La República de Los Indios:
Tlaxcala, Survival, and the Struggle for Autonomy within New Spain, 1519-1558

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Abstract:
This thesis examines the strategies Tlaxcalan leaders employed to maintain their autonomy directly with the Spanish colonizers and administrative officials in their province in the 16th century. Previous scholarship has portrayed the Tlaxcalans as insignificant collaborators or willful allies of Spanish colonizers. This thesis, by contrast, shows that they maintained their autonomy through their strategic appeals to various colonial authorities, integration of Catholicism into native culture, and the use of both prestige and alliance to emphasize the importance of the province. This thesis uses contemporary annals, government records, literature, artwork, and letters created by the Tlaxcalans, and Spaniards, to analyze the methods and reasonings behind their adaptations.

Glossary[1]

Translated or defined from their original languages. (S) for Spanish (N) for Nahua.

Alcalde (S). A first-instance judge who typically also serves as a member of a municipal council (cabildo)

Alcalde Mayor (S). The chief magistrate of any given area, appointed from above. Oftentimes both the chief administrative and judicial official over several altepetl. The title **Corregidor (S)**. might also be used.

Altepetl (Pl. Altepeme) (N). Nahua conception of a sovereign state. The Spanish would use the term pueblos for their administration. A close approximation might be the American county or the European city-state.

Audiencia (S). The highest court in New Spain is located in Mexico City.

Cabildo (S). Municipal council in the Spanish style.

Cacique (S). From the Arawak, "Ruler." Used by the Spanish interchangeably with **Tlatoani (N).**

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[1] Definitions of terms were borrowed from Camila Townsend's *The Fifth Sun* (Oxford University Press, 2019), VIII-IX and James Lockhart, Nahuas After the Conquest (Stanford University Press), 607-611.

Calpolli (N). "Great House." A smaller subdistrict of the altepetl, in approximation, is a parish.

Corregidor (S). Chief Spanish judicial and administrative offer of a given district, interchangeable with **Alcalde mayor (S).**

Don, Doña (S). High title attached to the first name, like "Sir" or "Lady."

Encomienda (S). Post-conquest grant of the right to receive labor and tribute from an Indigenous altepetl. In all cases, these were given to Spaniards.

Flower Wars. Pre-Conquest form of ritual combat consisting of mock battles, which sometimes lead to death.

Gobernador (S). Governor

Huehuetque (N). Old men, elders, referring to authorities of any sociopolitical unit; also, ancestors.

Indio (S). Indian. Used as a blanket term by the Spanish for all Indigenous groups within Mexico but seldom used by the people themselves.

Macehualli (pl. macehuatlin) (N). Indigenous Commoner.

Mestizo (S). A person with mixed Spanish-Indigenous ancestry.

Mexica (N). Ethnic group that once dominated central Mexico at the time of the Spanish arrival. Now most often referred to as "Aztecs."

Nahua (N). Speakers of the Nahuatl languages. The Tlaxcalans, the Mexica, and dozens of other Indigenous peoples of Mexico where Nahuas.

Nahuatl (N). The dominant language of the Nahua peoples, lingua franca for much of Mexico in the pre-conquest and early colonial period.

Oztomecatl (pl. ozcomeca) (N). Indigenous traders.

Peso (S). Literally "piece of eight." The primary monetary unit of colonial Mexico.

Pilli (pl. pipiltin) (N). Nobleman.

Principal (S). Spanish term for prominent Indigenous person, interchangeable with the Nahua **Pilli (N). Regidor (S).** Councilman, one of the members of the **cabildo (S).**

Tlalli (N). Land

Tlatoani (pl. tlatoque) (N). Dynastic ruler of an altepetl

Visita (S). Inspection tour, visit.

A Note on Terminology, Spelling, and Pronunciation

The people and places of Mexico have many names for themselves, many of which change over the course of the colonial period, language, and era. Some of these names are close

to what the natives called themselves: the Anglicized Tlaxcala is similar enough to the Classical Nahuatl Tlaxcallān to not warrant any significant angst in using the former. However, for some terms, the familiar words used to describe peoples or places are nowhere close to what the people of the time would have called themselves or it. In 1519, there were no Aztecs to speak of. Montezuma, and the people whom he ruled over, never called themselves that.

In an earnest attempt to capture the perspective of the Indigenous Tlaxcalans, terms that closely mirror their original or capture the meaning of the original, will be used. As an example, the entity commonly known as the "Aztec Empire" will mostly be referred to as the "Triple Alliance" and the people known as Aztecs, "Mexica." Place names will change to convey the change over time as colonization ensues. For example, the term Tenochtitlan may be used in the beginning to represent the purely Indigenous nature of the city while La Ciudad de México will be used later to represent the change in character. The exception to such rules is cities founded by the Spanish or that have no known Indigenous name. For said examples, Spanish would be used. For the consideration of the reader, more familiar terms (Aztec) may be used at the beginning but will be phased out. Also, pronunciation in parentheses will be added after most Nahuatl words to help immerse the reader. For spelling, James Lockhart's *Nahuas After the Conquest* will be referred to for the Latinization of Nahuatl terms.

Introduction; Such Strange and New People

> "There were other [signs] in this province of Tlaxcala before the arrival of the Spanish, very shortly before. The first sign was that every morning a light was seen coming out of the parts of the East, three hours before the sun rose, which was like a very clear white fog, which rose to the sky, and not knowing what it could be caused great fear and consternation ... Whatever it was, at last word came of the arrival of such strange and new people, especially in Mexico..."[2]

The foreigners arrived in Tlaxcala[3] through known faces. As the midday sun rose above the distant, dormant Matlalcueye[4] volcano on the 25th of August 1519, four native men trudged, through the forests and mud of the wet season, towards the republic of the Tortillas.[5] As they made their way down the slope of the valley, they were confronted by a structure: a nine-foot-high wall built of stone, slated like a pyramid, stretching as far as the eye could see.[6] The men had reached the defensive walls of Tlaxcala in the vicinity of Ocotelolco and Tizatlán.[7] Upon finding a guarded entrance within the walls, the four men announced that they were diplomats with gifts and a message. The Tlaxcalans, being no stranger to various diplomatic missions from around Mesoamerica, quickly shuffled the men through the gates and to the council. Sat in front of the four Tlatoque of Tlaxcala, and the 250 men of the senate, they recount their tale.[8]

These four emissaries, as it turned out, were from a Totonac tribe on the west coast of Mexico, the Cempohuallans.[9] Months ago, back in April, the Cempohuallans welcomed into their city strange men who arrived on canoes that could glide on the water with cotton sheets. These strangers, who call themselves 'Caxtilteca'[10] brought to shore strange beasts, wore clothes

[2] Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, ed. Alfredo Chavero (Oficina tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1892), 171, https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/historia-de-tlaxcala--0/html/.
[3] (TLAS-cah-LA).
[4] (mah-TLAH-cwhey-YE).
[5] Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the 16th Century* (Stanford University Press, 1952), 18. In Nahuatl, Tlaxcala means something like, 'land of the corn tortillas' or, creatively, 'Tortilla-town.'
[6] Description taken from Hernán Cortés, *Cartas y relaciones de Hernan Cortés al emperador Carlos V*. Ed. Pascual de Gayangos. (Paris: A. Chaix, 1866). Microfilm. 49.
[7] Gibbons, *Tlaxcala in the 16th century*, 18. (OH-coh-TEL-oh-CO) & (TEASE-at-LAN).
[8] Ibid. 16.
[9] Ibid. 16; (SEM-poh-HUAL-ans).
[10] Nahuatl for the Castilians, the Spanish; (CAS-til-TEC-a).

they had never seen, and spoke a language none could understand except for an indigenous woman who translated for them. These Caxtilteca, the emissaries explained, were friends. The Cempohuallans themselves had allied with the Caxtilteca, who had interests in both breaking Mexica power on the continent and friendship with the Tlaxcalans.[11]

The Cempohuallans produced a message on amate[12] from the Caxtilteca, which nobody could read, but whose points the emissaries recited from memory.[13] These foreigners understood that the Tlaxcalans were a numerous and powerful nation that had fought repeatedly against the Mexica. The Caxtilteca had arrived in this land in the name of a great Tlatoani called Carlos Quinto with a desire to make an alliance and help the Tlaxcalans in all their work and needs.[14] The Cempohuallans then presented the council with the gifts of friendship from the leader of these Caxtilteca, Cordes,[15] offered: a metal sword, a crossbow, and a silk hat.[16] Given food to eat and escorted out under guard, the Cempohuallans waited for the Tlaxcalan response. The Tlaxcalans debated whether they should kill the emissaries.[17]

Founded on the rim of the Valley of Mexico, nestled dangerously close to the heart of the Mexica Empire,[18] lay the Tlaxcalan Confederacy. Founded in the mid-14th century, the Tlaxcalan Confederacy united the previously independent altepeme of Tepectipac,[19] Ocotelulco, Tizatlán, and Quiahuixtlán[20] under a quasi-republican system of a 250-man senate of nobles and

[11] Laura E. Matthew and Oudijk Michel R., ed. *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 44.
[12] Nahuatl paper made from the pulp of mulberry and fig trees.
[13] Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 171.
[14] Charles the Fifth, by the Grace of God, Emperor of the Romans, King of the Germans, King of all Spains, etc.
[15] Nahuatl translation of Cortés; (KHOR-des).
[16] To translate these items into Nahuatl might cause more trouble than it is worth, as they (the Nahua) did not know what these items were and did not have words for them at this time anyway.
[17] Ibid, 182.
[18] (ME-she-CA).
[19] (TE-pec-TE-pac).
[20] (QWE-ia-WHUI-shlan).

commoners.[21] Its 650,000 strong citizenries were mainly Nahua in origin,[22] an Indigenous ethnic group of whom the Mexica were also a part.[23] In fact, in most cultural and political aspects, the Tlaxcalans shared much in common with their more famous neighbors. However, the shared cultural values and ethnic background between peoples did not prevent a deep loathing between each state.

Two years prior, in 1517, the Tlaxcalans and the Mexica had been at war. Cholula, an altepetl that the Tlaxcalans had conquered sometime prior, succeeded with Mexica aid. In the resulting Flower War,[24] the Tlaxcalans were put under a grueling siege for months. The resulting blockade starved countless Tlaxcalans, and their economy halted without imports like salt, forced to survive from whatever the province could naturally produce.[25] In the end, it was no use. Cholula would join the Mexica as a tributary while the Tlaxcalans were forced to give tribute as reparations.[26] The Cempohuallans, despite not liking the Mexica, were still a Mexica tributary state.[27] The emissaries could be spies looking to see any weaknesses the Mexica could exploit. A

[21] Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the 16th Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1952), 10.
[22] However, the Nahua were not the only ethnic group within Mesoamerica. The Otomis — an Indigenous ethnic group that had been living in Central Mexico before the Nahua migration south in 500 BCE — lived alongside the Nahua Tlaxcalans. Perceived as "barbarians" by the Nahua, Otomi relations with the Tlaxcalans would be complicated.
[23] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 12.
[24] A secondary type of war wherein participants agree to fight based upon certain restraints for the sole purpose of gaining prisoners, training the armies, and keeping the gods happy. There is some scholarly debate as to the validity of these terms as the only source referring to it, not by name, is by the Mexica Lord, Ixtlilxochitl. By the description of the war from the Tlaxcalan perspective, it appears to be an actual war as opposed to a ceremonial conflict. I am joined in my questioning by recent Nahua Historians such as Camilia Townsend and Matthew Restall, who argue that the concept of the Flower War may be the result of Mexica propaganda creating a potentially fictive ceremony to justify why exactly they never managed to conquer Tlaxcala and other altepeme. To this point I am uncertain. For the purposes of this thesis, the term Flower Wars will be used to refer to the long string of conflict between the Mexica and the Tlaxcalans between 1450 and 1519 with the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, arguably, being the last Flower War.
[25] Matthew Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés,* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2018), 210. Restall's methodology and analysis of primary material is questionable at best. Yet, he was the only one to offer a concise detail of a war between the Mexica and the Tlaxcalans briefly mentioned in the works of Gibson and Lockhart. It is for this reason he is used.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Matthew, *Indian Conquistadors,* 46.

private deliberation took place between the tlatoque.[28] To not kill the emissaries and publicly accept their proposals, was the decision by the Council.

This innocuous meeting between the Tlaxcalan council and Spanish representatives would set in motion a political relationship unique to the region and era — one of association, coercion, and autonomy that endured over three hundred years later when the Spanish administration of Mexico collapsed. It was not assured in August of 1519 when both parties hardly knew each other. It was not guaranteed after the events of the Spanish Conquest of 1521 when other native allies were crushed and the former Mexica enemies of the Tlaxcalans were made prominent notables of the New Spanish nobility. For the Tlaxcalans, despite the assuring words of the Fray missionaries and the de-jure pledge of autonomy gained in 1535 by the Spanish king, their province and way of life stood poised, on the edge of catastrophe: one wrong move away from becoming like their erstwhile Mexica foe.

The Tlaxcalan leadership ensured the survival of their homeland by adapting their society to the perceptions of a loyal, yet autonomous vassal expected by the Spaniards. To do so, the Tlaxcalan nobility acted as a bridge between the two societies, Spanish and Nahua, to gain the social-legal capital necessary to protect the autonomy of their province. In the pursuit of this interest, the Tlaxcalans negotiated each step of the subjugation process from the initial alliance with the Cortés to the later development of tributes and tithes. This constant negotiation with the Spaniards established that the Tlaxcalans would accept being vassals yet not unilaterally accept diktats that, in their eyes, impeded their previously established privileges. In their own province, the Tlaxcalans adapted their own society towards one that the Spanish preferred through the adoption of Catholicism and the creation of a more Spanish-influenced government structure. Yet even when the Tlaxcalans seemingly took definitive actions in favor of assimilation and total

[28] Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the 16th Century*, 18.

subjugation, it was not so. In terms of religion, the Tlaxcalans highlighted the distinctiveness of their Catholicism through the creation of historical narratives placing themselves at the heart of Mexican Catholicism, as well as the adoption of particular ceremonies unique to Tlaxcalan Catholicism. In terms of Government, the Tlaxcalan Cabildo was largely a renamed Nahua Council with the same functions from the pre-colonial era. As well as reforms within the province, outside the province, the Tlaxcalans negotiated for themselves within the concept of the República de Indios, a Spanish concept that allowed for a special jurisdiction for Indigenous communities to govern themselves as vassals of the Spanish crown and not colonial subjects. This constant negotiation, along with the varied adaptations of Tlaxcala to colonial life in the early 16th century marks the province as a unique exception in the history of Spanish Colonialism and offers a unique insight towards the rapidly changing world of what would be called Mexico.

"Acknowledged themselves as subjects and vassals of your Majesty": The Beginnings of the Tlaxcalan-Spanish Alliance (1519-1525)

> "I reminded them of all they had done to oppose my progress, and many other matters, which I omit to mention that I may not weary your Highness. Finally, they remained, and acknowledged themselves as subjects and vassals of your Majesty, offering their persons and their estates for your royal service. This they carried into effect, and have remained faithful to the present time; and I believe they will always continue so, as your Majesty will hereafter see."[29]

The beating heart of the Tlaxcalan Confederacy, both before the Spaniards came and long after, is the vehicle of the altepetl and the concept of alliance. The primary form of political organization for Nahua peoples was small communities which were called altepeme.[30] More than its size, what differentiated the altepetl[31] from any of its European counterparts was its social structure.[32] Unlike the European feudal county, where all powers judicial and administrative

[29] Hernán Cortés, *Cartas y relaciones*, 54.
[30] James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest* (Stanford University Press, 1992), 14. (AHL-te-PEH-me).
[31] (AHL-te-PETL).
[32] Lockhart, *Nahuas*, 14-15.

were held vertically by the county lord, the primary mode of organization of the typical altepetl was a horizontal system of the members of society with a rotating head to lead the state. For the Tlaxcalans, their confederacy consisted of four altepeme: Tepectipac, Ocotelulco, Tizatlán, and Quiahuixtlán. Each was 300 square miles, and each had its own head of state. What kept each Tlaxcalan altepetl within the confederal system was the composite system of alliance and state-building unique to Mesoamerica.

According to Tlaxcalan pre-history, they initially lived in the mythical land of Astlan before migrating south into modern-day Mexico.[33] Over the course of this migration, which lasted for a few centuries, the Tlaxcalans would separate into different groups before re-settling into modern-day Tlaxcala.[34] What this pre-history establishes is the common lineages between the individual altepetl and the larger Nahuatl peoples, establishing a path to negotiation against an aggressive Mexica Empire. The Tlaxcalan confederal model was also influenced to a large degree by the structure of the altepetl. According to James Lockhart, the "Nahua manner of creating larger constructs …tended to place emphasis on a series of equal, separate states and self-contained constituent parts of the whole… [was] by no means incapable of producing real, cohesive, larger units.[35]" The formation of the Tlaxcalan confederacy, despite its outward fragility, united because of the uniqueness of Mesoamerican political structures and the pressures of warfare in the region. These traits allowed for the Tlaxcalans to form into a confederated polity of atlepeme. Tlaxcalan conflict with the Mexica solidified that confederated polity into a rock, which the Flower Wars did not break. Yet the arrival of the Spanish would put this Confederacy to the test.

[33] Glass-Coffin, eds. *Anónimo Mexicano,* 9.
[34] Glass-Coffin, eds. *Anónimo Mexicano,* 9. (AS-tlan)
[35] Lockhart, *Nahuas*, 15.

Despite publicly agreeing to the alliance the Cempohuallans offered, inwardly the Tlaxcalan Council had a much different, conflicting opinion. Led by the Tlatoani Xicotencatl, and his son Xicotencatl the younger, the 'militarist' faction of the council outwardly rejected the plan by the 'moderate' members, led by the Tlatoani Maxixcatzin, to accept the Spanish alliance.[36] Instead, they proposed they attack the Spaniards as these new people could be allied with the Mexica, or otherwise a new potential rival in the region. After some debate, and the intervention of a third Tlatoani, Tlehuexolotzin: to offer peace and friendship to the Spaniards but engage in a military expedition to, hopefully, drive them away from their province.[37] If the plan succeeded, the Tlaxcalans would have prevented the potential subjugation of the province. If the plan failed, they could accept the alliance and blame the battles on other, rogue native groups in the region.[38]

Around August of 1519, after four months of reconnoitering their position, Cortés set off into the interior for Tlaxcala. Within weeks Cortés reached the border which separated Tlaxcalan territory from their Mexica neighbors. Upon his arrival at the border wall, Cortés sent more Cempohuallans to ensure the friendliness of the Tlaxcalans and made camp in the Zacatlan-Ixtacmaxtitlan region for seven or eight days.[39] The Spanish, like the Cempohuallans, had no idea of the Tlaxcalan strategy upon first contact. This reality was made manifest when five days after the Spanish entered Tlaxcalan territory — the first week of September — the Tlaxcalans met the Spanish in a pitched battle.[40] Neither Cortés nor his contemporaries recorded any dates or locations for their Tlaxcalan expedition, however, what was recorded was the irreplaceable casualties they took in their first encounter with the Tlaxcalans, including two horses and 10

[36] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 18. (SHE-coh-TEN-catl) & (MA-she-CAT-zin).
[37] Ibid. (TLE-hue-SHO-lot-ZIN).
[38] Ibid.
[39] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 19. (ZAH-cah-TLAN – ISH-tac-MAS-tit-LAN).
[40] Matthew, *Indian Conquistador*, 46.

soldiers killed with many more wounded. The battle was a draw, and the Tlaxcalans and Spanish retreated to lick their wounds and bury their dead.[41] Despite this, the Spanish were not deterred and their military, though weakened, were just as capable as ever. Xicotencatl's gambit had failed.

The Tlaxcalans sent diplomatic emissaries to Hernán Cortés soon after the final battles outside their Confederacy. Understanding that the initial plan of scaring Cortés off by force had failed, the emissaries announced their intention to surrender to Cortés. The Tlaxcalan emissaries now said they thought Cortés was a vassal of Montezuma and had thus attacked him for the belief that he was there to subjugate them. The Tlaxcalans then gave an official invitation for Cortés to enter the city and be received as a friend and ally.[42] Cortés chastised them severely for their actions, saying "that they well knew the losses they had sustained were entirely owing to themselves; that I had entered their territory in the belief that I was coming among friends... and yet they had attacked me …and fought against me.[43]" Cortés accepted their invitation, yet he did not move.

While the Tlaxcalans waited and prepared every effort to receive Cortés's entry with as much ceremony as they could muster, Cortés would make no attempt to hide the emissaries from Montezuma he received. Finally, sometime between September 18 and September 23, 1519, Cortés would enter the Confederacy proper, emissaries from Montezuma in tow.[44] For the first time, in the central plaza of Tizatlan, the Spanish Conquistador would meet the gaze of the most prominent leaders of the Tlaxcalan Confederacy: Maxixcatzin of Ocelulco, the Xicotencatls (father and son) of Tizatlan, Citalpopoca of Quiahuixtlán,[45] and Tlehuexolotzin of Tepectipac. If

[41] Matthew, *Indian Conquistador*, 46.
[42] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 20-21.
[43] Cortés, *Cartas*, 58-59.
[44] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 21.
[45] (SEE-tal-PAH-poh-CAH).

Cortés recognized the junior Xicotencatl as the leader of the war party that attacked him, he would make no comment on it. The Tlaxcalan tlatoque gifted Cortés and his men food, accommodations, and their daughters.[46] One of the leaders, Maxixcatzin, would go as far as to personally confess their initial plans to Cortés and plead for his forgiveness.[47] Cortés announced he would forgive the Tlaxcalans and would accept them, "as subjects and vassals of your Majesty…and have remained faithful to the present time; and I believe they will always continue so, as your Majesty will hereafter see.[48]"

The Tlaxcalans and the Spanish had an alliance. But that fact did not mean they necessarily trusted or were always faithful to each other. The very first challenge came immediately from the emissaries of Montezuma Cortés had brought with him. The emissaries accused the Tlaxcalans of disingenuously entering an alliance. The Tlaxcalans refuted this claim intensely.[49] When Cortés announced his plans to continue to another altepetl, Cholula, on his route to Tenochtitlán, the Tlaxcalans, Maxixcatzin specifically, argued that Cortés should not go to Cholula while the emissaries argued he should, causing another round of squabbling.[50] Instead of taking sides or mediating between his allies and the emissaries, Cortés simply stood by and gleefully watched. In his letters, he described his feelings thus, "I was not a little pleased on seeing their want of harmony, as it seemed favorable to my designs,[51]" before telling off both parties by quoting Matthew the Evangelist, "Every kingdom divided against itself shall be rendered desolate," an ominous forewarning in the light of the following events.[52] According to Diego Munoz Camargo, when Cortés finally did leave for Cholula with over 12,000 Tlaxcalan

[46] Bernal Diaz de Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain* (Penguin Books, 1963), 176-178.
[47] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 21.
[48] Cortés, *Cartas*, 58-59.
[49] Matthew, ed. *Indian Conquistadors*, 46.
[50] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 28.
[51] Cortés, *Cartas*, 59.
[52] Cortés, *Cartas*, 59.

auxiliaries, "to avoid bad thoughts, as well as other new incidents and proposals, Cortés saw to it that his new friends and confederates did not leave his side, using his wits as always, as an astute leader, to take advantage of a favorable situation.[53]" In essence, he was treating his "allies" with as much trust as his enemies on the field.

If Cortés' actions revealed the ambiguous nature of the Tlaxcalan-Spanish alliance, some of the Tlaxcalans themselves would reinforce this ostensible friendship with their own politicking. While some Tlaxcalan leaders, such as Maxixcatzin, did their utmost to uphold the new status quo, others did not. Xicotencatl the younger, whose plan to deter Cortés failed, never did give up his opposition to the Tlaxcalan-Spanish alliance. Publicly, Xicotencatl embraced Cortés when he first entered Tlaxcala and served as a captain under him during the rest of the Conquest, despite Spanish suspicion of him for his initial plans.[54] When the Spanish siege of Tenochtitlán failed on La Noche Triste, Xicotencatl's distrust of the Spaniards was made manifest. As the Spaniards limped their way back to Tlaxcala, Mexica emissaries secretly made a proposal to the Tlaxcalan council: if the Tlaxcalans made an alliance with the Mexica and destroyed the Spaniards, the Triple Alliance would transfer a quarter of their own territory to the Tlaxcalans.[55] At this, Xicotencatl jumped on the offer. However, in this, he was opposed by Maxixcatzin and his own father Xicotencatl the elder.[56] In a heated council debate, it was decided that the offer would be rejected. Begrudgingly, Xicotencatl the younger would return to his post, under the unforgiving gaze of Cortés' eyes.

Despite the ambiguity of the alliance with the Spaniards and the cynical actions on both sides, the incentives for it were clear. With the alliance, Cortés received an army of around

[53] Cortés, *Cartas*, 59.
[54]Diego Muñoz Camargo, *El Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, ed. Alredo Chavero (Editorial Cosmos, 1979), 58.
[55] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 25.
[56] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 25.

10,000-12,000 men to support his own 200 Spanish soldiers.[57] The Tlaxcalan military, because of the constant fighting with the Mexica, constituted some of the most experienced armies in Mesoamerica. Cortés, who never mentioned their numbers and rarely commented on their actions in his letters, nonetheless praised the bravery of a few of his native 'amigos' in battle with the Mexica.[58] For the Tlaxcalans, the alliance too had its benefits. Firstly, the Tlaxcalan council presented the alliance itself as a victory. It meant the Tlaxcalans were technically independent and not a conquered people. Atop this, many Tlaxcala and its leaders gained rewards for their service. An example of such a reward comes from the service of Chichimecatecuhtli, a captain from Ocelculco. Cortés publicly praised him and pledged to give him lands and vassals.[59] The state itself was praised by many after it sheltered the Spanish after La Noche Triste, an act that would win it much favor later in the polity's history.[60]

This was not to say that there was never any danger posed by the Spanish towards the Tlaxcalans. Once the conquest of the Mexica empire was completed by the 13th of August 1521, the Spanish turned their attention elsewhere. They turned towards the Purhépecha to the West. The Purhépecha Empire was another polity separate from the Triple Alliance who had fought several wars with the Mexica, like the Tlaxcalans.[61] After the conquest, Cortés sent Cristóbal de Olid to the Purhépecha capitol, Tzintzuntzan.[62] They chose not to fight and surrendered wherein they were granted autonomy and military service under the Spanish, like the Tlaxcalans.[63] However, this arrangement did not last. Overlapping administrative duties allowed for the brutal conquistador, Nuño de Guzmán, to conquer the Purhépecha in 1530, on the grounds it was not

[57] Matthew, ed. *Indian Conquistadors*, 23.
[58] Matthew, ed. *Indian Conquistadors*, 24.
[59] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 25. It must be mentioned, that this particular soldier does play a controversial, if contested, role in the events to come, which may explain his rewards.
[60] Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 56.
[61] Matthew, ed. *Indian Conquistadors*, 27. (PUR-he-PECH-a).
[62] (TSIN-tsun-TSAN).
[63] Matthew, ed. *Indian Conquistadors*, 27.

handing over the proper amount of gold in what has been described as a "genocidal campaign of expansion.[64]" The Tlaxcalan senate, whose soldiers had been a part of this campaign, must have taken note of the eerie similarities between the two states, and the result of non-cooperation. The Tlaxcalan leadership themselves would not be exempt from learning this lesson from the Spanish. In 1521, when Cortés was on campaign in Guatemala, Xicotencatl the younger, the mastermind of the anti-Spanish faction from the beginning was executed by Cortés.[65] As he told the Tlaxcalan council, which still included his father, desertion, which the younger Xicotencatl was accused of, was a death penalty offense in Spain.[66] There is no definitive record of the elder Xicotencatl's reaction.[67]

The Tlaxcalan-Spanish alliance presents itself as a myriad of challenges and opportunities for the natives of Tlaxcala. On the one hand, as the natural form of diplomacy and state-building to Nahua culture, it gave the Tlaxcalans great benefits and esteem, and it finally defeated the age-old enemy of the Tlaxcalans: the Mexica. Yet, never had such a polity come to so completely dominate Mesoamerica as the Spanish had, and the dangers of outright conquest never went away. Yet the history of the alliance shows how the Tlaxcalans would interact with

[64] Matthew, ed. *Indian Conquistadors*, 35.
[65] The exact reason why Xicotencatl was executed remains somewhat unclear and changes from source to source. According to Bernal Diaz de Castillo, Xicotencatl was planning a rebellion when he was caught by Chichimecatecuhtli and killed. Diego Camargo, however, states that Cortés was passing, misheard Xicotencatl and, in a fit of rage, killed him. Cortés himself claims Xicotencatl was planning on deserting, which he had previously warned him about, and when he heard he was planning on deserting him again, he had him executed. Juan Buenaventura Zapata Y Mendoza claims that Cortés always intended to kill Xicotencatl because Xicotencatl had opposed him at every stage and simply waited until he was campaigning in Guatemala to prevent immediate outrage in Tlaxcala.
[66] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 25.
[67] For clarity, it must be mentioned that in Bernal Diaz de Castillo's testimony, it was Xicotencatl the elder who begged Cortés to kill his son upon hearing the charges levied against him. However, Bernal Diaz de Castillo's history is notorious for its falsifications to the point where his is sometimes called "the first fiction novel of Latin America." Thus, any detail must be taken with a grain of salt. It is doubtable that Cortés would pause an entire campaign, wait for word to go to Tlaxcala and come back, before acting. It is also highly convenient for the conquistadors that his father's hands should also be soaked in his son's blood. Castillo's testimony is also at odds with most others in the sense that the events that led to the younger Xicotencatl's death appear to happen relatively quickly, over a day or so, whereas his version would mean the events likely dragged over weeks and would have likely caused outrage in Tlaxcala. A quick death would have prevented any objections from occurring until it was too late.

the Spanish: gaining tangible benefits and autonomy from their cooperation yet, understanding the metaphorical rapier at their backs and the fact that its master is not above using it against anyone. Coercion and autonomy, independence, and subjugation would be the main factors upon which the Tlaxcalans would have to carefully balance and navigate for the rest of the 16th century. An uneasy, trepidatious situation.

"To grant them much favor": the Creation of the Catholic Nation (1524-1545)

> "The Conquistadors say that the Tlaxcaltecs deserve His Majesty grant them much favor, and that if it had not been for them, they [the Spaniards] would all have been dead, when the Mexica repulsed the Christians from Mexico, and that the Tlaxcaltecs offered them a haven."[68]

After the Mexica were defeated, the Tlaxcalans found themselves with no room to maneuver. With the Mexica gone, there was no other power to contest Spanish hegemony on the continent. The process of alliance-building, which had defined Mesoamerican culture for centuries, was over. With its death, the Tlaxcalan leadership had to quickly contend with a new, unfamiliar strain of politics. The only way forward now was through the totalizing gaze of the Spanish. Despite this period being a nadir in Indigenous perspectives,[69] this era marks a fundamental shift in how the Tlaxcalans approached and adapted to the Spanish and their culture.

The Catholic priests too had a conquest on their mind: the conversion of the Indigenous people into the faithful, pious Catholics seen in Spain. The Tlaxcalan-Spanish interaction always had some religious components from the beginning. Mestizo businessman and Historian Diego

[68] Restall, *Seven Myths*, 44. This book incorporates text from *Relación de los ritos antiguos, idolatrías y sacrificios de los indios de esta Nueva España, y de la maravillosa conversión que Dios en ellos ha obrado*, a work by Fray Toribio de Benavente, 1540.

[69] Between the Conquest and roughly the 1530s, Classical Nahuatl had yet to be Latinized and transformed into a written script. Older texts, which might have contained some information about the time period, were burned by Spanish priests between the 1530s and 1550s for potentially containing heretical ideas. Spanish Historians during and after this period were primarily interested in the "adventure" of the Conquest or the aspects of Indigenous culture that needed to be targeted for conversion.

Muñoz Camargo describes in his *Historia de Tlaxcala*, the first interaction between the Spanish and the Tlaxcalans as Cortés happily proclaiming that he,

> "…brought with him the true God, because the gods that they worshiped were false and made by hand and by the hand of mortal men; and that the God whom he and his companions worshiped was the one who had created the heaven, and the earth, and all that was in it.[70]"

Bernal Diaz del Castillo also recalled Cortés' epistle to the Tlaxcalans. Unlike Camargo, Castillo recalled their reply, "that we should not trouble to discuss that subject [Conversion] with them again because they were not going to quit making sacrifices even if they were killed for it.[71]" Despite the emphasis on conversion in later historical works, Cortés' actions at that time stated that conversion to the true faith was of secondary importance.

In the face of the promulgation of Requerimientos,[72] the preaching by Cortés, and the campaign of fire and brimstone Cortés inflicted on pagan idols on his way towards Tlaxcala, once within Tlaxcala, Cortés made no attempt to burn pagan idols.[73] Cortés found it expedient to postpone conversion later for an alliance now, he would, however, convince the Tlatotoque to allow for the construction of a Christian shrine on top of a temple, with the first, rather rustic, mass being held in late September 1519.[74] Despite the church being erected for Spanish use, it was done so under Tlaxcalan labor and under Tlaxcalan authority.[75] A few Tlaxcalans attended Mass or prayer services, with Xicotencatl and Maxixcatzin having been mentioned being witnesses to the first mass.[76] Throughout the campaigns of the conquest, whilst the Spanish and

[70] Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 182.
[71] de Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 185.
[72] The Requerimiento of 1513 was a legal proclamation issued by all conquistadors before the engagement of hostilities. It outlined who the Spanish were, why they were there, and offered the Indigenous an opportunity to convert to Catholicism or be subjected to war and the brutal deprivations thereof. This was an early attempt by the Spanish Crown to prevent the massive abuses seen by the early conquistadors.
[73] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 29.
[74] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 33.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

Tlaxcalans nominally fought in the name of the Christian God and a brave few participated in Catholic services, the Tlaxcalan population continued openly worshiping their native deities.[77] The situation abruptly changed in the mid-1520s.

On the 14th of May 1524, twelve Franciscan missionaries from Spain arrived in Mexico for the sole purpose of converting the native populations to Catholicism.[78] Walking the whole route from Veracruz to México-Tenochtitlan barefoot and clothed only with the brown habits of the Franciscans, the missionaries arrived in Tlaxcala on a brief pause on their route to Mexico City.[79] Ragged, dirty, and without the recognizable helmets or haughtiness of the Spanish conquistador, they made quite the impression. One Fray,[80] Toribio of Benavente, would hear the Tlaxcalans refer to him and his brothers as "Motolinía," when asked what this meant, he was told it meant poor or ragged. He would take that word as his name.[81] In Tlaxcala, Fray "Motolinía" would build a strong rapport with the local Tlaxcalans, sharing whatever food items he was given and playing games with some of the children.[82]

The Frays were not there to share food or play with children. The *Inter-Caetera,* a Papal Bull in which the Papacy justified the colonization of the New World, exhorted the Spanish monarchs that "the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself.[83]" Armed with this justification, and with the vigor of the Spanish Church, the Frays were sent by the Spanish crown for the sole purpose of

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Matthew, *Indian Conquistadors*, 272.
[80] Fray is the Spanish term for Friar and used much throughout Colonial Spanish America.
[81] Restall, *When Montezuma met Cortés*, 240.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Pope Alexander VI, "Inter Caetera: Division of the Undiscovered world Between Spain and Portugal," May 4, 1493, Papal Encyclicals Online, accessed October 2023, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/alex06/alex06inter.htm.

establishing monasteries, schools, and above all, converting the natives. They were not the first to do so, smaller numbers of Frays and priests, many of whom would have a profound effect on Mexican Catholicism, arrived with Cortés and undoubtedly began the process in a limited fashion. Indeed, these missionaries, who would later be called Twelve Apostles of Mexico and seven of whom would live for years within Tlaxcala, would build upon techniques learned by these early missionaries such as learning the language and inventing techniques for learning doctrine.[84] What these men represented, however, was the first large-scale, systematic attempt to convert the natives of Mexico towards the true faith. In Tlaxcala, they saw, firsthand, what they would be dealing with. The Twelve Apostles did not like what they saw.

The people of Tlaxcala had not converted by 1524. Of those who attended mass and prayer services, the Christian God was another deity to worship alongside traditional Nahua gods. In the words of Motolinía, the Spanish conquest had simply made 101 gods, where 100 had been before.[85] Yet the fact that the Tlaxcalans accepted the Christian God at all speaks to the ability of the Tlaxcalans to adapt to the new situation. According to James Lockhart, for the Nahua peoples of Mesoamerica, the victory of Cortés and the establishment of Spanish rule was prima facie evidence of the superiority of the Christian God.[86] Thus, the "natives needed less to be converted than to be instructed.[87]" The instruction would begin immediately.

With the permission of Maxixcatzin, three of the Franciscans (Fray García de Cisneros, Fray Martín de Coruña, and Fray Andrés de Córdoba) established a monastery within the Tlatoani's palace.[88] From there, the brothers would go out into the streets of Ocotelolco to preach

[84] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 33.
[85] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 33.
[86] James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 203.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 34.

to the laypeople.[89] The Franciscan order of brothers practiced an emotive form of Christianity, intended to convert the laity through the heart and will through concrete, stirring language and verbal images.[90] Whilst other orders have been better at logically and intellectually debating the merits of Christian morality to university students, such as the Dominicans, Franciscans were masters of *sermo humilis*[91] dramatically involving the listeners in a world of action.[92] However, for all their attentiveness towards serving the needs of the laity, there was one glaring issue: language. To rectify this, the brothers began converting adults to help serve as assistants to the conversion process. However, they found a more eager, available assistant elsewhere: the children of Tlaxcala.

Once the sons and daughters of the nobility and commoners alike lost their fear of the odd-looking and tonsured Spaniards, they began to participate in games with the Frays as they had with Motolinía.[93] The intention of these games was twofold: to begin to learn the Nahuatl language and to build a rapport with the population. Largely completing this, the Franciscans opened a school within their monastery to instruct the sons of the Pilli on the finer points of Christian doctrine, establishing a church school service for child preachers.[94]

In 1525, a group of neophyte converts came upon a native priest within the market of Tlaxcala, attempting to preserve the worship of the gods, Omectohcli and Tezxatlipoca.[95] The youths stoned the native priest to death in an act that shocked their horrified Frays.[96] Despite

[89] Gibson, *Tlaxcala,* 33.
[90] Jaime Lara. *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.), 42.
[91] Humble Speech, or Homilies directed towards the laity rather than 'arrogant rhetoric designed to impress' in the words of St. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, Book IV.
[92] Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs,* 42.
[93] Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs,* 61.
[94] Gibson, *Tlaxcala,* 33.
[95] (OH-mec-TOH-cli) & (TEZ-sha-TLI-po-CA).
[96] Gibson, *Tlaxcala,* 33.

being punished severely by the Frays; the boys did not understand why as they believed they had not killed a man but a demon in human form.[97] The Children's Crusade continued. Starting in January of that same year, Tlaxcalan children, mainly the sons of noblemen and other prominent scions, would energetically lead the Frays against the native temples and images of the Nahuatl Gods their society worshipped for centuries. For several years afterwards until the early 1530s, the sporadic raids and burnings of indigenous temples and idolatry would continue, spearheaded by the children of Tlaxcala.[98]

In 1527, Fray Martin de Valencia, one of the Twelve Apostles, came to Tlaxcala with a zeal to destroy idolatry. He immediately moved the Franciscan monastery from Maxixcatzin's Palace to a separate building. With some support of the child preachers but acting of his own accord and church administration, de Valencia took idols from the shrine of Camaxtli and set them alight in the town square.[99] Yet he would not solely burn idols, as, in unprecedented and unauthorized step as a mere Fray, Valencia would commence the first auto-da-fé in Tlaxcala. Tenamazacuicultzin, Cuahtotohua, Acxotecatl, and Atltlontzin were accused of heresy by local priests and, under the orders of de Valencia, were executed by burning.[100] Compiling the extraordinary nature of this act, was the reality that all four were high-ranking members of the Tlaxcalan nobility and had either served with Cortés during the conquest, were relatives of the current Tlatoque of Tlaxcalan altepeme, or both.[101] Once again, as in the case of Xicotencatl the younger 8 years before, service and rank could not save from Spanish wrath.

[97] Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 61.
[98] Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 61.
[99] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 34. (CA-mas-TLI).
[100] Ibid. (TE-na-MAH-sha-QWUI-cul-TZIN), (CUAH-toh-TOH-hua), (ACK-sho-TE-catl), and (ATL-tlon-TZIN).
[101] Ibid.

In keeping with a growing generational divide, the parents and elders of Tlaxcala would fight back against their own children and the growing influence of the priests. This development was best represented by one of the men on the scaffold that day: Acxotecatl. Acxotecatl had previously been the leader for the Tlaxcalan Catholics, served with Cortés at Coyocan, as well as son-in-law to Maxixcatzin.[102] In all, he appeared to be the very model of the compliance the Spanish desired. He was not. According to the records of Fray Motolinía, who was staying in the province and now investigating the deaths of the boys he educated, Acxotecatl was not at all adherent to the new Catholic religion and has desperately tried to prevent his eldest and favorite son, Cristobal, from being educated by the Franciscans.[103] In this he failed, his ruse was found out and Cristobal was sent to the mission for education along with several of his stepbrothers (Acxotecatl had 60 wives).[104] When Cristobal, who was described as 'good,' 'intelligent,' and 'prudent' in the Nahuatl annals, returned from the mission he immediately began preaching to the servants and laity around his father's household.[105] This his father did not like. The breaking point was when Cristobal destroyed some of his father's idols. Allegedly with the support of one of his other wives, Acxotecatl invited his son to a banquet where he was imprisoned, beaten, and burnt, before being stabbed to death by his own father alongside his mother, who was killed trying to defend him.[106] This was found out and Acxotecatl was subsequently put to death.

This would not be the only homicide caused by religious tensions. In 1529 two more boys, Antonio and Juan were put to death by locals in the Cuauhtinchan region of what is now Puebla state for desecrating native graves.[107] (An important note, Antonio was the grandson of

[102] Ibid.
[103] Robert Haskett, *Dying for Conversion: Faith, Obedience, and the Tlaxcalan Boy Martyrs in New Spain*, 185.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Haskett, *Dying for Conversion*, 186.
[107] (CUAH-tin-CHAN).

Xicotencatl and heir to his grandfather).[108] Political tensions too were not far away. There is some evidence to support the idea that the altepetl of Quiahuiztlan had briefly succeeded and replaced their Franciscan missionaries with Dominican ones, sometime between the 1530s and 1540s.[109] Yet despite all the resistance against the encroachment of Christianity, it was futile. The Frays, empowered by ecclesiastical councils in Mexico City, could make life very difficult for heretics to the Catholic faith. In this instance, it was prudent to bend and at least begin the slow process of converting to the new religion of the Spaniards.

The exact nature of this new Catholic religion was not an exact copy of the religion practiced in Spain. Boys and girls sent to learn the catechism often brought a gourd filled with squash as an offering.[110] During the festivals of Holy Week in Tlaxcala in 1536, the natives began making offerings of incense, tapers, pigs, and blankets, whereafter they formally danced around the church in a solemn procession.[111] In the words of Motolinía "I was astonished to see anything so new.[112]" During Corpus Christi 1538, in what was described to have been attended by thousands, an outdoor church was made from thousands of arches made from flowers whilst the holy sacrament was accompanied by files of Tlaxcalans bearing images of saints and crosses worked with gold and expensive, exotic feathers.[113] Theater productions of the fall of Adam and Eve, and other biblical events also shaped Tlaxcalan religious life. Elaborate offerings, ceremonial accouterment, and devotions to saints would characterize Tlaxcalan Catholicism for many years to come. Yet, the beliefs of this Catholicism were also different. Christ was often referred to as 'the Eagle' or "the Sun" both by Frays in an attempt to convey the importance of

[108] Haskett, *Dying for Conversion*, 192.
[109] Lockhart, *Nahuas after the Conquest*, 232.
[110] Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 61.
[111] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 37.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

Jesus and by the locals to transfer the importance the concepts had had in traditional religion into Catholicism.[114] Nahuatl was often used alongside Latin in prayers or songs.[115] The concept of heaven and hell was particularly foreign, as the Nahuatl religion did not really have a concept of an eternal life wherein one's actions dictated future, spiritual realms. For the most part, when the Tlaxcalans conceptualized it, they understood it as merely another world to be lived in.[116]

The biggest impact Catholicism would have on the Tlaxcala and its inhabitants would be how it told and interpreted the history of the province and of religion in New Spain. Beginning in the 1530s and continuing until the end of the century, local Frays like Toribio de Motolinía and Bernardo de Sahagun, with the help of secular laypeople like Diego Muñoz Camargo would write some of the earliest documented accounts of Tlaxcalan history. The stories often told by these narratives, written in cooperation with former child preachers turned monks, emphasized Catholicism's special relationship with Tlaxcala. One popular narrative tells that Cortés himself planted a cross upon entering Tlaxcala, another says that it appeared by divine intervention.[117] Another account states that, when the first mass was celebrated, a divine light was shown upon a pagan temple whereafter a demon in pig form was seen by the natives scurrying away.[118] One author goes as far as to state that the "light in the sky continued to glow miraculously for three or four years, and a column of cloud hovered over the cross until the entire province was converted."[119]

In what represents the victory of the new generation over the old, these particularly Christian histories of Tlaxcala scrub away any attachment to Nahuatl traditional religion and

[114] Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs,* 59.
[115] Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs,* 212.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Gibbons, *Tlaxcala,* 30.
[118] Haskett, *Dying for Conversion*,190-1.
[119] Ibid.

emphasize the province's particular susceptibility towards the 'true faith' in the events following the conquest. More than an academic retelling of events, many of these histories would be spun into pseudo-historical folk narratives by the Tlaxcalans and accepted as fact. Through this, the preaching of the Frays, and the growing participation towards the new religion, Catholicism, despite the pains and threats associated with its formal introduction in the province, would be reworked and reimagined into the social and cultural fiber of Tlaxcala.

"We will accompany you wherever you go": Death, and the Birth of a New Era, 1530-1558

> "And our King said, "Why do you do this?" and they [the Tlatoque] answered him, "We will accompany you wherever you go. We were already aware of your concerns. Thus did our ancestors so that the marquis [Cortés] conquered all the Altepetls." The King was very grateful for these words. He said "Truly you are impressive, you Tlaxcalans. You make clear both the respect you deserve and the respect you give to others. May our Lord God keep you. I thank you deeply."[120]

In the face of uncertainty from the conquistadors and the church, the Tlaxcalans turned to the only power that could potentially reign in the growing colonial pressures on Tlaxcalan society: Madrid. On April 22, 1535, after receiving an embassy from Tlaxcala to redress the issues the province faced from local, Spanish Authorities, Holy Roman Emperor and Spanish King Charles V affixed his name to a long, illustrated piece of parchment. In the center of the document, painted with a mix of European and American pigments, lay a yellow castle on a shield against a blue field: the new royally approved coat of arms for the city of Tlaxcala. The document he had just signed, one of many he would throughout his reign, was a Royal writ. The writ, officially *Real Cédula de la Fundación de la Ciudad de Tlaxcala, México*, outlined the types of autonomous privileges and symbolic gestures the king gave to the city and defined how the Spaniards in Mexico would have to approach and deal with their new 'Royal' Tlaxcalan allies. Whether he had any intention of upholding this or not, Charles V, the official overlord of

[120] Camila Townsend, *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016),196.

Tlaxcala who would never see the allies with his own eyes, had just provided the Confederacy with the platform to resist, and sometimes obey Spanish demands.

The 15 years since the first interaction with the Spanish, as evidenced by the situational development of the Tlaxcalan-Spanish alliance and the Conversion of the province, had seen the Confederacy and its people buffeted by the whims and desires of the various Spanish actors they encountered. Despite the promises of Cortés during the Conquest and the enticements of the priests during the Conversion, each phase of the colonial process was mired in unfulfilled promises, uncertain intentions, and an unsure structure of governance. Even worse for the Tlaxcalans, behind this uncertainty lay the very real threat of death for individuals and the whole province. This is not to say that Viceroyalty of New Spain was a lawless entity engaged in a conflict of all against all, nor that the Tlaxcalans could not adapt to this new structure; however, the vagaries of agreements combined with the infrequent visits of the few crown officials in Mexico prior to 1530 had allowed for capricious behavior exacerbated by the relative absence of non-ecclesiastical state organs (especially compared to mainland Spain) to regularize Spanish-Tlaxcalan contact.

Implemented at a time when the Spanish Crown wished to crack down on the excessive powers of the Conquistadors and reign in the Catholic Church, The Royal Writ passed in 1535 and the arrival of the Viceroy Antonio Mendoza that year along with the establishment of other governmental institutions throughout the decade, finally established the kinds of institutions that could regularize Spanish-Tlaxcalan contact.[121] The most important institution was the Cabildo. The Cabildo was a municipal form of government imposed by the Spanish in much of Colonial America.[122] In theory, the Cabildo co-opted the traditional government structure of the altepetl

[121] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 65.
[122] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas: A Compendium of the Records of the Cabildo of Tlaxcala, (1545-1627)* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986), 2.

with the position and duties, notably Tribute collecting, of the Tlatoani replaced by a Governor.[123] The Tlaxcalan Council would also now be regulated with membership reduced to twenty-one members: one governor, four Alcaldes, and sixteen Regidores.[124]

Rather than further deteriorating the existing Tlaxcalan institutions, the implementation of the Cabildo did the opposite. The implementation of the Cabildo system, however, was not an overnight process. The last crown official, a Corregidor, who visited the province did so in 1531 and a new crown official would not do so again until 1545, which meant that the state Spanish government was weak and confused in the province for 15 years.[125] In between those years, the governorship was held in monopoly by Ocotelulco or Tizatlan, disregarding Quiahuiztlan and Tepectipac and threatening the stability of the whole Confederation.

In 1545, a judge from the Royal Audiencia, Licenciado Gomez de Santillan, reached an agreement with the Tlaxcalan Tlatoque and created a proto constitution that would define the administrative structure of the province until its collapse by the end of the 16th century.[126] The most important points of the agreement included dividing the membership of the Cabildo between each Tlaxcalan altepetl with a rotating governorship between the four, an electorate and advisory body of 220 Tlaxcalan nobleman, and a general agreement that the viceroy would negotiate with the governor to implement policy and vice-versa.[127] This agreement, negotiated with the Tlaxcalans, hard largely allowed the pre-existing Nahuatl altepetl to be legitimized and integrated within the colonial structure with a new, Spanish veneer.

One of the most prominent first actions taken by the newly, reminted government of Tlaxcala was to crack down on the lingering pagan remnants. Don Valeriano Castañeda or

[123] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 1.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 3.
[126] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 2.
[127] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 4.

Quetzalcoyotzin, eleventh Indigenous governor of Tlaxcala and from Ocotelolco,[128] issued a declaration, written in Nahuatl, empowering the local *alguacil* or Sheriff, Feliciano Tizamitl, to go to the surrounding areas of Ahuazhuatepec, Xaloztoc, Teyacac, Tepeixpan, and Ocoyocan and their arrest anybody, peaceably, who did any of the following:

> "Adultery, stealing, beating people up, getting drunk, gambling; those of us men who bathe themselves together with women, those who bathe themselves in public. And perhaps others have been practicing the old idolatry…and those who do other things that clearly appear to be sins.[129]"

Whilst the order to prosecute the heretical actions may seem in line with Spanish desires (and it was) the reality of the matter is that this order, written before the final reformation of the province, shows the growth and transformation of political power under the Cabildo. The Order shows that the Governor, de-facto Tlatoani, could now order the bureaucracy to fulfill his guidelines in the smaller altepetl, something that could not occur under the looser agreements that defined the pre-Cortesian province. His order also took away the authority that the Franciscans held within the province. With the Indigenous Governor legitimized to act in the King's interest, he could coordinate religious policy and thus co-opting the powers previously held by the Franciscans to root out heresy and pagan practices that had previously scarred the province. On an even larger note, the development of taking the colonial process away from the Spaniards and into the hands of the indigenous Tlaxcalans would represent a kind of Hispanicization of Tlaxcalan governance that would slowly define politics in the province as the centuries continued.

Despite formally taking on some of the burdens of colonial life, the Tlaxcalans still faced existing challenges from the local colonial authorities and from within the province. Tribute,

[128] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 216.
[129] Justyna Olko and Agnieszka Brylak, *Defending Local Autonomy and Facing Cultural Trauma: A Nahua Order against Idolatry, Tlaxcala, 1543*, 573-575.

either through maize or labor, was given by Tlaxcala to the colonial government as part of the alliance's requirements. The minutes for the Cabildo session on January 19, 1548, record that a "tribute of 8,000 fanegas of maize is to be delivered to Puebla...the Cabildo assesses a fine of two pesos upon anyone, noble or commoner, who should … try avoiding paying his share."[130] The next recorded session, on January 27th, outlines the exact measurements of fanegas to be paid by each commoner, Pilli, and Tlatoque towards the tribute. It thus appeared that the Tlaxcalans had the tribute situation under control.

The recorded session a year later January 11, 1549, paints a different picture. The record states that "the cabildo unanimously decides that Tlaxcala cannot provide Puebla's request for three months of tribute labor there in lieu of the commoner's maize tribute. The additional tribute labor would place an excessive burden on the commoners, who would be absent .... too long … and … Tlaxcala's own building needs not met."[131] The record continues that the only tribute to be delivered to Puebla will be the corn fanegas received from the Pilli and Tlatoque.[132] The issues with the tribute payment point to the fact that the Tlaxcalans were already spread thin by the 1540s. The burden of tribute was compounded by having to provide soldiers and military aid to the various expeditions across New Spain. Tragically, the Tlaxcalan struggle to maintain their obligations alluded to a graver concern: despite all their negotiation, the Tlaxcalans were still being ravaged by disease and the population of 500,000 in Maxixcatzin's era would be degraded to 60,000 by 1600.[133]

[130] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 37.
[131] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 41.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Interestingly, on April 29, 1555, the cabildo would record sending a delegation to the Viceroy outlining their concerns about noble women's prerogatives in heading households. On September 13, 1555, the Cabildo hired a Corregidor to go on a fact-finding mission to establish whether women headed noble houses in their own right. Possibly because of increasing mortality, social upheaval by the Spanish, and a declining power base, women were increasingly filling the roles assumed by males, specifically amongst the upper classes. Gender-based relations were thus experiencing an upheaval at the same time.

The growing conflicts and difficulties experienced by the Confederacy caused a growth of new forms and means of negotiation with the Spaniards. Beginning around the time of the reorganization of 1545, the Tlaxcalan cabildo began appointing and paying a lawyer to represent their interests in Mexico City. The session of January 21, 1549, accounts for the re-appointment of Alvaro Ruiz to be the lawyer representing Tlaxcala in Mexico City, to be paid 30 pesos.[134] The session notes that the lawyer "is not to restrict himself to any one matter but attend to all the city's needs" with the addition that "the cabildo feels it should always have a legal representative in Mexico City."[135] The development of a semi-permanent counsel in Mexico City allowed for Tlaxcalan grievances to be immediately addressed and decided, as the cabildo would see fit. Such development would prove itself necessary as in the 1550's the Tlaxcalans would repeatedly file suits to the Audiencia against Spaniards who had illegally settled in the province.[136] The Viceroy at the time, Antonio de Mendoza, would comment that "Our allies are very fond of our courts."[137]

In addition to the counsel, the Tlaxcalans would leverage the support of the King. The Tlaxcalans funded 5 campaigns across the Atlantic to Madrid: in 1527, 1535, 1540, 1562, and 1582-5. These visits not only could see a redress of grievances but, with the King's blessing, could also see further privileges and rights for the Tlaxcalans. The most important occurred in 1535, as mentioned previously, as it set in motion the autonomy and role the confederacy would have in the colonial structure. However, the other visits were constructive as well. The visit in 1540 resulted in a cedula granting perpetual crown government and a recognition of the validity

[134] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 41.
[135] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 41.
[136] Gibson, *Tlaxcala,* 82-3.
[137] Gibson, *Tlaxcala,* 97.

of pre-Hispanic noble lineages.[138] Tlaxcala also did not need to visit Madrid to get redress from the King. The cabildo session of June 17, 1552, notes preparation for another delegation "to lay Tlaxcala's troubles before the emperor."[139] According to Charles Gibson, there was no evidence that any delegation was sent, and the matter was settled in in written dispatches.[140] Interestingly however, the Tlaxcalan session also prepared "A painting of Cortes's arrival in Tlaxcala and the war and conquest is to be prepared for presentation to the emperor two regiodores are to... choose the artists … it is not decided whether the painting should be on cloth (tilmatly) or paper (amatl)."[141] Thus, the Tlaxcalans not only used direct diplomatic ties to the King to curry favor but also gifts in order to reinforce the importance of Tlaxcala in the colonial effort, within the king's mind.

The creation of artistic works to maintain the prestige and importance of the province represents a larger development of cultural institutions that appealed to Spanish desires while reinforcing Tlaxcalan identity and development: in short, soft power. The Cabildo session of March 3, 1550, records a noble-funded enterprise to build a clock within the province, a costly endeavor.[142] The Cabildo, despite the costs, approved of such construction as "the city of Tlaxcala truly needs it, and it is also needed for the honor of the emperor so that things should look attractive in Tlaxcala."[143] Tlaxcalan myths surrounding the conversion of the province previously developed were further reinforced by campaigns by the cabildo in the 1560s to build

[138] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*,165. Effectively, the transition to crown government meant that the Tlaxcalans were vassals to the King of Spain and not subjects of the Viceroy in New Spain. The legal differences were subtle as the Viceroy was still the king's representative in New Spain, and thus the Tlaxcalans would still be answerable to him in most cases. However, it did mean that the Tlaxcalans could appeal to the King when it was felt their agreement as vassals was under duress. It was also a powerful symbolic tool when dealing with the Audiencia.
[139] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 51.
[140] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 165. The Cabildo session of January 15, 1552, states "The Cabildo discusses the letter it sent to the emperor through fray Francisco de Molante concerning Tlaxcala's trouble with estancias." it is likely through this session that Giblin made the claim, and I see no reason to contradict him.
[141] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 51.
[142] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 70
[143] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 70.

churches so that the Tlaxcalans "be taught in the Catholic faith, so that they may gladly serve our lord God and the king."[144] Yet, there would be another event that the Tlaxcalans would use to cement their prestige and soft power within the Viceroyalty, and it occurred halfway across the globe.

Cáceres, Spain, September 21, 1558: After a month of failing health due to malaria, His Most Excellent Majesty, Charles V, by the Grace of God, Emperor of the Romans, forever August, King of Germany, King of all Spains, and the first Spanish overlord of the Tlaxcalans, lay dead.[145] In the shadow of the death of the monarch, who had abdicated two years prior, black draperies and funerary monuments were raised across the Spanish, Mediterranean-Atlantic world. News of the death was slow to reach the far-flung corners of the Spanish Empire, and news probably did not reach Mexico until January 1559.[146] It is probable that the Tlaxcalans themselves were not informed until February, when the Cabildo noted preparations to receive the visit of Viceroy on the 10th of that month.[147] Regardless, of when the Tlaxcalans were informed, preparations were made for a funerary procession to a constructed tomb for the monarch in Mexico City for November 30, and their presence would be necessary.[148] There was no official record within the Actas noting who were sent as delegates, if money or tribute was given, nor the event in general. It was noted by New Spanish administrative officials, however, that the Governor of Tlaxcala, Domingo de Angulo, and a few nobles did attend the event.

With the inhabitants and buildings of Mexico City draped in black,[149] the assembled choreography began to make the procession across the city and to the Chapel of St. Joseph of the

[144] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas,* 123.
[145] Geoffrey Parker, *Emperor*, 612.
[146] Byron Ellsworth Hamann, "An Artificial Mind in Mexico City (Autumn 1559)." *Grey Room* 67 (September 13, 2017): 7. In fact, the news was so slow that Charles V's son, Phillip II, didn't learn of his father's death until 6 weeks after he died. Phillip was in Italy at the time.
[147] Lockhart, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 59.
[148] Hamann, "An Artificial Mind in Mexico City (Autumn 1559).", 8.
[149] Hamann, "An Artificial Mind in Mexico City (Autumn 1559).", 13. An order was by the Viceroy given to the people of Mexico City to wear black and, by all accounts, this was apparently followed through with little fuss.

Natives.[150] The delegation from Tlaxcala, as well as those from Texcoco, Tacuba, and México-Tenochtitlán led the large funeral procession from the front, followed by native nobles according to their rank, next priests and other members of the clergy, and, finally, the colonial officials of New Spain, which included the viceroy.[151] After a mass, a Tlaxcalan envoy was stationed at one of the corners of the tomb.[152]

The ultimate effect of Tlaxcalan participation in the funeral of Charles V, other than it might look awkward and insulting that the Mexica attend but not the allies of the Spanish, was that it placed the Tlaxcalans at the forefront of administrative functions within the colony. By doing so, the Tlaxcalans could know and curry favor with the administrative officials who had a daily interaction with the province. In the introduction of the *TVMVLO IMPERIAL,* a book ordered by the Viceroy to document the funeral, it is noted that,

> "[T]his way they fulfilled their obligations, and the natives did the same by their imitation and example: so that by such clear signs they understood the loyalty which they owed to such a great lord, in death as well as life, and that the great distance which exists between these regions and Spain does not mean that such a great loss is felt any less in these kingdoms."[153]

They were successful.

The funeral of Charles V, however, represents a new era for the Tlaxcalan Confederacy. By 1558, Tlaxcala was now fully ingrained into the colonial structure and, despite the uncertainty of the Conquest and social upheavals, thereafter, managed to make the difficult transition into the colonial period intact. For over 37 years, the Confederacy was mired in difficulties and problems brought along by the colonial experiment. There were still problems yet to come. The institutions, privileges, and features established in this era would at least ensure

[150] Hamann, "An Artificial Mind in Mexico City (Autumn 1559).", 12. The original Cathedral of Mexico City, to be replaced by its modern successor in 1573, was so disliked by the administration for its simplicity that the Convent of San Francisco was chosen instead.
[151] Hamann, "An Artificial Mind in Mexico City (Autumn 1559).", 13-14.
[152] Hamann, "An Artificial Mind in Mexico City (Autumn 1559).", 18.
[153] Hamann, "An Artificial Mind in Mexico City (Autumn 1559).", 17.

that the Tlaxcalans could at least meet the challenges head-on. The Tlaxcala Maxixcatzin led against the Mexica Tlatoani in 1520 was quite different from the one celebrating the Funeral of their Caxtilteca Tlatoani in 1558 yet, all the same, through their struggles and negotiations with the Spaniards, it was a province of an enduring people who would bend but never break.

Conclusion: A Stabilized Uncertainty, Beyond 1558

In 1692, Don Juan Buenaventura Zapata y Mendoza completed his manuscript for *La Historia Cronológica de la noble ciudad de Tlaxcala*. An Indigenous nobleman and member of Cabildo, Zapata wrote *la Historia* as a comprehensive history of the Tlaxcalans between 1310 and 1682. Despite being written over 150 years after the initial conquest, and the Tlaxcala of his era being vastly different from the one Maxixcatzin knew, *la Historia* paints a dynamic image of Tlaxcalan leadership, making and using authority both to resist and to obey. Zapata highlighted the discursive pillars of Tlaxcala in his text: the defense of the pre-Conquest nobility, loyalty to the Spaniards (both as conquerors and later administrators), and the faithful, robust conversion to Catholicism. Written at a time of calamity, with the authority of Indigenous Tlaxcalan nobility on the decline, Zapata used his history to shore up the prerogatives of the province with the Spaniards and to define the Tlaxcalans for all time.[154]

It did not work.

"There is a nagging thorn in most Tlaxcalans' minds [about the conquest] and a sort of anger because the adjective 'traitor' has been so strong," Juan de la Rosa, delegate from the National Institute for Anthropology and History, said in a 2019 interview. "But they have the need to have arguments that explain why they're not traitors."[155] Following independence from

[154] Kelley McDonough, *The Learned Ones: Nahua intellectuals in Post-Conquest Mexico*, 63-65.
[155] Agren, David. "Don't Call Us Traitors: Descendents of Cortés's Allies Defend Role in Toppling Aztec Empire." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 13 Aug. 2021, amp.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/13/mexico-tlaxcala-aztec-empire-anniversary. Accessed 28 Oct. 2023.

Spain, the nascent Mexican people needed a new vision of historical understanding of their nation separate from those adopted from Spain. It was thus, that the new Mexican political class adopted the Mexica Empire as the grounding for their historical understanding.

As opposed to the Spanish version, which saw a Catholic, Hispanic force defeat a pagan, bloodthirsty Mexica Empire in a glorious triumph, the Mexicans adopted a more tragic view of history, that the Mexican nation was the heir to the Mexica and the Conquest of 1521 was but one tragedy in a long series of oppression and disasters brought about by European intervention. Thus, the question must be asked, if Mexico is the heir of Montezuma, and considers itself the living blood of the Nahuas through Mestizaje, what room in the narrative does that leave the Tlaxcalans, a Nahua group who aided in overthrowing that empire? It leaves none.

Colored by centuries of historiography by the Spanish and then the Mexicans, the Tlaxcalans are seen by Mexican schoolchildren and the wider public as 'traitors,' characterized by their 'shiftiness and 'untrustworthiness.' Tlaxcala is one of Mexico's poorest states, with GDP per capita standing at 101,336 pesos (or $5,594 USD per person).[156] The state's current struggles with poverty, sex trafficking, and the drug trade can be seen as 'just deserts' for their collaboration with the Spaniards. Yet the history we have seen is that this characterization of "Vichy"[157] Tlaxcalans willfully opening the heart of Mexico to Spanish brutality, answering to every beck and call of a Conquistador with vigor and gusto, is simply not true. Such history covers the reality of Indigenous struggles within the perilous initial decades of Spanish rule with a quiet, comfortable substitute: collaborator.

[156] Editors. "Per Capita "Per Domestic Product If Mexico's GDP Was Distributed Equally among All Its Inhabitants, How Much Money Would Each One Get?" Pib Per Cápita. Cuéntame de México, May 13, 2019. https://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/economia/pibpc.aspx?tema=e.

[157] Vichy France, 1940-44, a rump state in occupied France which, under the leadership of Marshal Philippe Pétain fully collaborated with the Nazis and sent up to 75,000 Jews to the death camps. Vichy remains a painful chapter in the history of France today.

There have been attempts before to view the Conquest from the Tlaxcalan lens. Charles Gibson was the first modern historian to do so with his monumental work *Tlaxcala in the 16th Century* in 1952. James Lockhart revolutionized the Mesoamerican anthropological field with his *Nahuas after the Conquest* in 1992. It was only at the dawn of the 500th anniversary of the Spanish Conquest, that the inklings of a new historical understanding began to make their presence in Mexico, with new research conducted by a multitude of talented individuals in academia and various programs and textbooks released by the National Institute of Archeology and History and the Secretaría de Cultura attempting to change perceptions about Tlaxcala.

The History of Tlaxcala in the early 16th century, through conquest, conversion, and administrative reform is one of negotiation and struggle within the confines of the new colonial system. This thesis builds upon the shoulders of many historians, notably the previously mentioned Gibson and Lockhart, and seeks to re-contextualize their research with the latest evidence. In doing so, this thesis seeks to construct a more thorough evaluation of Tlaxcalan actions in choosing to adapt. It is by no means a totalizing work into the subject matter but seeks to be a contributing analysis in the wider academic study of a fascinating and unique people that are the Tlaxcalans.

Historiography:

Academic and popular histories of the Spanish conquest traditionally reflected the same underlying analytical framework for the last few hundred years. Namely, a titanic struggle between the Catholic, Castilian forces of Spain against the Nahua Mexica Empire culminated in the former's victory and the tragic defeat of the latter. In this, the Tlaxcalans can play a variety of roles depending on the inclination of the author. Yet, over a period before the 500th anniversary of the conquest, this has begun to change, encouraged by a surge in academic interest in the cultural and social perspective of the Nahuas along with a chorus of complaints from the living descendants of those natives who could only recognize their ancestors in modern histories as villains, imbeciles, or tragic victims. Even taking these improvements into account, these efforts still fall short of what might be hoped. This is partly because the Tlaxcalans appear today to be inseparably linked to the events of the Spanish conquest, which is partially understandable given their important role in such an event. However, trapped within these events, the Tlaxcalans are removed from their agency, colored by outsiders, and, despite being a surviving community today, are relegated to the background while Cortés and Montezuma make the real history at the forefront of the historical stage. In effect, the civilization that was cast into the background is still just as invisible to the scholars of today.

The first rounds of surviving documents that recorded the Tlaxcalans as a people, were the wide variety of letters, histories, and compendiums on Mexico that were written and published soon after the Conquest itself. *The Letters of Cortés*, which were published as almost real-time news upon reaching Seville, make the first European mention of the Tlaxcalans. However, it would be *The Letters* that would set the tone for further Euro-centric discussions of the Tlaxcalans in academic literature, as Cortés, narratively, relied on the Tlaxcalans as a springboard for further campaigns into the Mexica Empire, without directly mentioning the

number of troops they supplied, nor the exact support offered (Malintzin would get a similar, if not worse, treatment).

Mentions of the Tlaxcalans would continue in government records and smaller references up until the 1540s to the 1580s. It was during this period that the first complex histories of the Nahuas and the Tlaxcalans would be written. One of the most preeminent Euro-centric works was *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* written by Bernal Díaz del Castillo in 1568. Written at the time when the aging Conquistadors struggled to get pen to paper to elaborate their own importance of the Conquest, *The True History* offers an engaging, dramatic account of Castillo's own military campaigns in Mexico. Unlike Hernan Cortés' *Letters*, de Castillo offers a far more elaborate account of the Conquest, Tlaxcalans included, with details missing in *Letters*. Yet, like all works, it is a testimony written not in a vacuum, but with a specific purpose, to lift the Conquistador's increasingly diminishing image within the colonial structure. Later historians, such as Camila Townsend, Matthew Restall, and Juan Miralles, have pointed out the inconsistencies in Castillo's work to the point that some, like Restall, have concluded that Castillo witnessed little of what he wrote and instead amalgamated his details from a wide variety of sources. Yet, for much of the period between the Conquest and the 19th century (sometimes into the 20th century), it would be these sources that would define the Conquest period in Europe, Anglo-America, and, at times, Mexico itself.

However, at the same time Cortés and Castillo were spinning their own narratives on the conquest, the Tlaxcalans, sometimes with the help of Europeans, were continuing to write their own histories. The first and most pre-eminent, was the *Tlaxcalan Actas*, a compendium of the minutes of the government of Tlaxcala recorded intermittently between 1545-1627. Being a government record and not a history, the *Actas* share little about the wider goings on at the time that is not related to the discussions at hand. However, this does not diminish their importance as

a testament to the continued agency of the Tlaxcalans and offers a fascinating account of the political debates and problems facing the council during this period.

Another supporting document is Diego Muñoz Camargo's *Historia de Tlaxcala,* completed in 1585, ostensibly the first Spanish history about the Tlaxcalans. Unlike the previous works, which only dealt with the Tlaxcalans as they related to the Spanish, Camargo, the illegitimate son of a conquistador and a native woman, instead attempted to tell the story of the Tlaxcalans beginning as far back as Astlan and the mythical pre-history of the province. The care and detail he offers within the work are made apparent throughout much as he carefully outlines the general trajectory of the Tlaxcalans from their first arrival to Hernan Cortés' Conquest. The documentation also captures the evangelical endeavor to convert the indigenous population from their customary deities to the Christian faith. The arrival of the initial twelve Franciscan friars, the establishment of the mythical inaugural cross, the initial baptisms, and the prompt administration of "justice" to those converts reverting to "idolatrous" practices are all recorded. As a pre-modern piece, the *Historia* lacks the scholarly criteria of potential modern works. However, it, and sources like it such *as La Historia cronológica de don Juan Buenaventura Zapata y Mendoza*, the *Tlaxcalan Actas*, and *Anónimo Mexicano*, would serve as primary sources for future historians and records of what took place within the province. It wouldn't be until the 20th century, however, that a historian would use them to write a full history of the province.

First written in 1952, before being revised and updated in 1967, Charles Gibson's *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* is a pioneering work in the field of Mesoamerican studies in the 20th century and focuses on the polity of Tlaxcala, an autonomous confederation within the larger colonial structure. Through analysis of government records and written histories, Gibson contends that Tlaxcalans managed to maintain much of the pre-Cortesian structures that defined their society, selectively adapting Spanish methods under pressure and influence. This was a

revolutionary insight at the time and broke away from the typical two-tiered system of either a clash or a replacement between the Indians and the Spanish. Gibson's larger argument was that the survival of the Tlaxcalan peoples throughout the colonial period to the modern day was due to a delicate balance between the humanism espoused by Spanish reformers, and a native leadership able to seek and use new methods to maintain power and stability. In his own words, "The Indian government … was able to express a remarkable discretion in accepting or rejecting the diverse elements of Spanish colonial life.[158]"

Gibson begins his work by briefly analyzing Tlaxcalan society before the conquest, giving the reader ample explanation as to the nature of the province, its unique political structure, and its relation towards other Nahuatl groups neighboring. When discussing the conquest of Mexico by Cortes, Gibson makes note of the alliance made between the Spaniards and the Tlaxcalans against the Mexica and the military aid given to the Spanish cause by the polity. Gibson nevertheless dismisses claims of the importance of the alliance for the Tlaxcalan in the post-conquest period. Commenting on those later fights for privileges and rights, he suggests they came from expressions of "Tlaxcalteca patriotism" of which "the alliance emerges only as a feature of secondary value.[159]" Gibson goes as far as to propose that "had the Tlaxcalans been able to defeat the Spanish in open battle, the alliance would not have been made.[160]"

What continues for the rest of the book is a tightly woven analysis of the interaction between the Tlaxcalan government, the Spanish government, and other prominent actors using written histories and government records available in Mexico City and Seville. In this Gibson's scholarship shines as an example for others in his field, making a great effort to clearly describe, list, and date, for example, the offices of important government figures in both the Spanish and

[158] Gibson, Tlaxcala, X.
[159] Gibson, Tlaxcala, 26.
[160] Ibid.

Tlaxcalan governments. His notes and bibliography are likewise impressive containing lists of privileges given to Tlaxcala and the dates they were given, an index explaining both Spanish and Nahuatl terms perhaps unfamiliar to the reader, and an in-depth bibliography explaining the content and format of every single primary source he used.

However, whilst Gibson's view is focused on the Tlaxcalans and the progression of their society under colonialism, his characterization of the Spaniards and their perceived intents gives the reader the impression that the choices made by the natives were influenced in large part by Spanish actions and events rather than freely chosen of their own volition. For instance, Gibson characterizes the Spanish program in Tlaxcala as "sincerely and genuinely tutorial" and appears to take the writings of the Mestizo Diego Muñoz Camargo, and his pro-Spanish position, at face value.[161] While Camargo was perhaps genuine in his beliefs, he was not the only one to influence the province. As evidenced by Fray Martin de Valencia, whom Camargo euphemistically condemned for his treatment of the Tlaxcalans, was certainly not a humanist yet had a profound impact on the province. Gibson appears to put so much emphasis on humanism, that, by extension, he appears to suggest by allusion that the only reason why Tlaxcala survived was because of the door opened by the Spanish philosophy and the priests that espoused it. By this logic, the reason the polity declined was because the popularity of humanism declined rather than changing external political and economic factors. However, being that it was a work written so early in the field of Mesoamerican ethnographical studies, it is still a marvel of scholarly research and presentation. The book, written 60 years ago, is still a foundational text for those wishing to learn about Tlaxcala, partially because it is one of a few modern works available in English. Whilst Gibbon's book is marred by some of its characterizations, *Tlaxcala* is an impressive work of scholarship and will likely stand as such for another 60.

[161] Gibson, *Tlaxcala*, 190.

Over 30 years after Gibbon's work was first published, James Lockhart released *The Nahuas After the Conquest* in 1992. Using developments in the wider field of Mesoamerican studies, as well as his own Nahuatl language skills, Lockhart looks holistically at the native Nahuatl population of central Mexico. Lockhart chose to assemble his corpus from "mundane" documents such as wills, property transfers, and government records mostly from the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City. In fact, despite Gibbon's sharing a society within the same cultural group within the same period, there is little to no overlap in the discussion of post-conquest development between *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* and *Nahuas after the Conquest.* Unlike Gibbon's work, which used mainly Spanish histories and government records, Lockhart centers his text on the Nahuatl perspective and used their documents and understandings as a foundation for his work. Despite this, Lockhart praises Gibbon's insights in the introduction and accredits him with changing the historical narrative by making clear that native institutions survived long into the colonial period.

In Lockhart's view, native society in colonial Mexico follows general trends in roughly three stages; In the first, (1545-1550) the natives were subjugated under tribute, proselytized, and native rulers left in place; In the second, (1550-1640) the demands on the native labor grew weaker, more natives converted, and native-style governments were converted into more Spanish styles; and in the third, (from 1640 to roughly 1810) most natives are fully converted, speak some Spanish, and have generally acculturated to the Spanish ways of life. Lockhart's tri-stage model of acculturation can best be seen in his description of the Nahuatl language. In the first period, practically no change occurred from the pre-conquest era. In the second, the proliferation of the Latinized script of the language gains popularity whilst certain nouns and adjectives are shunned for their association with the pagan past. In the third, Spanish loanwords occur at a rate

previously unknown, and words that once held distinctions between Paganism and Christianity now begin to fade away as the natives forget a time when their ancestors were pagan.

Atop of the wide scope of its subject matter, two of the most prevalent strengths in Lockhart's work is his ability to center the Native perspective whilst also covering a vast range of topics within everyday life that makes clear to the reader. At times, this is as simple as explaining vocabulary. In the introduction of the Household chapter of the work, Lockhart states that there is no Nahuatl word for family. Instead, Nahuatl words emphasized the setting in which joint life occurs rather than biological relation such as *techan tlaca* "people in someone's home" or *cencatlin* "those in one house.[162]" Lockhart then proceeds to explain the native household and its evolution using the tripartite development previously mentioned. It should also be noted that Lockhart does not use the tripartite model as the sole representative of native development and explains, at length, the instances where such is not the case.

Lockhart's work, however, is not wholly perfect and there are times when his conclusions do not square with the evidence. His insistence that the Spaniards copied the Nahuatl model of township and settlement long into the 18th century appears to not have any basis in fact, or, at the very least, he did not cite a source that said as much.[163] Another issue is that Lockhart smooths the transitions from one of his stages to the next, ignoring the political or social conflict that occurred between them, such as the conflict between the Natives and Spaniards that led to the decline in labor demands and tribute between stages one and two. However, this is not a condemnation of the work which, as Lockhart himself states, is not a definitive work but a "state of the art" compilation of the newest interpretation of archival finds.[164]As such, it stands as one of the best.

[162] Lockhart, *Nahuas*, 59.
[163] Lockhart, *Nahuas*, 434.
[164] Lockhart, *Nahuas*, XII.

Moving into the 21st century, scholarship has taken a more nuanced approach towards the institutional interactions between the Nahuatl and Spanish worlds; Emphasizing not only the ability of Native institutions to integrate with the Spaniards but also the Spanish institution's ability to conform to natives, perhaps unintentionally.

The title, *The Conquest All Over Again: Nahua and Zapotec Thinking, Writing, and Painting Spanish Colonialism,* is a series of essays edited together by Susan Shroeder. As can be assumed from the title, the collection of essays each broadly covers the topic of Nahua interaction and perception within the colonial system, much in the same vein as Lockhart and Gibbons before them. In the introductory essay of the series, Schroeder takes the time to recognize the ability of the Catholic Church to conform to native desires. She states that "although the natives preferred to live under their own religious and political institutions," religious confraternities established by the Catholic church "reinforced traditional social relationships" and "actually doing what most [Natives] wanted to do anyway.[165]" She then notes the coincidental, practices between Catholicism and the pre-conquest religions of the Nahuatl that made conversion from one religion to the next. In a manner of speaking, Schroeder clarifies and refines the arguments made by Gibbons in a more cohesive lens, considering the Spanish impositions whilst also recognizing native action.

However, Schroeder was not the only one in the compendium to recognize the ability of Spanish institutions, specifically the Church, to match well with native sensibilities. In his essay, "Representations of Spanish Authority in Zapotec Calendrical and Historical Genres", David Tavarez explains the relationship between Catholic books of hours and religious calendars with

[165] Susan Schroeder, ed. *The Conquest All Over Again: Nahua and Zapotec Thinking, Writing, and Painting Spanish Colonialism* (Sussex Academic Press, 2010.), 3-4.

native beliefs of religious and political authority. In doing so, the natives were able to take advantage of the established church in ways that were not thought of at the time. [166]

In what is a largely complementary work to *The Conquest All Over Again*, *Negotiation within Domination,* edited by Ethelia Ruiz Medrano and Susan Kellogg and published in 2010, covers a similar topic over a larger stretch of time. Like *The Conquest*, *Negotiation* builds upon the works of Gibbons and Lockhart and focuses on native interaction with Spanish institutions and the leeway granted intentionally or not. In the essay, "Fighting Destiny" by Ethelia R. Medrano, Medrano notes the ability of the natives to rely on previously established Spanish institutions in their revolt against the king, most notably, the Cabildo. The Cabildo was, essentially, the Spanish municipal government. As Medrano notes, the Cabildo's overall structure left much room to be filled in the bureaucracy and daily routines that allowed for native sensibilities to influence procedures and rulings. As such, when a revolt occurred in 1645, the cabildos, which were supposed to represent the crown's interests, largely worked to blunt the harshest reactions whilst attempting to advocate some of the proposals put forward by the revoltees.[167]

Both books, being essentially essays on specific concepts within the larger topic, have the benefit of exploring the events put forward by the author. All essays are generally of high quality however, some detail and explanation of sources are missing in the inevitable difference between an essay and a larger written work. It should be made clear however that whilst *The Conquest* and *Domination* effectively build off the work made by Gibbons and Lockhart in viewing the colonial period from the native perspective and identifying trends in which peaceful cooperation was the norm, the authors do not ignore the periods of conflict, war, and violence between the

[166] Schroeder, ed. *The Conquest All Over Again,* 56.
[167] Susan Kellogg and Ethelia Ruiz Medrano, ed. *Negotiation within Domination: New Spain's Indian Pueblos Confront the Spanish State* (University of Colorado Press, 2010), 23-45.

Spanish and Natives. Indeed, some essays take great pains to ensure such facts are not forgotten. However, in the larger trends of historical interpretation, their ability to recognize Spanish leeway makes their newest interpretations unique.

Taken together, the more recent developments in historical works have allowed for a more fluid, complicated image of the post-Conquest Era. Looking beyond the struggle between Montezuma and Cortés, the survival and adaptation of the Nahua peoples caught within their wake comes to light after being hidden for centuries. As scholarly works on the history of the Spanish Conquest and the subsequent colonial period refine, rediscover, and realign modern understandings of the past, it becomes all the more apparent that within the modern historical analysis, there is a lacking in the analysis of the Tlaxcalans. Gibson’s work was certainly revolutionary, and his research par excellence, it need not be the final word on the matter — especially as popular conceptions of the Tlaxcalans today still identify them as traitors and villains. As Mexico, and the people who call the land their home, climaxes over the 500th anniversary of the conquest and reaches for the 200th anniversary of independence, the need for a varied and multi-characteristic approach towards the foundation is needed never more than ever, especially in rectifying the oversimplifications and comfortable lies of the past.

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