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Conceptions of Time and History in New Spain: Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *Historia de la nación chichimeca* (~1625)

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The historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl stood at the crossroads between two worlds in colonial Mexico: Owing to his Aztec and Spanish heritage and Franciscan education he was intimately familiar with both 'Old' and 'New World' histories, writing in Spanish but using Aztec sources. This article seeks to trace the upheavals in historiography emerging at the turn of the 17th century by means of Alva Ixtlilxochitl's chronicle *Historia de la nación chichimeca.* Pre-conquest temporal and historical traditions of the Aztecs and Castilians are sketched in order to trace back conceptions of time and history contained in the Historia. Furthermore, the emergence of a group of scholars of indigenous descent in the late 16th century serves as historical background to Fernando de Alva's ideas. Behind these intellectual developments lies the question of whether the Spanish conquest brought with it the substitution of traditional conceptions of time and history, or rather their transformation into new forms of knowledge production.

In colonial Mexico, the late 16th century was a time of exceptional intercultural and intellectual exchange. A learned native elite was being educated by mendicant friars in theology and Latin, but also in Mesoamerican languages. Spanish, indigenous and *mestizo* chroniclers turned to oral testimonies,[1] Aztec songs and pictographic codices in order to record the customs and histories of pre-conquest Mesoamerica. These upheavals in historiography raise the question of how traditional Aztec and Spanish conceptions of time and history were transformed by colonial contact. The necessity for native chroniclers to abandon traditional forms of transmitting history and adopt alphabetic writing and books in order to be heard

1 The term '*mestizo'* was used to denote descendants of Spaniards and native people in the Spanish *casta* system. In spite of its colonial background I will use it here because of its wide currency in research literature and a lack of alternative concepts. People of Spanish descent born in the overseas possessions were known as '*creoles*', Spanish-born people as *'peninsulares*'. The *casta* system was based on cultural rather than racial categories, in connection with the '*limpieza de sangre*' policy that distinguished between degrees of Spanish blood in the family, thus making it distinct from policies in later colonial empires focusing on skin color.

has been stressed in this context.[2] But how self-contained were the Aztec and Spanish views relayed through these newly adopted media, how easily were long-held beliefs relinquished as a consequence of Spanish hegemony? And to what extent was criticism of this hegemony possible by means of history writing? In order to investigate these issues, I will closely examine the work of one of the *mestizo* writers, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (ca. 1578-1650), of mixed Spanish and noble Aztec descent, focusing on his most accomplished work, the *Historia de la nación chichimeca*. So as to put his chronicle into a historical context, an overview of various Aztec and Spanish temporal and historical conceptions is given in the first part, followed in the second part by a closer look at indigenous and *mestizo* chroniclers.[3]

I. Aztec and Spanish Conceptions of Time and History

Anahúac[4]

The Aztec Triple Alliance was formed in 1428, and comprised the Acolhua of Tezcoco, the Tepanec of Tlacopán and the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, with the latter assuming a dominant position from the 1460's onwards: "Aztec culture was made up of numerous individual regionally based ethnic groups, each sharing a common language [Nahuatl] and fundamental social, religious, and political institutions".[5] This shared socio-cultural heritage was also evident in Aztec views and transmission of history.

The wise men of the Aztecs (*tlamatinime*) were concerned with astronomy, historical annals and codices, pursued philosophical questions and taught their notions of truth to their fellow men. Their communities saw the *tlamatinime* as a link to the past, but also as a path or guide to the future. They inquired rationally, and formulated truths in the form of poetry, which represented a higher form of intuitive knowledge.[6] According to Alva Ixtlilxochitl, the wise men also "had charge of recording all the sciences of which they had knowledge and of which they had achieved understanding, and of teaching from memory all the songs that

2 Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance – Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 127-29.

3 The categories 'Aztec' and 'Spanish' are not understood as two oppositional, monolithic civilizations here. Both include various population groups, with the Aztec Triple Alliance subsuming a host of city states as part of their empire, and the first 'Spanish' settlers coming from different Iberian and European regions. The focus lies rather on pre-conquest intellectual developments in Mexico and Spain pertinent to post-conquest *mestizo* chroniclers.

4 Pre-Hispanic designation for the modern-day Valley of Mexico.

5 Davíd Carrasco (Ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures. The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America Vol 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 250, lines 87-91.

6 Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture. A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, transl. by Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 177-83.

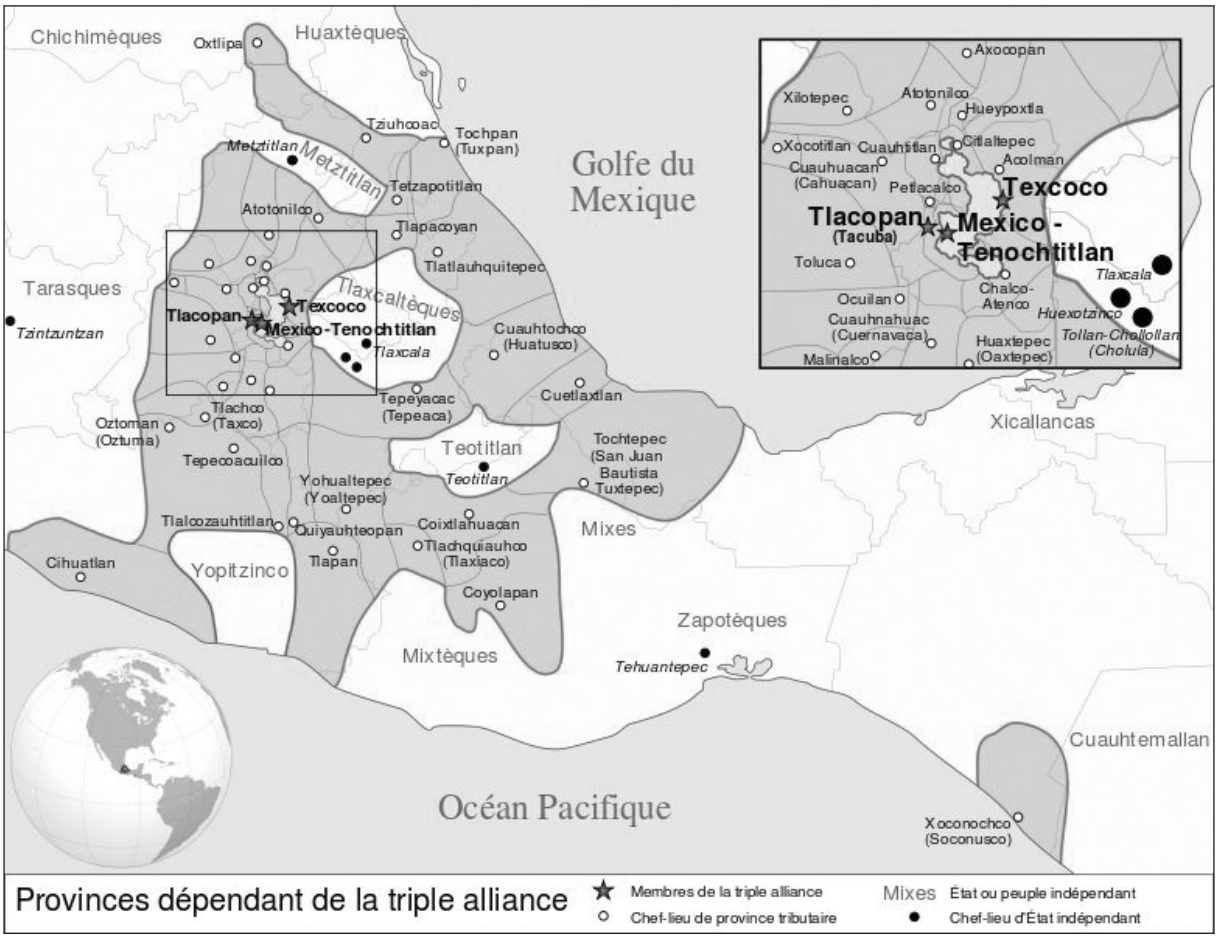

Figure 1. The Aztec Triple Alliance at the time of the Spanish conquest.

preserved their sciences and history.[7] They preserved the records of the origins, successes and failures of their people, placing the historical events of each year in the order of occurrence, sorted by day, month and hour. Official historical codices were written in an annals style, recording notable events without explanation of causes. The events themselves such as coronations, conquests of cities and temple expansions were mostly related to political decision making, as benefited the royal sponsors of the writings. The codices were narrated, but this verbal transmission of history was based on numerical signs and paintings, and was only complete when performed both ritually and orally. This in turn led to an interpretative approach to history, so that the reading of certain historical information could change with each interpreter. Another central aspect of the Aztec historical consciousness was a deep respect for tradition. Here the ancient Toltecs had special importance as cultural originators, to whom the Nahuas traced back their central

7 "[*Y finalmente los filósofos y sabios que tenían entre ellos,*] *estaba á su cargo pintar todas las ciencias que sabían y alcanzaban, y enseñar de memoria todos los cantos que observaban sus ciencias é historias*", Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochtil, *Obras Históricas Vol. 2*, ed. Alfredo Chavero (México D.F.: Oficina tip. de la Secretaria de fomento, 1892), 18, lines 7-9, translation from León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought*, 16.

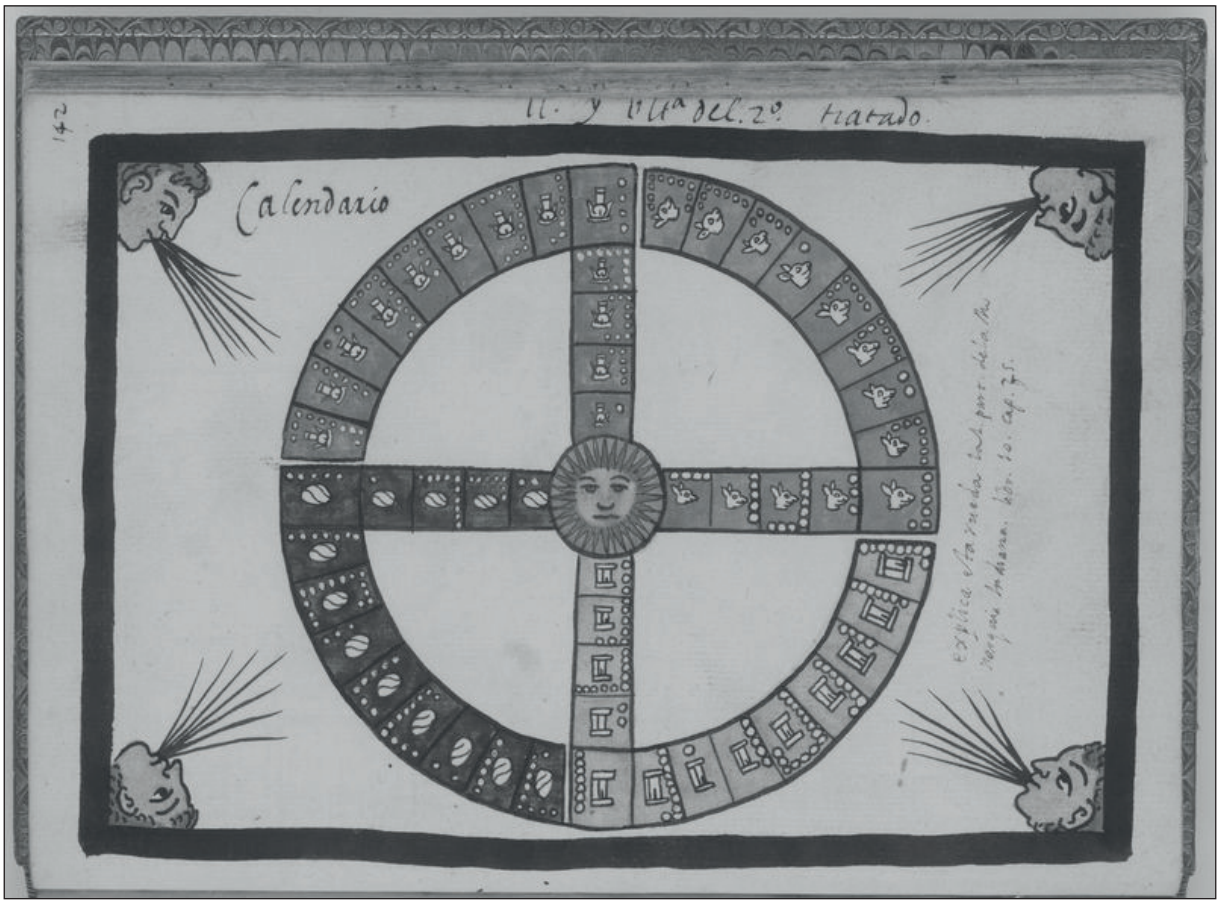

Figure 2. The Aztec Tonalpohualli Calendar, with the four cardinal directions, the sun, and signs for the 20 trecena (13-day periods).
From the Tovar Codex.

artistic, religious and ethical concepts,[8] and to whom they constantly referred in writings on history. It was of special importance to all Aztec population groups to derive their heritage from both the cultured Toltecs, originally settled in Anahúac, and from the martial Chichimecs, who had come South by way of various, distinct invasions. However, ideas of Toltec origin were not simply generally accepted, but formed the basis of intense religious and philosophical speculation.[9]

The wise men also maintained sacred almanacs of divination (*xiuhpohualli*) used to determine the fate of individuals according to specific dates as well as for recording events, and year-count calendars (*tonalpohualli*) that required complicated calculations. Time was said to move in four or five cycles (or 'Suns'), each

8 Used here for the Nahua-speaking people of Central Mexico, many of whom were united under the Triple Alliance empire in pre-colonial times and shared a common political system, religion and iconography.

9 León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought*, 79-80, 154-56; Ross Hassig, *Time, History, and Belief in Aztec and Colonial Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 111; Federico Navarrete, "Writing, Images, and Time-Space in Aztec Monuments and Books" in *Their Way of Writing. Scripts, Signs, and Pictographies in Pre-Columbian America*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone, Gary Urton (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2011), 190-91.

ending with natural catastrophes, and with the final cycle representing our current age.[10] As Hassig shows, the traditional notion portraying Aztec time as simply cyclical is problematic: The seemingly fixed calendar dates, among them dates of birth determining bad and good omens, could be and often were manipulated by individuals and rulers alike, leading to temporal elasticity. How and why calendars were set up was a political decision, and as such structured society under institutional influence. The Aztec empire practiced no active political integration or spreading of social practices and religious beliefs to tributary states, which explains why the spreading of calendars had important organizational and integrative functions. Furthermore, for Hassig the distinction between cyclical and linear time does not hold, as both concepts were used in different contexts. While time is inherently cyclical for religious purposes, Aztec political authorities emphasized linear time, in accordance with the more random character of political events and to allow each ruler to distinguish himself from his predecessors. A distinction between myth and history is evident in the description of occurrences after the beginning of the fifth cycle, where divine interaction is for the most part restricted to the dated but temporally unanchored ritual time, and not listed in the historical codices.[11] The various time-concepts taken together with the interpretative view of history make for a multitude of approaches, manifested by the Aztec wise-men under royal tutelage and tied to political decision making.

Castile

As in Mesoamerica, there was no single notion of time or history in medieval Castile. Nonetheless, regarding the conquest of the Americas the importance of ideals developed during the *reconquista* can be underlined,[12] together with an increasing religious dualism, starting with the conquest of the Emirate of Granada in 1491. Various Christian kingdoms campaigned against the Muslim rulers of Al-Andalus in medieval Iberia, with Castile gradually becoming the dominant force after the decisive victory at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, and especially through the personal union with Aragon under Ferdinand and Isabella in 1479 and the later incorporation of Granada. In order to legitimize the campaigns against Spanish Muslim rulers, the Visigoth kings' right to rule over Iberia was invoked by positing a lineage running from them to the later Castilian kings.[13] Special importance was given to the semi-mythical victory of the Visigoth founder of Asturias, king

10 León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought*, 21-22.
11 Hassig, *Time, History*, 36-37, 62, 72-80, 111-12.
12 Term applied retroactively to the centuries-long military campaigns leading to the end of Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula in the late 15th century.
13 The Crowns of Castile and Aragon were merged in dynastic union under Charles I of Spain, the Habsburg heir to Ferdinand and Isabella. The Indies, islands and mainland of the Ocean Sea formed part of the Crown of Castile upon Ferdinand's death. Furthermore, Charles I was King of Aragon, Majorca, Valencia and Sicily, Count of Barcelona, Roussillon and Cerdagne, extending the territories acquired under his parents.

Pelayo, over Muslims at Covadonga as early as 722. In this way, late medieval Castilian historians related events to the more distant past of pre-Roman, Roman and Visigoth times, as well as with the medieval Iberian kingdoms: Historical writing dealing with the present thus changed in relation to what could be learnt about the past, and at the same time both changed in light of new approaches to historical scholarship.[14] Castilian chroniclers used various chronologies that went back to Octavian gaining control over the Peninsula, the Incarnation or the Creation respectively. The Iberian kingdoms were connected to the first generation after the biblical flood, in this way dating back their political and cultural identities to the first age of human history, and adding legitimacy by referring above all to the Visigoth heritage. The past was understood as organically advancing through time, whereby human insight was enhanced and European societies became more 'civilised'. Castilian and Aragonese chronicles were mostly concerned with royals and nobles, reflecting the social reality of Christian medieval Iberia where royal rule was directly tied to noble support.[15]

At the same time, the conviction that the apocalypse was imminent was a dominant view in the early modern Spanish church as well as amongst mendicant orders, especially the Franciscans.[16] A providential view of history is evident in official chronicles such as the *Primera Crónica General* written under the tutelage of Alfonso X. There, the devil is said to have directly interfered as to end Visigoth rule, whereas the Christian kingdoms of the north had been spared so that Christianity's light would not disappear from the Peninsula.[17] Towards the late Middle Ages, Roman and humanistic historiographical traditions with their focus on written records were adopted on the Peninsula, amongst others by the humanist Antonio de Nebrija. He posited a parallel, teleological development of language and culture, with the summit of Castilian expansion taking place under Ferdinand and Isabella, whom he advised to expand militarily, but also linguistically by spreading the Castilian language.[18] Castile's rise towards dominance of the Peninsula and consequently of the Mediterranean was connected to an increasingly confident identity discourse, with both official Castilian and Roman Catholic views at times enhancing but also diverging from each other. It was based on a teleological con-

14 Sabine MacCormack, "History, Memory and Time in Golden Age Spain" in *History and Memory*, Vol. 4 No. 2 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992) 39, lines 11-15.
15 Ibid., 42-44, 49-51.
16 The Franciscan mendicant orders go back to the 13th century, adhering to the principles of St. Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) by seeking to return to a simpler life as declared by Christ. The Franciscans were the first mendicant order to arrive in New Spain, shortly after the conquest in 1523, and remained the most influential order there until the late 16th century, cf. Felix Hinz, "*Hispanisierung" in Neuspanien 1519-1568, vol. 2* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2005), 266-68.
17 Ramón Menéndez Pidal (ed.), *Primera crónica general: Estoria de España que mandó componer Alfonso el Sabio y se continuaba bajo Sancho IV en 1289* (Madrid: Nueva biblioteca de autores españoles, 1906), fol.. 188 r. - 188 v., fol. 196 v.
18 Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramática castellana* (Salamanca, 1492), fol. 3 r.-3 v.; Mignolo, *Darker Side*, 38-39.

cept of time, according to which Castilian power would increase through divine favour, and in propagandistic portrayals of the *reconquista* and Iberia's Christian past. A thread common to these different views is the differentiation from Others, be it Muslims, Jews or 'barbarians', which would come to form a central tenet of the Spanish overseas empire.

The numerous, at least superficial parallels between both world views further complicate their disentanglement: Both in Castile and Anahúac historical writing was concerned with the deeds of rulers, set down by official chroniclers. The imminent end of the world provided a focal point for both Christian and Aztec views of possible futures. And in both cases, ancient and not-so-ancient pasts provided templates and legitimation to the royal lineages, for whom time and calendars constituted forms of political control.[19] Mythical origins played an important role in Aztec tradition, where the royal lineage of each city-state (*altepetl*) justified its right to rule by highlighting its descent from Chichimecs and Toltecs, as well as from their individual, arduous migrations into Anahúac. In a similar way, Castilian kings invoked the mythical past by highlighting the supposed dynastic connections running from pre-Roman, Roman and especially Visigoth rulers like Pelayo up to their present. However, the parallel existence of various conceptions of time and history in both medieval Spain and pre-Conquest Mexico undermines the claims of a supposed substitution of cyclical with linear time and of Aztec with Spanish history in New Spain. Medieval Spanish traditions of writing history were not only transferred, but also adapted to the 'New World': Non-official chroniclers started laying the focus on the *conquistadors* and natives, instead of on kings and nobles as was traditionally the case. Spanish colonial writers, some of them royally appointed as 'Cosmographer-Chronicler of the Council of the Indies', adapted indigenous perceptions of their conquest and pre-conquest pasts. What is more, the theocratic belief in God's will leading to salvation was translated to chronicles, in which Cortés' 'victory' was portrayed as a Christian triumph through divine intervention.[20] This providential reading of the conquest was also employed by *mestizo* chroniclers. As common in medieval writings, passages from other chronicles were incorporated, but also used in conjunction with indigenous sources, leading to different outcomes.

19 For the role of the royal counselor Tlacaélel in forming the Mexica's mystico-militaristic world-view by rewriting their history, see León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought*, 158-66.

20 Luis Weckman, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*, transl. by Frances M. López-Morillas (New York: Fordham Unviersity Press, 1992), 505-509; Carolyn Salomons, "Hybrid Historiography: Pre- and Post-conquest Latin America and Perceptions of the Past" in *Past Imperfect* Vol. 12, No. 1 (Edmonton, University of Albany: 2006), 4.

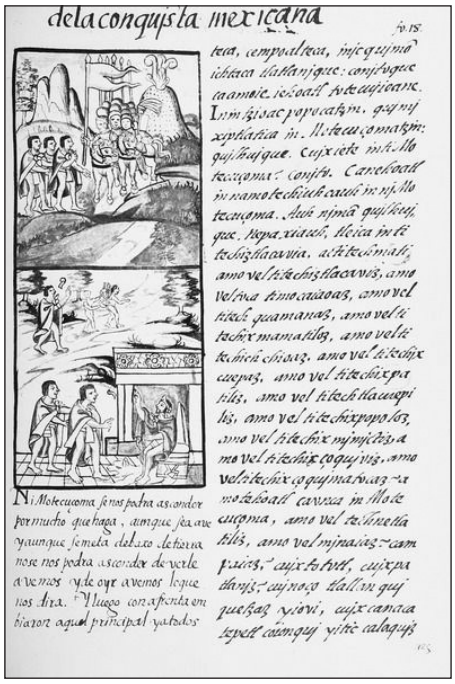

Figure 3. Paintings of Cortés' army and Motecuhzoma II., with writing in Spanish and Nahuatl.
From the Florentine Codex, created under Sahagún's supervision.

II. Indigenous and Mestizo Chroniclers: Knowledge Transformed

Since the beginning of the conquest indigenous forms of recording the past were supplanted by, but also adapted to their Spanish counterparts. This process is evident in the introduction of alphabetical script and books, as well as the Latin and Castilian tongues, which were seen by the Spanish as more advanced than indigenous languages, oral traditions and pictographic script. The identification of native codices with the devil also led to massive campaigns of destruction by the mendicant orders.[21] Simultaneously there were also points of intercultural exchange: The *crónicas de Indias* were an early and important product of intercultural contact, mashing annals, travelogues and ethnography into a new genre. In these, the traditional Aztec codices were combined with Latin script, written in Spanish and Nahuatl and incorporating European artistic traditions. Besides Spanish chroniclers, *mestizo* and indigenous scholars played an increasingly important role. These included indigenous chroniclers such as Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, who came from a royal Mexica family, and Don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, the only chronicler to write extensively in Nahuatl. *Mestizo* authors of Spanish and indigenous descent like Diego Muñoz Camargo from Tlaxcala started gaining prominence in connection with the stark indigenous population decline. The rise of a Christianised and educated local elite

21 Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico. The Incorporation of Indian Societies Into the Western World, 16th-18th Centuries*, transl. by Eileen Corrigan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 1-3, 14-17, 38.

was directly tied to the mendicants: Primarily in the Franciscan 'Imperial Colegio de Santa Cruz Tlatelolco' in Mexico City where learned friars trained young indigenous noblemen to become priests from as early as 1536 onwards.[22] As the plans to form native priests did not come to fruition, *mestizos* were increasingly allowed to enter higher education towards the end of the 16th century as well, especially through the recently opened Jesuit schools. Among the faculty served such influential Franciscan scholars as Andrés de Olmos, Alonso de Molina and Bernardino de Sahagún. The curriculum's focus lay on humanist learning but also contained Nahuatl, and texts were translated to and from the Aztec language.[23]

Members of this new elite used their judicial and linguistic knowledge to defend their privileges and status – the majority of the chroniclers were related to the royal lineages of the Mexica, Acolhua and Tlaxcaltec. Many tried to create family trees legitimizing their lineage's claims to lands and properties, owing to the lack of a central (Mexica) authority that had enforced an official version of the past before the conquest. These writings were connected to the colonial practice of rewarding achievements with privileges through the *relaciones de méritos*, used by the colonial bureaucracy to award positions and determine their inheritability. While in theory every person who took or had taken part in the conquest, mission or administration was eligible, the legal procedure to attain privileges was so complicated that only a small minority was able follow the regulations successfully.[24] The secret confirmation of traditional values threatened by evangelisation was another motivation for writing chronicles. These attempts were hindered by the deaths of people who had witnessed pre-colonial times. The indigenous nobles acted in accordance with the ideal of the Spanish *hidalgo*, taking on their clothes and piety while at the same time secretly collecting Aztec chronicles. The Spanish attitude was ambiguous as well, as Spaniards feared Mesoamerican knowledge, but also tried to control and appropriate it to their advantage. Local indigenous

22 Serge Gruzinski, *Painting the Conquest. The Mexican Indians and the European Renaissance*, transl. by Deke Dusinberre (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 103-18, 150-58; Germán Vázquez Chamorro, "Introducción" in Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia de la nación chichimeca* (Madrid: Dastin historia, 2000), 5-7.

23 "[…] *grammar, rhetorics, poetics, philosophy and medicine were taught. Pliny, Martial, Sallust, Juvenal, Livy, Cicero, Boetius, the Fathers of the Church, Nebrija, Erasmus, Luis Vivés, etc. were read. From the college of Santa Cruz emerged an indigenous group brilliantly initiated into the lettered culture of the Europeans"*, Gruzinski, *Conquest of Mexico*, 58, lines 29-34

24 The *relaciones de méritos* were supposedly autobiographical writings showcasing the achievements of the applicant or his forebears. A petition containing a list of witnesses had to be submitted to the royal *audiencias* (appellate courts), from where they were passed on to judges, the Council of the Indies, and the ultimate authority of the king. Robert Folger argues that the writing of these *relaciones* contained tactical elements, attempting to portray a complete narrative by writing over gaps in the source material, cf. Robert Folger, "Alonso Borregán Writes Himself: The Colonial Subject and the Writing of History in Relaciones de méritos y servicios" in Robert Folger, *Wulf Oesterreicher* (Ed.), *Talleres de la memoria – reivindicaciones y autoridad en la historiografía indiana de los siglos XVI y XVII* (LITVerlag: Münster, Hamburg, London, 2005), 267-73.

wills and land tenure titles called *Títulos primordiales* were even accepted by colonial courts as a way of authenticating a community's rights to its traditional territories.[25]

From 1570 onwards, the indigenous demographic crisis led to immense losses of privileges. The cumulative effects of epidemics, marriages with Spaniards, the continuing European immigration, and the collapse of the ancient dependencies accelerated the decline of the traditional elites, on whom the colonial authorities did not depend anymore. Developments such as the counter-reformation and the creation of the inquisition are emblematic of a less tolerant attitude of the Spanish Crown in the second half of the 16th century. Simultaneously, the *Colegio de Santa Cruz* lost importance, and was gradually replaced by the newly founded University of Mexico at the turn of the century. The university was mainly geared towards *creoles*[26] instead of students of indigenous descent, reflecting the social changes of the times.[27]

Against this background, native intellectuals used traditional knowledge to advance their goals under the difficult conditions of colonial rule, adapting new media, ideas and practices, and sometimes passing them on to local communities. Multiethnic networks were used for collaboration and production of knowledge. It is important to stress that there was not a single *mestizo* identity. Rather, in colonial society different adaptation strategies were applied independently of native ethnicity or position in the *casta* system. Knowledge exchange in administration, literature and everyday-life was constantly negotiated under hierarchical relations between colonizers and colonized, as shown by the fact that non-Spanish chronicles were only being printed from the late 19th century onwards.[28] Having considered the development of a literate indigenous and *mestizo* elite, we now turn to the works of one of their better-known members, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, in order to examine the processes of negotiation between Aztec and Spanish traditions.

25 Gruzinski, *Painting the Conquest*, 103-18, 150-58; Idem, *Conquest of Mexico,* 61-62, 130; Vázquez Chamorro, ibid.

26 *Criollo* in the Spanish *casta* system referred to people of Spanish descent born in the overseas possessions.

27 Carrasco, *Oxford Encyclopedia*, 257-258; 260; Gruzinski, *Conquest of Mexico*, 64-68.

28 Gabriela Ramos, Yanna Yannakakis, "Introduction" in *Indigenous Intellectuals. Knowledge, Power, and Colonial Culture in Mexico and the Andes*, ed. idem (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2014), 1-17; Salvador Velazco, "Reconstrucciones historiográficas y etnicidades emergentes en el México colonial. Documento para ser leído en la Conferencia de la Asociación de Estudios Latinamericanos a celebrarse del 24 al 26 de septiembre de 1998 en el Palmer House Hilton Hotel en la ciudad de Chicago.", 17; Mignolo, *Darker Side*, 204.

III. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl: Christian Apologist or Mexican Patriot avant la lettre*?*

Fernando de Alva descended from the marriage of a Spaniard and a *mestiza*. On his mother's side he was directly related to the ruler Nezahualpili of the Acolhuas and to Cuitlahuac, the penultimate lord of the Mexica's capital Tenochtitlan. Because of his indigenous ancestry he was allowed to study at the *Colegio de Santa Cruz* where he consulted with Franciscan chroniclers. After his studies de Alva was employed as a governor in various native communities, and later worked as an interpreter at the 'General Court of the Indios' (*Juzgado General de Indios en la Nueva España*). He used his linguistic competences to defend his family's hereditary titles for the native community Teotihuacan before court, which where contested numerous times by the authorities.[29] As sources for his historical works he used mostly Aztec codices and traditional chants, and discussed their meanings with nobles who had lived before the conquest. Other important sources were works by Spanish and indigenous authors from different lineages.[30] Alva Ixtlilxochitl examined various colonial codices for the *Historia*, and out of those consulted for pre-Hispanic events the *Códice Xolotl* and the *mapas Tlotzin*, *Quinatzin* and *Tepechpan* have come down to us. Regarding the conquest he indicates Spanish sources (Cortés, Gómara, Herrera) as well as texts from Acolhua (Bautista Pomar), Mexica and Tlaxcaltec (Tadeo de Niza, Muñoz Camargo) chroniclers, thus considering positions of different population groups.[31]

Despite his mixed Spanish-Aztec heritage a self-identification with the Acolhua is evident in his working methods, combined with an identification by colonial authorities as an indigenous noble, given access to positions such as governor (*gobernador*[32]) and interpreter that were often held by non-Spanish people.[33] Ac-

29 Benton underlines that the family's possessions were not left to Fernando de Alva, but to his older brother Francisco de Navas, and that Fernando's son Juan de Alva Cortés went to court to gain these privileges. According to Benton, de Alva's side of the family laid claims only to Teotiuahacan, and after conquest had an outsider status in the pre-colonial former capital Tezcoco, cf. Bradley Benton, "The Outsider: Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Tenuous Ties to the City of Tetzcoco" in *Colonial Latin American Review*, Vol. 23 No. 1 (Routledge: London, 2003), 37-52.

30 Vázquez Chamorro, "Introducción", 23-24, 34-35; Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras históricas Vol. 2*, ed. Edmundo O'Gorman (México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1977), 525.

31 Vázquez Chamorro, "Introducción" 37; Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia chichimeca* (2000), 292.

32 While in other Spanish Mesoamerican overseas possessions the *gobernador* was the highest political authority, this position was assumed by the viceroy in New Spain. The Newspanish *gobernadores* held authority over a city or community. In order to ascertain better control over territories that were predominantly populated by native people, the colonial authorities tended to employ *gobernadores* (or *caciques*) of indigenous descent but foreign to these areas, who implemented Spanish instructions.

33 John Frederick Schwaller, "The Brothers Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Bartolomé de Alva. Two native Intellectuals of Seventeenth-Century Mexico" in Ramos, Yannakakis, *Indigenous Intellectuals*, 43-44.

cording to de Alva himself, he had exhibited a large interest in events of the 'New World' since his youth, which he saw as no less important than those of ancient Europe and Mesopotamia, of Greeks, Romans and Medes.[34] The *Historia* begins with the creation of the world and ends abruptly with Cortés' conquest of the Aztec empire, as the chronicle was either left unfinished or formed part of a larger work lost to us. Its main focus lies on the Acolhuas, their rulers and ascendancy as a major force in the Aztec Triple Alliance. In the following I will concentrate on temporal and historical aspects of the chronicle due to their centrality to de Alva's positions. The distinction made between 'history' and 'time' is analytical, and does not imply a division of both necessarily intertwined concepts.

Time: Calendar and Prophecy

The chronicles' external structure is reminiscent of European universal histories, which record events considered important from the world's beginning up until the author's own time. However, its internal structure follows native historiographical traditions, starting with the *Nahua* cosmogony: The story of the Four Suns is told, which take as their starting point "*Teotloquenahuaque Tlachihualcípal Nemoani Ilhuicahua Tlatcpaque,* […] universal god and creator of all things, according to whose will live all creatures, lord of heaven and hell."[35] This description brings to mind the Aztec supreme deity *In Tloque in Nahuaque*, according to León-Portilla the "Lord of the Close Vicinity", an active principle giving foundation to the universe at the beginning of each new age.[36] In contrast to Castilian chronicles like the *Primera Crónica* which begins with the Genesis,[37] Alva Ixtlilxochitl thus attributes the beginning of time to a *Nahua* deity. Furthermore, the present is directly connected to the legend of the Suns, as the fourth age (the Fire Sun) is said to be still in effect in current times.

This final age was inaugurated by the white and bearded ruler Quetzalcóatl,[38] who tried to establish good rules and doctrines and planted a cross. As his teachings met with limited success, he left "where he had come from, which was the

34 "[…] *desde mi adolescencia tuve siempre gran deseo de saber las cosas acaecidas en este Nuevo Mundo,que no fueren menos que las de los romanos, griegos, medos y otras repúblicas gentílicas que tuvieron fama en el Universo",* Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, *Obras Historicas Vol. 2* (1892)*,* 15, lines 1-3, all translations by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

35 "[...] *el dios universal de todas las cosas, creador de ellas y a cuyo voluntad viven todas las criaturas, señor del cielo y de la tierra."*, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, *Historia de la nación chichimeca* (Barcelona: Red ediciones, 2011), 19, lines 6-9.

36 Leisa Kauffmann, "Figures of Time and Tribute: The Trace of the Colonial Subaltern in Fernando de Alva Ixtlixochtitl's *Historia de la nación chichimeca*" in *The Global South*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 38-39; León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought*, 91-93.

37 Menéndez Pidal, *Primera Crónica*, fol. 4.

38 De Alva gives 'Huémac' as an alternative name for this early religious leader, thus distinguishing him from the major Aztec deity of the same name, as well as from the later Toltec ruler Ce Acatl Topiltzin.

Orient",[39] but not before foreseeing his return in the year *ce ácatl*, "when his doctrine would be received and his sons would be lords and possess the earth, and they and their descendants would instigate many calamities and persecutions."[40] Quetzalcóatl's description as well as Cortés' arrival in 1519 (or *ce ácatl* in the Aztec year count) connect both figures in a cyclical pattern, possibly making the conquest more intelligible to the *Nahua* world view. However, this passage should not be understood as portraying Cortés as an Aztec deity, because the Spaniards are not explicitly referred to as gods in the chronicle.[41] Rather, Quetzalcóatl stands at the start of a lineage of prophesies about the Aztec empire's or even the world's ultimate demise, that refer to a menacing future (known to the author) by drawing on native religious traditions. In other parts of the chronicle, the Acolhua ruler Nezahualcoyotl and his son Nezahualpiltzintli repeat similar warnings, amplified by phenomena such as a great glow of fire appearing from the Orient shortly before conquest.[42] Interestingly, in a rare case of inserting his own voice into the story de Alva comments that the increase in vices has been fulfilled completely "because what was considered supernatural and prodigious in those times is in our own time very obvious and ordinary, and is thus no cause for admiration."[43] Among the fulfilled predictions of Nezahualcoyotl we find that the rulers will disappear, the earth turn unprofitable, the youth turn to vices and sensualities from a young age and robbery of belongings proliferate. In this way, the chronicler inserts prophecies of the colonial future into the pre-Hispanic past, in order to hold a mirror to the evils of the 'innovations' brought by the Spaniards, which have first and foremost served to disrupt the relative harmony in place before their arrival.

Throughout the *Historia* Alva Ixtlilxochitl mentions incidents that took place at a similar moment in time but in different places, using Spanish and Aztec dating systems: For 959 are listed the Toltec empire's downfall, but also the papacy of John XII, the reigns of German emperor Otto I. and of Castilian ruler García,

39 "[...] *se volvió por la misma parte de donde había venido, que fue por la de Oriente*", Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, *Historia chichimeca* (2011)*,* 20, lines 21-22.

40 "*y entonces su doctrina sería recibida y sus hijos serían señores y poseerían la tierra, y que ellos y sus descendientes pasarían muchas calamidades y persecuciones",* Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, ibid, 20, lines 23-26.

41 The conquistadors are sometimes called 'sons of the sun' (*hijos del sol*) by de Alva, which does not necessarily imply divine qualities. A discussion between Motecuhzoma II and his advisers concludes in a similar vein, as the Mexica ruler decides on treating Cortés as the ambassador of a great ruler rather than as a deity, cf. Gabriel Miguel Pastrana Flores, *Historias de la Conquista: aspectos de la historiografía de tradición náhuatl* (México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004), 76-78, 111-12.

42 Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, *Historia chichimeca* (2011), 167; For descriptions of divination according to the Aztec's sacred texts see Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 volumes , transl. By Arthur J. O. Anderson, Charles E. Dibble (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2002), books 4 and 5.

43 *"*[*se han cumplido*] *a la letra, porque las que en aquellos tiempos se tenían por cosas sobrenaturales y prodigiosas, son en éste muy patentes y ordinarias, y así no causan admiración*"*,* Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, ibid, 128, line 34 – 129, line 2.

as well as the Aztec date *ce técpatl*.[44] Once more, there are precedents in Castilian chronicles, where the enthronement of a new king was often juxtaposed with the reigns of other European monarchs. Then again, for the beginning of 1500 are given the birth dates of both Ixtlilxochitl II, the chronicler's forebear who was converted to Christianity during the conquest, and of Charles V., both supposedly instruments for spreading the Catholic faith to the Americas. Although this parallelism is depicted as God's work, it brings to mind the importance of day and year dates in Aztec thought as well, whose localisation in the *xiuhpohualli* calendar had certain positive or negative consequences for the destinies of individuals.[45] Finally, this technique brings us back to de Alva's contrasting the histories of the 'Old' and 'New World' – for if Aztec culture is seen as no less important than that of ancient Europe and Mesopotamia, and if medieval rulers in Europe and Anahúac are treated as equals, then why should the indigenous and (above all) *mestizo* people of New Spain be treated as less than equal?

History: David in Anahúac

By bringing his distant ancestors the Chichimecas closer to the Toltec cultural heritage through the depiction of marriages between both groups, Alva Ixtlilxochitl tries to increase the formers' reputation.[46] The arrival of the Chichimec ruler Xolotl in the Valley of Mexico in 963 is depicted as initiating a peaceful conquest, taking possession of the former Toltec empire which was mostly depopulated at this point. What is more, Xolotl led "the greatest army that had existed in this New World",[47] consisting of one million warriors. In contrast, Dibble casts doubts on this huge number, taking into account the size of the region in question, as well as the sustained rather than sudden immigration of Chichimecas described in the Códice Xolotl, de Alva's main source for the pre-colonial period. Further discrepancies are highlighted by Davies, among them the exaggerated age of rulers like Xolotl, whose reign is described by the *mestizo* chronicler as having lasted 112 years. This can be seen in connection with the use of different year-count systems from various population groups on the one hand; on the other hand, extending the rule of various monarchs added greater antiquity and thus legitimacy to de

44 Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, *Historia chichimeca* (2011), 24.
45 Ibid, 161; Kauffmann, "Figures of Time", 161.
46 Similar to portrayals in codices like the Codex Xolotl, de Alva describes a process of acculturation of the nomadic Chichimeca, who adopt a sedentary lifestyle and the Nahuatl language by mixing with the Toltecs. Other Nahua population groups are shown to arrive later in the Valley of Mexica and are given lands by Xolotl, who is depicted as direct ancestor of the Acolhua rulers.
47 "[...] *pobló con las gentes de su ejército, que fue el mayor número que se halla en las historias haber tenido ningún príncipe de los más poderosos que hubo antes ni después en este nuevo mundo porque, según parece sin las mujeres y niños, era más de un millón*", Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, ibid, 25, lines 21-24.

Alva's ancestors.[48] From this perspective, the historian built on codices produced after the conquest, using methods of time-manipulation current among the Aztec political and religious leaders. Owing to the use of these techniques, the codices used were highly subjective taken by themselves. What is more, his narrative of the martial Chichimecs' adopting the higher civilisation and language (Nahuatl) of the Toltecs could have brought to mind a similar process on the ancient Iberian Peninsula involving Visigoth invaders and settled Romans, no doubt familiar to his contemporaries. Similar to Renaissance authors turning to new interpretations and translations of classical authors, Alva Ixtlilxochitl turned to a variety of American sources hailing the Toltec rather than the Roman example.[49]

This manipulation of the past continues in the portrayal of the 15th century Acolhua ruler Nezahualcoyotl, "the most powerful, courageous, wise and fortunate prince and leader there was in this new world",[50] according to de Alva. The extensive judicial and land reforms, as well as the construction projects undertaken by his ancestor are listed. This serves to present a highly developed indigenous civil society, not so different from its Spanish equivalent. Fernando de Alva goes on to describe in detail how Nezahualcoyotl abolished his subjects' tribute payments in times of crisis, which can once more be interpreted as implicit criticism of Spanish colonial authorities: The Nahua ruler's generosity stands in clear contrast to the exploitation and over-taxation imposed on native communities by their indigenous rulers who in turn had been appointed by the Viceregal administration, which contemporary readers from New Spain would have been familiar with. Furthermore, while the Mexica are portrayed as idolaters, the Acolhuas appear as 'monotheistic' proto-Christians who opposed human sacrifice, in order to further the author's position in colonial Mexico.[51] Above all, Nezahualcoyotl serves as a moral example, who "[h]ailed as false the gods worshipped by those of this land, saying that they were no more than statues of demons, enemies of humankind",[52] and asserting that there was only one true God, creator of heaven and earth, "with whom came to stay the souls of the virtuous after death, and those of the bad went to another place, the most abysmal of the earth, of horrible works and punishments."[53] As seen in the creation myth, the Aztecs traced their various

48 Charles E. Dibble (ed.), *Códice Xolotl Vol. 1* (México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1980), 28-29; Nigel Davies, *The Toltec Heritage: From the Fall of Tula to the Rise of Tenochtitlan* (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980) 47-48, 122-24.

49 Thomas Ward, "Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Civilization, and the Quest for Coevalness" in *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Vol. 23 No. 1 (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 110.

50 "[...] *el más poderoso, valeroso, sabio y venturoso príncipe y capitán que ha habido en este nuevo mundo*", Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, *Historia chichimeca* (2011), 131, lines 28-30.

51 Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, ibid, 110; Kauffmann, "Figures of Time", 42-45; Ward, ibid, 117-19.

52 "[*t*]*uvo por falsos a los dioses que adoraban los de esta tierra, diciendo que no eran sino estatuas de demonios enemigos del género humano",* Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, ibid, 132, lines 11-13.

53 "[...] *que con él iban a parar las almas de los virtuosos después de muertos, y que las de los malos iban a otro lugar, que era el más ínfimo de la tierra, de trabajos y penas horribles"*,

gods back to the central deity *In Tlaque in Nahuaque*, and their notions of the afterlife also share similarities with the Christian heaven and hell put forth in this passage. However, the Acolhuas' supposed monotheism as well as designations such as "God our Lord" foreground a connection to Christianity. Furthermore, Lesbre sees in the invocation of a single god a negation of the primordial duality *Omeyocan*, a central concept in Aztec thought.[54] This adoration of the Abrahamic God and his depiction as a warrior-poet king have led to the identification of Nezahualcoyotl with the biblical King David by contemporaries like Juan de Torquemada and by later researchers. Torquemada, who collaborated with de Alva, highlights both rulers' experiences of flight, eventual victory and romance, as well as the punishment of four of Nezahualcoyotl's sons for committing sins, supposedly reminiscent of David's treatment of his son Absalom.[55] By making de Alva's vision of his ancestors, above all Nezahualcoyotl, as a just, 'monotheistic' and cultured people explicit through Christian comparisons, Torquemada inserted an Acolhua bias into Mexican historiography. As the Spanish used the Roman and Visigoth Iberian pasts, and as the various Aztec tribes claimed Toltec ancestry, so Alva Ixtlilxochitl continued this process of turning to the past for legitimacy. Only that after 100 years of contact between colonisers and colonised there were more pasts to choose from and transform.

Writing between Two Worlds

Lockhart notes a high degree of similarity between the cultural systems of Europeans and Nahuas regarding social, political, financial and religious organization.[56] However, while on a micro level indigenous concepts that oftentimes survived the

Alva Ixtlilchxochitl, *Historia chichimeca* (2011), lines 20-22.

54 Patrick Lesbre, "Chants traditionnels en nahuatl et Relation de Tezcoco (Juan Bautista Pomar, 1582): la recherche d'une identité préhispanique" in ed. Jean-Paul Barbiche, *Des Amériques: Impressions et expressions* (Le Havre: L'Harmattan, 1999). The epiphet of "Creator of heaven and hell" also recalls Aztec views of the supreme principle as creator of all things, cf. Ibid, 37-38.

55 While the focus lies on both rulers just application of laws in their own family, this particular comparison is based on incestuous behaviour: Both Absalom and Nezahualcoyotl's sons committed adultery with their stepmothers, cf. Juan de Torquemada, *Monarchía Indiana. De los veinte y un libros rituales y monarquía indiana, con el origen y guerras de los indios occidentales, de sus poblazones, descubrimiento, conquista, conversión y otras cosas maravillosas de la mesma tierra* (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM): México D. F., 1975), 165.1*;* see also D. A. Brading, *The First America – The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State 1492-1867* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1991), 281.

56 "As a people with a sedentary life, intensive culture, dynastic rulers and tax systems, territorial polities, a well-developed religious apparaturs of pantheon, priesthood, and ritual calendar associated with those polities, and social distinctions between nobles, commoners, and intermediate groups, the Nahuas had reasonably close analogues of the concepts structuring nearly all facets of European life.", James Lockhart, "Sightings: Initial Nahua reactions to Spanish culture" in *Implicit Understandings. Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1994), 218, line 16 – 219, line 4.

conquest were far from identical with their closest Spanish analogies, Nahuas also adopted Spanish artefacts, practices or principles useful to them. Similarly, the *Historia* is full of descriptions that have ostensible precedents in both Aztec and Spanish culture, from the four ages or (in Christian thought) various world realms to apocalyptic prophecies. Whether or not de Alva was a practicing Christian is secondary – the external and self-identification with the Acolhuas does not necessarily exclude Catholic faith in his time. The concept of 'double coding' (*Doppelkodierung*) as used by Margit Kern for describing the transcultural processes leading to the production of new art forms in New Spain is helpful in this context. According to this theory, cultural elements were mostly transmitted successfully by the Spaniards when they had connection to older traditions, changing the original concepts in the process. The example of the Franciscans shows that Spanish groups were often aware of and used these parallel meanings to their advantage, in this case to advance evangelisation. At the same time, these processes were used to pass pre-colonial beliefs on as well, and were thus neither merely pre-Hispanic nor merely Spanish. De Alva, as a student of both the Franciscans and Aztec traditions, would have been aware of the usefulness of these 'double codings', and either consciously or unconsciously tried to employ them to impart Nahua concepts without falling victim to the Inquisition.[57]

Conclusion

Among the Nahua literary techniques used by the *mestizo* chronicler we find an interpretative approach to history, in conjunction with the manipulation of dates to fit his purpose: Prolonging the reigns of Chichimec rulers like Xolotl added legitimacy to his Acolhua ancestors' claims to power. On the other hand, the Acolhuas' supposedly benevolent rule and prophesies of a worse future are used to contrast life in the Aztec empire with the comparatively harsher colonial rule: The colonial authorities are directly and indirectly criticised using concepts unfamiliar to them. Above all, by giving the dates of contemporary European and Aztec rulers, and by implicitly invoking comparisons between Chichimecs and Visigoths as well as between Nezahualcoyotl and David, the deep respect for traditions shared by Spaniards and Aztecs is exploited to reach an equation of both historical traditions.

57 Margit Kern, *Transkulturelle Imaginationen des Opfers in der Frühen Neuzeit: Übersetzungsprozesse zwischen Mexiko und Europa* (Berlin, Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013) 108, 130; For the exemplary case of de Alva's relative Don Carlos Ometochtzin Chichimecatecatl, who was charged with advocating indigenous self-determination and a return to native religion and subsequently condemned to death at the stake in 1539 by New Spain's first Catholic bishop, Juan de Zumárraga, see Eduardo J. Douglas, "Figures of Speech: Pictorial History in the 'Quinatzin Map' of about 1542'" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 85 No. 2 (New York NY: College Art Association, 2003), 285.

The colonised elite's use of its dual linguistic and cultural heritage is evident in Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's works and life. He shows exemplarily how *mestizo* chroniclers built their own Mesoamerican canon, incorporating a diverse array of sources from both cultural areas and thus continuing the work of Aztec *tlamatinime*, albeit in a transformed, transcultural manner. On a local level, this meant using his knowledge of languages and law to repeatedly defend his family's hereditary possessions and title as a *cacique*[58] successfully in court against Viceregal authorities. Not only did de Alva use Nahua narrative techniques, he also followed the structure of the colonial *relaciones de méritos* by highlighting his forebears' achievements, a prerequisite for obtaining privileges and higher positions in New Spanish society. On a more abstract level, de Alva's equal treatment of European and American history went against prevalent appraisals of the 'superior European civilisation' – albeit while using Castilian language and Christian terminology. What is more, by way of his writings and collection de Alva influenced a multitude of later New Spanish scholars, among them the *creole* polymath Sigüenza y Góngora and the historian Echeverría y Veytia.[59]

At the same time, modified knowledge could travel back from the 'New' to the 'Old World', as the example of the Franciscan chronicler Juan de Torquemada illustrates. He had collaborated with de Alva and adopted his Acolhua bias, which would in this way go on to exert considerable influence on later history writings on Mexico. Even at this early stage of colonialism, we can discern a global flow of ideas and concepts, between Spain and New Spain. This knowledge exchange was of course asymmetrical and hierarchical, and led to the (often forced) transformation of indigenous, but also of 'European', knowledge. Fernando de Alva appears as a cultural mediator between Spaniards and indigenous peoples, taking part in various traditions and networks of knowledge production through which he imparted his vision of the Mesoamerican past and his world view.

58 Title for leaders of indigenous groups, derived from the term for pre-Columbian Caribbean leaders. In colonial Mexico caciques often were considered part of the nobility, holding rights to estates.

59 Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World – Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 221-224.