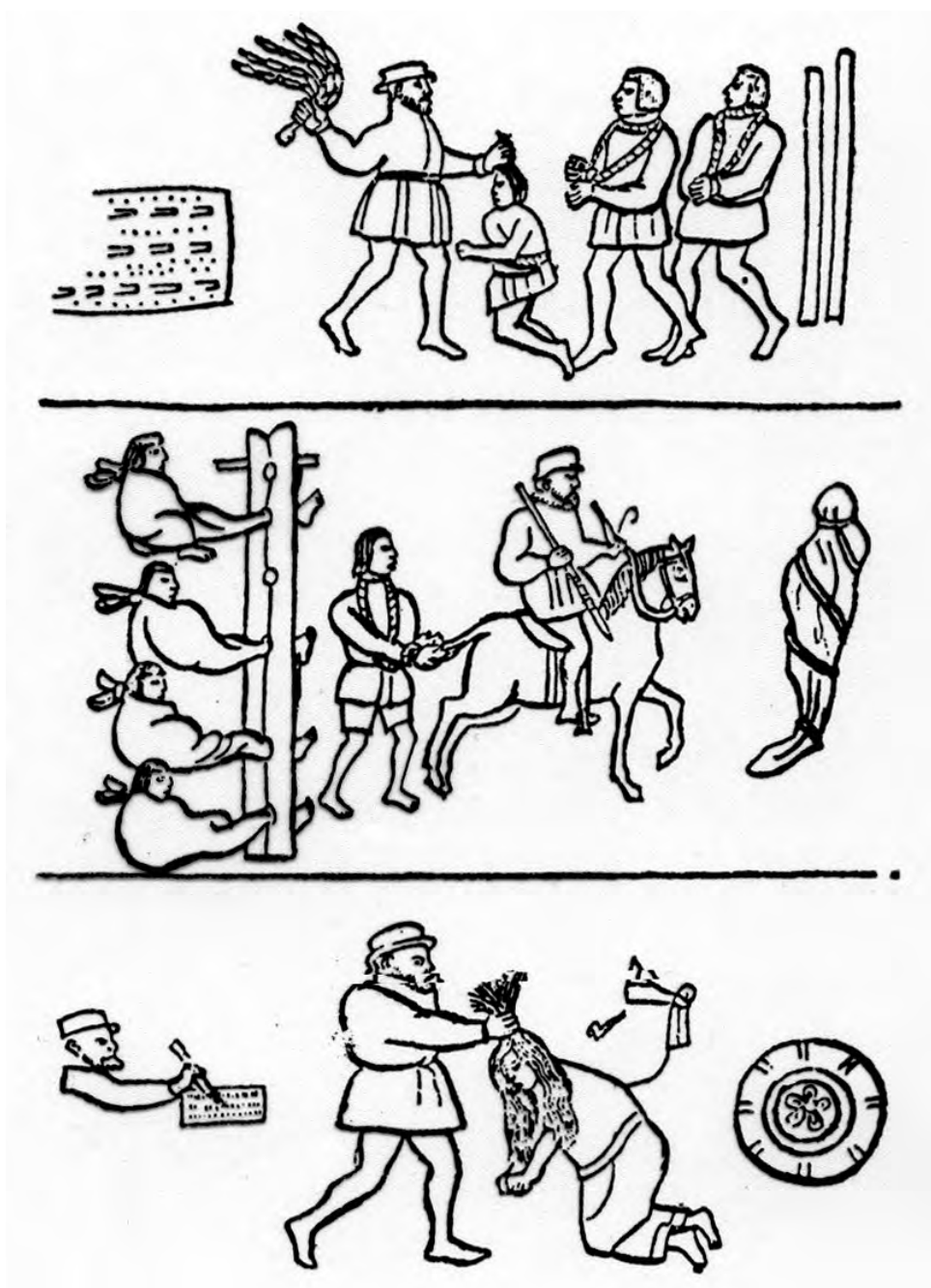
Below, to the left: glyphs of three groups of 20 x 5 (100) workers each = 300 + 20 x 3 (60) = altogether 360 men, presumably performing forced labor. To their left is, presumably, their *tecpanpixqui*. Luis Reyes García mentions such a pattern of labor recruitment in 16th century Cuauhtinchan, where the *macehualtin* were formed into units of five groups of 20, each group led by a *centecpanpixque* and each unit of five groups led by a *macuiltecpanpixque*, exactly as before the coming of the Spaniards (Reyes García 1978).

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5 “Casa en la heredad de Sandoval esta es la casa que hicieron sin pagar en la misma heredad.”

6 “Los trozos que le ha dado don Antonio a Villanueva...”. (The parcels of land that don Antonio gave to Villanueva...).

Figure 5: The Fourth Pictograph. Margariño's Case



This pictorial shows vividly the punishment inflicted by Margariño upon the native lords. It is divided into three parts. The first part, on top, depicts the lashing of a local lord, forcefully held by the hair, which is a typical pictorial form of recording an act of captivity. To the left is a pictogram of the land in dispute (*tlalmilli*), and to the right are the figures of two of Margariño's stewards standing next to two measuring rods (*tlalmachiuan*). The second part, in the middle, shows on the left side four persons in the stocks; next to them is a lord tied to the tail of Margariño's horse, with Margariño mounted on the horse and holding a dagger. He is facing the figure of a corpse, presumably one of the workers who had died from overwork. On the third part, below and to the left, is the figure of the scribe (*tlacuilo*) documenting the case, and in the middle, Margariño forcefully holding and pulling the hair of a noblewoman, with the *amatl+tlalpilli* glyphs attached to her *huipil* in the form of an anthroponym. To the right is a Nahua marketplace (*tianquiztli*) glyph consisting of a *momoztli* (marketplace shrine) glyph, with footprints leading in different directions, as in the *Matrícula de Huexotzinco* (Durán 1967, 1: 177). Note that the two acts of holding by the hair closely resemble the war captive scenes on fol. 65r in the *Codex Mendoza* and similar scenes of maltreatment in the Tepetlaoztoc case (*Codex Kingsborough*): all of them denote a state of captivity.

The final extant text in the Tenayocan affair refers to the act of translating or transcribing the above pictograms into a verbal form in exactly the same way that pictorial writing was supplemented in the native court of law by oral testimony. On 12 September 1567, the majordomos of the local church were summoned by Julian de Salazar to translate the "painting" concerning Margariño's deeds in their town through the mediation of Francisco Ramírez, the translator. Fifty year old Pedro de Gante testified before the *juez de residencia* that these "paintings" had been presented by the barrios of San Francisco, Santa María, and San Lorenzo as "a living testimony". He thus emphasized the continued importance of pictography in transmitting information and that the primary process of recording/memorizing the acts committed was already present in the pictorial form itself, while the oral addition that customarily supplemented the visual mode was now being transformed into an alphabetized version. During this intermediary phase, recording is based on a concurrence between linguistic structures present in traditional Nahua forms (ideograms) and the already present Spanish alphabetic forms of communication.

## 5. The Annals

The Annal-type manuscripts of the late 16th century maintain the distinct traditional-pictographic nature of recording, similarly to the pictorial Annals of Aubin and Telleriano-Remensis. In the *Anales de Tecamachalco*, for example, the following astronomical record appears under the entry for Tuesday, November 4, 1577: "The great comet *citlalin huey popoca* came out from the west. We observe it to be highly potent,

from the direction of Zoyapetlayocan. Rar away, it raises its tail. It can be seen from the time of twilight.” In the margins of the text there is a pictograph of a smoking star (Solís/Reyes García 1992:79). The emphasis on natural disasters, supernatural signs, and astronomical occurrences is also present during this period both in the *Libro de los guardians of Cuauhtinchan* and in the *Anales de San Juan del Río*, from Puebla. In the largely transformed contents of the Annals during this phase, we also detect the translation of pictorial narratives dealing with sacred concerns into alphabetic form.

One of the best examples in the Annals of Cuauhtinchan is that of the hanging in 1528 of don Tomás Uillacapitz in the public market place, Temilco, in Tepeyacac (Tepeaca), by order of the Franciscan guardian, Fr. Cristóbal de Santiago. The hanging took place in the presence of dignitaries from the neighboring communities of Tecamachalco, Quecholac, Acatzinco, Tecalco, and Cuauhtinchan. The subtext is about a cannibalistic commensality of a sacrificial victim on top of the mountains Chiquilichtepetl (Fuming Mound) and Tziuhquemecan (Place of Worn to Rest). The victim, Tochayotl (a pre-Columbian title for a rabbit-hunter) was quartered on a wooden scaffolding, his heart was pulled out, and the rest of his parts were found hanging in different locations. With Uillacapitz’s consent and participation, another local dignitary, Chipeua, conducted the sacrificial meal at the site together with his mother and brother-in-law. The verb applied in the Cuauhtinchan Annal to describe the acts performed by the participants is *tlatzotzonaliztli*, which in Nahuatl means “the act of stringing or plucking a musical instrument” (Karttunen 1992). This is followed by a sentence related to a song (*cuicatl*) of the “Devil” (*tlacatecolotl*). *Tlatzotzonaliztli* could also refer to the harmony in the binding together of the performers in a sacred act of sacrifice, similar to music, the flow of water, and flowers – metaphorically speaking.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the subtext indicates that the participants, together with other women, are described as metaphorically “tuning” the instruments of a ritual sacrifice at the site of a bath (*?tlaatililli*), probably for the sake of purification. They are subsequently described as having cast lots to choose the sacrificial victim, and eventually chose the child (Solís/Reyes García 1992: 25-26). The *Códice Vaticanus A*, composed around the same period as the *Libro de los Guardianes*, contains a vivid pictorial account of such an act: five male figures are holding a sacrificial victim by his arms and legs, as one of them cuts open his chest and pulls out his bleeding heart with a stone blade. On the lower part, three additional bleeding victims await their fate (Anders/Jansen 1996).

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7 In the *Cantares mexicanos*, the threading or entwining of coiled flowers are often portrayed as symbolic acts that mean: “joining the souls of those who had died bravely in battle with the ancestors and the gods”.

Figure 6: Sacrificial Scene



Source: Códice Vaticanus A, fol. 54v.

### 6. Post-1650 Development (Lockhart's Stage 3)

We can fully determine that by the mid 17th century Nahua pictorialism, in its complex form and function, no longer existed. The poor form that remained of traditional pictography was encapsulated predominantly in two types of content: a) place-names of sites cited in earlier, pictographic manuscripts; and b) norms of recording that preceded alphabetic documentation. In the *primordial title* of San Antonio Zoyatzinco, for example, all the highly symbolic sequences of sacred sites contain clear pictorial characteristics that were once represented by glyphic toponyms. These include the boundary-altars (*momoztli/calpolli*) that formerly signaled the internal limits between settling groups: *Amixcalco* (House of Mists), *Chichinatl* (Burnt Water) (*agua chamuscada*, in Spanish), *texixitini* (Stirring the Stones), *tecalahuatzalamquitiuh* (Little Water are draining the House), *tecalxixini* (Consuming the Stone House [by the forces of the currents]), *tehuhuila* (the Powerful Stirring of the Water), and *Malinaltepec* (Place of the *Malinalli*), where the act of Foundation or “binding the lands” was concluded, near Amequemecan (Primordial title of San Antonio Zoyatzinco, AGN, Tierras, vol. 1665, exp. 5 fs 188r-194v).

Despite the mortal blow suffered by traditional pictography as a result of alphabetization and Europeanization, the toponymic essence of remembrance remained vibrant through the early part of the 18th century, and its use was closely connected with ritual reenactments of the old traditions. The case study of Tepexi de la Seda is a good example. The map entitled *Linderos de San Vicente Coyotepec*, which according to Klaus Jacklein originated from an earlier lawsuit between Acatlán and Tepexi in 1596, shows in toponyms and pictorial writing an entire list of place names and their sacred associations (AGN, Tierras, vol. 1234, exp. 1: 16v). According to Jacklein (1978: 52-53), these do not correspond to any of the names cited in the accompanying alphabetic text. Jacklein states that this map was the only one he found in the Chocho language. Nevertheless, this is yet another example of how the contextual link between the pictorial antecedents and their later translation and transformation into alphabetic writing has been at least partially mutilated in the social memory. Similarly, the dates and historical characters that appear in late 17th and mid 18th century primordial titles have become partially incomprehensible because they were separated from their original pictorial contexts.<sup>8</sup> This is what was experienced by Don Manuel Carlos Mancio in the first decade of the 18th century.

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8 Also mentioned by Tepexic's witnesses, was an entire list of boundary-markers lying on the south side of their territory that depicted toponyms, e.g., “Agua del sudor que da la piedra” (Sweat Water coming out of the Stone); “cerro de la cara del idolo” (Mound of the Idol's Face); “cerro del que truena el cumbre” (Thundring Summit). On the north side were located “tetel del temazcalli o baño” (Stone of the Sweatbath) and the “cara retratada del cacique o seño” (Illustrated Face of the Lord).

On April 22, 1712, the Spanish-commissioned judge and interpreter of the *Audiencia* in Mexico City, don Manuel Carlos Mancio, was placed in charge of interpreting the materials brought into court by the peoples of Santa María Magdalena Mixihuca, under the jurisdiction of Mexicaltzinco, and of San Gregorio Atlapulco, under the jurisdiction of Xochimilco. Mancio was acting under the strict orders of the Royal Council in Spain, delivered to him by Doctor don Juan Díaz de Bracamonte. Mancio acquired his practice of interpreting from Nahuatl indigenous alphabetic manuscripts of this area between 1704 and 1708, in the course of the important lawsuit fought in the court of the *Audiencia* in Mexico City between Santiago Tlatelolco and its surrounding communities. The lawsuit (between the inhabitants of the *parcialidad* of Santiago Tlatelolco, as a corporation and don Lúcas de Santiago, a native from the barrio of *La Concepción*, as well as some inhabitants of the barrio of San Sebastian) concerned lands, *ciénega* (marshland), and the water and products of the lake. In defense of their claim against the expropriation of their lands and property, the people of Tlatelolco presented three old maps and texts painted on *maguey* paper, which originated from the 1560s and earlier. Mancio was possibly also behind other primordial titles presented in the first decade of the 18th century from the area of Xochimilco-Milpa Alta. Appeals and lawsuits were filed in this decade by other members and cooperatives of communities bordering the lake shores against those who sought to disrupt the old order of things. Mancio was responsible for translating and interpreting the oral and written testimony presented by the litigants. The significance of this process, which was established within the framework of the Spanish-colonial court of the *Audiencia*, lay in the fact that by the first decade of the 18th century these members and corporate bodies were still able to produce a complex body of historical documents and evidence, fully substantiated by the explanations produced and translated by Manuel Mancio. Moreover, by the 18th century such narratives, despite containing separate segments of the past pertaining to three different eras, could be appropriated, integrated, and woven into a whole, coherent schema based upon pictorial and oral accounts and testimony.

On April 4, 1710, in reviewing the *Anales de San Gregorio Atlapulco*, all that Mancio was able to note was that

Likewise, having acknowledged the painting that follows, where there is a manifestation of figures, the species of which are a Reed, a Stone/Rock, a House and a Rabbit's head, that the aforesaid figures alternate with each other, it signifies that it is the Annal, expressing in them all the memorable events that occurred since the year 1519 until the year of 1606 (Archivo General de Notarias, México, fondo Contemporánea, No. 19, Vol. 60, leg. 3785, fol. 8v.).

The manuscript brought before him by the elders of Santa María Magdalena Mixihuca consisted of eight entire leaves, most probably painted on *amatl* paper, and set in the

ancient form of a folding screen (Archivo General Agrario, Fondo Reservas, Mexico City, exp. 23/899, 1708).

Mancio and the elders of Mixihuca took great care trying to decipher as many of the pictorial/glyphic details as possible, but to no avail. In contrast with the rest of native documentation that he was already accustomed to interpret, such as the primordial titles brought into court by litigating parties and as part of the legal process of legalization of land holdings in the different native communities, the manuscript of Santa María Magdalena Mixihuca did not contain any core alphabetic part but only a pictorial narration, with sparse alphabetic marginalia in Nahuatl. His native assistants' lack of knowledge of the meanings of the glyphs, the toponyms, the historic personalities, and the rest of contents made their task hopeless. Moreover, Mancio's Nahuatl transcription of the names and annotations was rife with errors, which vividly illustrates how critically misguided he was. In more than a few cases he shows his hesitation and lack of confidence about the object of his study. The reason for this confusion was the fact that the elderly delegates of Mixihuca were unable to provide Mancio with the meaning, the function, or the important role these pictorials had played in ancient times.

In the last decades of the 17th century and the early part of the 18th century, pictographic representations in indigenous texts were already essentially European in both style and technique, entirely devoid of their original nature and function. In contrast with the rich historical-pictorial narration it contained until the mid 17th century, pictography had already lost its key role in native documentation as transmitter of Mesoamerican sacred knowledge and historical data. This process is clearly present in the sub-genre of the *Techialoyans*, of which some fifty manuscripts dating from 1685 to 1716 use both the Roman alphabet and European calligraphy.

A good example is the *Techialoyan* of San Francisco Apaxco (Apatzco). Its re-edition and presentation is part of a long historical process of social and religious fragmentation that the town and its environs have increasingly undergone between the 1550s and the first decade of the 18th century. If the social memory can sometimes be read as "frozen" in time and isolated, than the overall context in which it originated is a *longue durée* one. The time span in this document goes back to the primordial era of foundation, where we encounter a site named Tzompanco (lace of the Skull Rack) which was the ancient heart of the *a-ltepe-tl* [*a-ltepe-tl yaotl*]. It is here that the church was later erected and where the *quaxochamatl* ??(title deeds) were to be guarded for ever. Ending this sequence of pictorials is a colored illustration of founding of the local church and the beginning of Christian teaching in this town "by St. Francis of Assisi" (Archivo General Agrario, Mexico City, Fondo reservado, exp. 23-02453, fol. 25r).



**Figure 7: The Christian Foundation, Techialoyan of Apatzco 1716**



Source: Courtesy of the *Archivo General Agrario*, Mexico City, Fondo reservado, exp. 23-02453, fol. 25r.

The date of 1555, at the end of the text, may be the year when the local governor and lords convened to examine in detail their pictographic histories in order to present the title-deeds before the Spanish authorities. By the last decades of the 17th century the “papers” were transcribed into an alphabetic text, as part of an overall historic process that the town underwent.

A final note. One evening, in August 2007, a group of Mexican and foreign ethnohistorians paid a nocturnal visit to one of the outlying Zapotec communities near Oaxaca to look at a local *Lienzo* that was said to be ancient. We were met at the local *Cabildo* by this town’s custodian of the local Cult of the Saints. Inside the structure, was a large, framed *Lienzo*. By its style and appearance it was the work of a late 18th-century artist, possibly inspired by a much earlier original. Or perhaps the artists relied on lingering oral traditions. The pictographic sequence recounted the original acts of foundation of the town, long before the Spanish conquest, and described its rulers and lingering conflicts with neighboring settlements. Although all the essentials of the Mesoamerican memory reservoir were retained, it’s the transformed pictographic contents of the *Lienzo* were entirely disengaged from the original roles assigned to it in Mesoamerican writing systems, and it’s the traditional components have metamorphosed into what was evidently a European-Baroque style. Moreover, by the time the *Lienzo* was commissioned by the local Zapotec nobles to defend their claims “as heirs to a glorious indigenous heritage”,<sup>9</sup> pictography had already been emptied of its major function as a receptacle of social memory, preserving sacred ritualistic formulas, data on festivals and their times of celebration, historic events and their overall contextualization, predictions regarding the action of the fates, as well as instructions for mundane activities. When evening fell, the local inhabitants who gathered at the town’s *Cabildo* were far from being able to associate the figures of their historical rulers and leaders appearing on the ancient screen with what they still knew and cherished of their oral heritage, and were eager to find out what the ethnohistorians present were able to tell them, in the hope of bridging the oral and pictographic essentials of their past. In any case, the Zapotec men were not mere spectators, then as now.

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9 See, what Stephanie Wood says about the *Techialoyans* in her “The Techialoyan Codices”, 1.

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