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Rethinking the Conquest : an exploration of the similarities between pre-contact Spanish and Mexica society, culture, and royalty

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RETHINKING THE CONQUEST: AN EXPLORATION OF THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN
PRE-CONTACT SPANISH AND MEXICA SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND ROYALTY

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Samantha Billing
University of Northern Iowa
May 2015

ABSTRACT

The Spanish Conquest has been historically marked by the year 1521 and is popularly thought of as an absolute and complete process of indigenous subjugation in the New World. Alongside this idea comes the widespread narrative that describes a barbaric, uncivilized group of indigenous people being conquered and subjugated by a more sophisticated and superior group of Europeans. There is also a common misconception that the Conquest resulted in a dominance of European culture and a loss of the indigenous heritage that had prevailed in the New World up until that point.

This manuscript explores the period known as the Conquest in a new way. I argue that by limiting the scope of the Spanish-indigenous interaction in the sixteenth-century to a single event, the actual historical narrative of this period is lost. The Spaniards did indeed win a war in 1521, but this event did not signify a conquest or an extinction of indigenous culture. Instead, this date marks the end of a two-year war between the Spaniards and the people commonly known as the Aztecs. This group of indigenous people, the Mexica of central Mexico, had dominated the central valley of Mesoamerica for only a few centuries, but had built up an imposing empire centered around the capital city of Tenochtitlan. Their culture was not only impressive by New World standards, but it was remarkably similar to the society and culture found in Early Modern Spain.

The focus of this manuscript is the concept of royal culture, but I also explore broader topics of society such as religion, warrior ethos, and imperial control. By looking at similarities between these two cultures, it is easy to see why they were able to come together in such a unique way during the Colonial Period. The society that emerged in New Spain after 1521 was not wholly European, nor was it wholly indigenous; it was a conglomeration of indigenous and Spanish elements that took the best concepts from both societies and combined them into an entirely novel culture, which can still be seen in Mexico today.

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has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

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INTRODUCTION

In 1519 a group of Spanish conquistadors reached the coast of Mexico and encountered a group of Native Americans called the Mexica who had built a great imperial civilization known to us as the Aztec Empire. They dominated the majority of the land that makes up present day Mexico from their capital city Tenochtitlan, which is estimated to have had a population of over 200,000 residents. When the capital city fell in 1521, it was not only the largest city in the New World, but it was one of the most populous cities on earth. Yet, despite a comparable population size to European cities and the amazement Spanish *conquistadors* (conquerors) experienced when they first entered Tenochtitlan, contemporary accounts quickly began to focus on the differences between the Mexica and the Europeans. Differences such as language and culture, including the practice of human sacrifice and polytheism, overshadowed the similarities. However, the Mexica practiced medicine, had roads, weapons, irrigation systems, palaces and other architectural works of astonishing size. They had developed a calendar, systems of writing and tax collection, and had a marketplace in the capital city which attracted 60,000 people daily according to some sources. Many of these innovations rivaled or were even more advanced than their European counterparts. In addition, the Mexica had

a very stratified social hierarchy, hereditary nobility and royal courts which will be the focus of this study.¹

I would like to introduce a comparative approach to explore the similarities between the Mexica and Europeans with regards to palace and court life, royalty and social hierarchy. Previous generations of scholars have concentrated on Spanish primary sources when writing about this period of time. They translated these sources and made them widely available to academics across the globe, however their focus was one-sided.² The next wave of scholars began to look at indigenous sources, especially the now infamous codices, but the European perspective dominated and the indigenous people were still depicted as backwards, barbarous and inferior.³ A more novel approach by scholars is the focus on indigenous sources on a larger scale, sources that may seem mundane but that provide invaluable insights into the lives of the Mexica before and after the conquest. This new view

¹ Marco A. Almazán, "The Aztec States-Society: Roots of Civil Society and Social Capital," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 565 (September 1999): 165.; Lane F. Fargher, Verence Y. Heredia Espinoza, and Richard E. Blanton, "Alternative Pathways to Power in Late Postclassic Highland Mesoamerica," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 30 (2011): 307.; Charles Gibson, "The Aztec Aristocracy in Colonial Mexico," *Comparative Studies in Colonial Mexico* 2, 2 (January 1960): 169-171.; Christian Isendahl and Michael E. Smith, "Sustainable Agrarian Urbanism: The Low-Density Cities of the Mayas and Aztecs," *Cities* 31 (2013): 138.; Tarmo Kulmar, "About the Comparison of the State Authority and Social Organization by Incas and Aztecs," *Folklore* 45 (June 2010): 142, 144.; Matthew Restall, Lisa Sousa, and Kevin Terraciano, eds., *Mesoamerican Voices: Native Language Writings from Colonial Mexico, Oaxaca, Yucatan, and Guatemala* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4, 126.; Matthew Restall and Kris Lane, *Latin America in Colonial Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12-13.; J. Rounds, "The Role of the Tecuhtli in Ancient Aztec Society," *Ethnohistory* 24, 4 (Fall 1977): 352, 354.; Stuart B. Schwartz, Ed., *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahuatl Views of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 6.; Michael E. Smith and Frances F. Berdan, "Archaeology and the Aztec Empire," *World Archaeology* 23, 3 (February 1992): 354.

² William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico with a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilization and the Life of the Conqueror Hernando Cortes* (New York: The Hovendon Co.: 1842).

³ Maurice Collis, *Cortés and Montezuma* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955).

stresses the similarities between the highly developed societies of Mesoamerica and their European contemporaries.⁴ The founder of this school of thought, James Lockhart, says, “The extent of their [the Spanish government and friars] success depended precisely upon the acceptance and retention of indigenous elements and patterns that in many respects were strikingly close to those of Europe.”⁵ Thus, not only were the Mexica comparable to the Europeans in many ways, but it was those similarities that can explain the success of the Spaniards in implementing certain practices in the large urban areas of the Basin of Mexico.

I argue that one of these similarities between the two cultures was their social structure, royalty and court life. Many indigenous rulers all over Mesoamerica retained their elevated status after the conquest because the Spanish recognized their equivalence to contemporary European nobility. This led to an integration of the two cultures, with changes on both sides, rather than a one-sided conquest where the indigenous people lost everything and were completely changed. The simple fact that each culture recognized its equal in the other is why Mexican society today is neither wholly European nor wholly indigenous. Matthew Restall calls this “Double Mistaken Identity” and states that “both Spaniards and natives viewed the same concepts or way of doing something as rooted in their own culture. In this

⁴ James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).; Laura Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).; Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).; Restall, Sousa and Terraciano, 2005.; Stephanie Wood, *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

⁵Lockhart, 4.

way, the native borrowing of Spanish cultural elements did not represent native culture loss or decline, but rather adaptability and vitality.”⁶ For my study, I will focus on the Mexica, the dominant imperial rulers of what is popularly called the Aztec Empire, and the Spanish, the people who they came into contact with in the sixteenth century and over hundreds of years exchanged many cultural elements. Although my focus will be on the years immediately surrounding the contact period, I will also move past the conquest a few decades to show how these similarities played out.

Background

The Mexica belong to a rare class of Native Americans. They built large, complex cities, had extraordinary architecture, and a very sophisticated culture and society. At the time of initial contact in 1519, the Mexica were still new to the sedentary lifestyle and were still working on shaping and improving their government, warrior tactics, and ideas about royalty and royal culture. When the capital city, Tenochtitlan, fell in 1521, the empire was not quite two hundred years old and the people were still developing their ideas of class-consciousness. The city, as the Spaniards saw it, was a fairly new albeit imposing metropolis on an island in the middle of Lake Texcoco. Although it rivaled the major cities in Europe at the

⁶ Restall, 128.

time such as Paris, Seville and Venice, the Mexica were not too far, temporally, from their humble beginning.⁷

Following the fall of the Toltecs, of whom the Mexica claim decent, there was a large migration of hunter and gatherer nations that began moving south into the central plateau of Mexico in the twelfth century. The Mexica, one of the late comers, did not reach the lake until about 1250. Known to us now as the Aztecs after their mythical home land, Atzlán, the Mexica were not well liked by the previously established people living on the land around the lake. Pushed to the marginal lands unwanted by the others, the Mexica established themselves on a few swampy islands in the middle of Lake Texcoco and began building their capital city in 1325. Starting from scratch with gardens built on mud covered wicker rafts and under the overlord ship of more powerful neighbors, the Mexica worked their way up to become the major power in central Mexico. Under the rulership of great emperors like Itzcoatl (1426-1440) and Moctezuma I (1440-1468) the Mexica expanded their control to include the majority of present day central Mexico by 1470. Although their actual presence in various provinces varied, most scholars now agree that

⁷ John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2011), 12-16; Inga Clendinnen, "The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society," *Past & Present* 107 (May 1985): 44.; Collis, 48-49.; Caroline Dodds Pennock, "A Remarkably Patterned Life': Domestic and Public in the Aztec Household City," *Gender and History* 23, 3 (November 2011): 536, 541.; Fargher et al., 307.; Martínez, María Elena, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 92-95.; Barbara E. Mundy, "Mapping the Aztec Capital: The 1524 Nuremberg Map of Tenochtitlan, Its Sources and Meanings," *Imago Mundi* 50 (1998): 11, 26-27.; Restall, xiii – xv.; Restall and Lane, 12-13.; J. Rounds, "Lineage, Class, and Power in the Aztec State," *American Ethnologist* 6, 1 (February 1979): 77.; Schwartz, 1, 8.; Jacques Soustelle, *The Daily Life of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 5, 34.; Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 85, 91-92.

what the Mexica had accomplished within a couple hundred years was quite remarkable. Although their control of provinces was often indirect, their dominance of Mesoamerica can indeed be considered an empire. Under the last pre-contact emperor, Moctezuma II (1503 – 1520), their empire was still conquering and expanding. When the Spanish first arrived, comparing Tenochtitlan to the city of Venice, the Mexica Empire had not even come close to reaching its full potential.⁸

When the Spanish reached the Basin of Mexico, the Mexica dominated their empire from their capital city or *altepetl* (city-state) Tenochtitlan. Their social hierarchy at this time was very stratified and completely hereditary. The dynastic ruler (*tlatoani*) of Tenochtitlan was Moctezuma II and he had been in power since the death of his uncle Ahuizotl in 1503. In Mexican society, the ruler was technically elected by the other nobles of the city of Tenochtitlan and its powerful allies and neighbors Texcoco and Tacuba (Tlacopan). However, the elected emperor always came from a pool of close relations to the previous *tlatoani*. Hence, there is a direct line from the first ruler of Tenochtitlan, Acamapichtli, to every other successive ruler. Especially toward the end of the pre-conquest era, the pattern closely

⁸Almazán, 166.; C. A. Burland, *Montezuma: Lord of the Aztec* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1973), 29-35.; Clendinnen, 45-46.; Friedrich Katz, "The Evolution of Aztec Society," *Past & Present* 13 (April 1958): 14-15.; Kulmar, 145.; Jaime Mata-Míguez et al., "The Genetic Impact of Aztec Imperialism: Ancient Mitochondrial DNA Evidence from Xaltocan, Mexico," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 149 (2012): 504.; Michael A. Ohnersorgen, "Aztec Provincial Administration at Cuetlaxtlan, Veracruz," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 25 (2006): 1-4.; Restall and Lane, 68-74.; Restall, Sousa and Terraciano, 4-5.; Rounds (1979): 74-77.; Schwartz, 5-6.; Carla M. Sinopoli, "The Archaeology of Empires," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 164.; Soustelle, xv-xvii.; Brian M. Tomaszewski and Michael E. Smith, "Politics, Territory and Historical Change in Postclassic Matlatzinco (Toluca Valley, central Mexico)," *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2011): 25. Townsend, 14-15.

followed the practice of premogeniture in Europe, where the eldest son inherits, followed by his brothers and sons.⁹

Although the Spanish technically took over in 1521, indigenous rulers continued to maintain their traditional status and authority for centuries. In the words of Susan Schroeder, “the king certainly died, but the four-part socio-political structure of governance was maintained with traditional nobles as Spanish-styled elected officials in control much as they had been before.”¹⁰ In fact, many aspects of indigenous culture remained including housing, farming, clothing, and language in addition to choosing their own leaders and worshipping the new religion of Christianity in a traditionally indigenous way. Not only did indigenous people recognize similarities in the Spanish culture that they could selectively adapt to their own lives, but the Spanish recognized that the easiest way to “conquer” would be to build upon already existing cultural, political, social and economic indigenous structures. Tenochtitlan, known today as Mexico City, continued to serve as the capital and it can even be argued that what we call the “conquest” is still not entirely complete.¹¹

⁹ Restall, Sousa and Terraciano, 4-5.

¹⁰ Susan Schroeder, “Introduction: The Genre of Conquest Studies,” in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, eds. Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007): 12.

¹¹ Restall, 65, 75, 104.; Wood, 5, 10.

Historiography

Charles Gibson wrote in 1960 that, “there is no satisfactory full treatment of Mexican social or political organization.”¹² Since then, however, historians have taken it upon themselves to fill in this gap. Some scholars, such as Friedrich Katz, claim the Aztecs are without comparison. Katz says that because of how advanced their society was despite the lack of the basic commodities of Old World civilizations such as the wheel, beasts of burden and metal tools, the Mexica are in a league of their own.¹³ Many scholars, however, use some measure of comparison when approaching the topic of Mexica society and this context varies from historian to historian.

One common and obvious theme is to compare the Mexica to other indigenous groups in Latin America. This group is further subdivided into two main classes of comparisons: indigenous groups that predate the Mexica or contemporary indigenous groups. Scholars that compare the Mexica to ancient indigenous people tend to focus on the Toltecs, Olmecs and Maya, all of whom had their peak prior to Mexica dominance in Mesoamerica. Patricia Rieff Anawalt does this in her discussion of the imperial cloak worn by the Aztec royalty. She discusses how the pattern which distinguishes royalty from common people is based on ancient Toltec symbols of nobility. She also describes the pattern as sharing many similarities with

¹² Gibson, 171.

¹³ Katz, 23.

Mayan noble clothing.¹⁴ Nicholas J. Saunders uses comparisons with the Olmecs and Maya to show the importance of jaguar symbolism to Mesoamerican royalty.¹⁵ Used in a multitude of ways to make various arguments, comparisons between the Mexica and one of these ancient Mesoamerican civilizations is a common theme seen in scholarship.¹⁶ Comparisons to the Mexica's contemporaries, the Incas, can also be found. Tarmo Kulmar compares their social organization and shows that although these groups were both in power at the same time, they had very different ways of running their respective empires.¹⁷

Some scholars look to Europe as their comparative tool instead of other indigenous societies and do so in various ways. Anawalt begins her article by saying that, "The ceremony and grandeur surrounding the court of the Aztec emperor Moctezuma encompassed a degree of elaboration unrivaled in Europe."¹⁸ However, she does not go into a comparison of these two cultures but instead switches to strictly indigenous comparisons. Marco A. Almazán also looks at Europeans for comparisons and very briefly discusses some similarities. He argues that the basis of the Mexica states-society was in fact similar to that of Modern Europe.¹⁹ Stuart Schwartz compares the histories of the Spanish and Mexica by saying that, "Both were the heirs of a long process of cultural development and fusion, both had a

¹⁴ Patricia Rieff Anawalt, "The Emperors' Cloak: Aztec Pomp, Toltec Circumstances," *American Antiquity* 55, 2 (April 1990): 291, 294, 297-298, 302-303.

¹⁵ Nicholas J. Saunders, "Jaguar Symbolism and Mesoamerican Elites," *World Archaeology* 26, 1 (June 1994): 105-108, 112-113.

¹⁶ Isendahl and Smith, 132-143.

¹⁷ Kulmar, 148-149.

¹⁸ Anawalt, 291.

¹⁹ Almazán, 174.

warrior ethos, both held fervently to a religious faith, and both justified their imperial expansion in terms of theological ideals.”²⁰ Neither Almazán nor Schwartz details these similarities. Inga Clendinnen, like many scholars, remarks on the differences between the Aztecs and Europeans while focusing on the relationship between war and social distinction.²¹ This follows the more common way of using European comparisons, as a model of dissimilarity to the Mexica.²²

Although some scholars have touched on the idea of using a European model as comparison, I do not believe they have taken it far enough. I have thoroughly studied available work on Aztec society and I think a deeper look at the similarities between the society of the Mexica and that of their contemporary Europeans is lacking. More specifically a comparison to the Spanish, the people who conquered the Mexica is needed. Even Lockhart, who is considered the most influential Colonial Latin American historian said, “Sixteenth-Century Spaniards found in central Mexico a society remarkably like their own.”²³ Why then has this comparison never been studied in depth? Lockhart suggests that the remarkable similarities between the two cultures are “not always emphasized in the body of the study, since the English reader already knows the European elements and will immediately recognize the similarities.”²⁴ However, just because similarities are easily recognizable does not mean that an in depth scholarly study is not relevant. In addition, scholarly work

²⁰ Schwartz, 13.

²¹ Clendinnen, 55, 60, 76.

²² Tomaszewski and Smith, 22, 26.; Soustelle, 40.

²³ Lockhart, 1992, 94.

²⁴ Lockhart, 1992, 429.

specifically focusing on Mexica royalty, court life and social structure is virtually non-existent. I hope to contribute not only an analysis of these topics in Mexican society but also a direct comparison to their counterparts in Spain. In addition, I will show how the similarities between the two translated to the post-conquest decades, the integration of the two cultures, and the formation of society which is as much indigenous as it is European. This study will add to the new scholarly approach of history from an indigenous perspective, rejecting the idea of a complete conquest. It will also add to the historiography of contact era Mesoamerican as well as Early Modern European societies and will be relevant to scholars interested in the society of modern Mexico and how the current society and culture emerged.

An Introduction to the Primary Sources Examined

The first group of primary sources that will be examined can be lumped together under the category of Spanish chronicles. The leader of the conquistadors, Hernán Cortés, wrote one of the more detailed accounts of the conquest of Mexico in the form of letters to the king of Spain, Charles V. These letters, known as the *Cartas de Relación*, were used to justify Cortés' continued exploration of Mexico, the overthrow of Moctezuma and the subsequent massacre of the people of Tenochtitlan.²⁵ Bernal Díaz Del Castillo also describes the journey of the Spanish Conquistadors and their first encounter with the people of Mexico in his work *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*. Written thirty years after contact, the

²⁵Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, trans. A. R. Pagden (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971).

work is a firsthand perspective of what the Spaniards perceived when they came into contact with the Mexica for the first time.²⁶ *The History of the Indies of New Spain* by Diego Durán is also an important source to examine. Born in Spain in 1537, Durán moved to Mexico at a young age and grew up in Tenochtitlan's neighbor, Texcoco. As an adult, he became an author and wrote about the history of the Mexica based on documents he had access to as well as oral histories.²⁷ These sources are among the many available Spanish primary sources that will be evaluated.²⁸

On the other hand, there are many indigenous accounts that will be considered including the account by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún which is one of the most complete histories of the Mexica Empire before contact. Arriving in the New World in 1529, Sahagún with a team of elite Nahuatl²⁹ men set out to interview and record testimonies from various Mexica individuals. This led to the creation of the *General History of the Things of New Spain*, which includes the original Nahuatl alongside Sahagún's Spanish translation.³⁰ Another important indigenous source is

²⁶Bernal Díaz Del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico*, ed. Genaro García, trans. A.P. Maudslay (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956).

²⁷ Schwartz, 34.; Durán, 1994.

²⁸ Other accounts include: The chronicles of Andrés de Tapia, Francisco de Aguilar, and the Anonymous Conquistador which can be found in Patricia de Fuentes, ed., *The Conquistadors: First-Person Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Toribio Motolinía, *Motolinía's History of the Indians of New Spain*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Andros Foster (Berkeley: The Cortés Society, 1950).

²⁹ Nahuatl was the language the majority of people in Mesoamerica spoke during the time of contact. It was the language used by the Mexica and was also used a sort of "universal language" for people within the empire and those they did business with. The word "nahua" is generally used, and is used here, to describe people who were Nahuatl speakers.

³⁰ Bernardino de Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain: Florentine Codex, Volumes 1-12*, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1970).;

The Codex Mendoza which is a collection of Mexica pictographs depicting the history of their people. Composed twenty years after the conquest, it includes traditional Aztec pictographs each with Spanish explanations.³¹ The *Codex Chimalpahin*, *Códice de Tlatelolco*, and the *Códice Cozcatzin* are among many other primary sources, which tell us about the pre-conquest era through a native point of view.³² Although my main focus for this study will be on Mexica society, their social structure and hierarchy, royalty and court life, the comparative context of using a European lens will necessarily include a description of Spanish society as well.³³

Analytical approaches to the topic of Spanish-indigenous contact and colonial society in New Spain have proceeded in phases which I discussed in the historiography section. The first wave focused solely on Spanish sources to tell a one-sided story and the second group began to integrate now common indigenous sources but still depicted it as a complete “conquest” and a triumph of European culture. The newest approach, and the one I will take, is to consider all available sources including the Spanish chronicles and previously translated indigenous

Kevin Terraciano, “Three Texts in One: Book XII of the Florentine Codex,” *Ethnohistory* 57, 1 (Winter 2010): 58-60, 64-65.

³¹ Kurt Ross, ed., *Codex Mendoza: Aztec Manuscript* (London: Regent Books, 1984).

³² Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, don Diego de San Antón Muñón. *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1 & 2. Edited and translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Susan Schroeder. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.; James Lockhart, ed. and trans., *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).; Ana Rita Valero de García Lascuráin and Rafael Tena, *Códice Cozcatzin* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia & Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1994).; Perla Valle, *Códice de Tlatelolco* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia & Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1994.).

³³ John Edwards, *Ferdinand and Isabella* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004).; Mariéjol, Jean-Hippolyte, *The Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella*, trans. Benjamin Keen (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961.)

sources. These sources can be looked at in an entirely new way by considering *how* they are written and what that can tell us about colonial society, in a sense “reading between the lines”. For example, when the indigenous people describe their interactions with the Spanish and the implementation of Spanish institutions, it is clearly conveyed that they are not overawed by the Spanish or overwhelmed by the new structures. In fact, they usually find a parallel in their own society in order to explain the new phenomenon. These types of discourses in indigenous documents tell us a lot more about the indigenous perspective than what is seen when only taken at face value. I will also follow in the footsteps of scholars such as James Lockhart, Stephanie Wood, and Matthew Restall who seek out sources not as commonly used and which may seem mundane to some but which provide important observations of pre- and post-conquest society.

An Introduction to the Context of this Manuscript

As I said before, the focus of the body of this work is on the idea of royalty, royal culture, court life, and the importance of social distinction. However, when working with a topic such as this, it is necessary to include descriptions of other aspects of Mexica society in order to supplement the main theme. For this reason, the first and last chapters do not concentrate strictly on royal culture in Mesoamerica and Spain. The first chapter serves as an in depth background to both of these societies. I include, in addition to a description of royal society, explanations of other aspects of Spanish and Mexica society which were strikingly similar. This

chapter reveals that both societies were conquerors, with strong warrior characteristics. This conquering mentality was one reason why the two societies came together, and often worked together during conquest expeditions, in the years following the Conquest. Not only did the Mexica and other natives of central Mexico want to continue their conquering expeditions to increase their territory, the Spaniards wanted to take part in conquests as well so they could implement their control over more people of the New World. This common interest had many interesting repercussions in the post-Conquest years.

Chapter 1 also describes how the religions of Spain and Tenochtitlan may have had some differences, but that the importance of religion in each society was extremely comparable. The Spaniards may have thought that they were converting the natives, but really, the indigenous people of Mesoamerica were simply incorporating some aspects of Christianity into their own practices because they recognized them as having parallels in their own religion. Their methods of imperial control were also very similar in these two societies. Both the Mexica and the Spaniards highly respected and idolized their royalty, but the governmental control outside of the major cities was very indirect. Most people in Mesoamerica who were under control of the Mexica Empire still had their own rulers and maintained a lot of their own control. This was a reproduction of the situation in Spain and this similarity between these two societies would live on to be practiced in the Colonial years. This meant that although the Spaniards claimed they had jurisdiction in their

colony of New Spain, at the local level, indigenous hereditary rulers were still in power. These are but a few examples of what will be discussed in Chapter 1, but the overall argument is that these pre-contact similarities greatly affected the way the Spaniards and Mexica reacted to one another. Both groups recognized relationships between the two societies and readily incorporated certain aspects of one another's society. This led to an interesting Colonial period in New Spain and has a lot to do with the culture we see in Mexico today.

Chapter 2 and 3 both focus on the importance of royal culture in both Spain and Mesoamerica, but use different sources to do so. Chapter 2 focuses on indigenous source material, which tends to highlight local dynasties, royal intermarriages, the success of royal children, and territorial conquests. Through these sources we learn that hereditary nobility was extremely important to the people of central Mexico. The last emperor of the Mexica before the Conquest, Cuauhtemoc, was a direct descendent of the first emperor, Acamapichtli. The line of rulers passed flawlessly from father to son, brother to brother, uncle to nephew, or cousin to cousin. The Mexica also used marriage as a tool to cement alliances. Daughters were often married off to the rulers or heirs of other city-states, and emperors and heirs to the Mexica throne always married women of royal birth. Often, the women that Mexica emperors married were members of their own extended family. Royal children were given prominent posts. Males often became part of the royal council or held other high-ranking posts in Tenochtitlan. If this path

was not possible they were set up as a ruler of a city-state under the rule of the Mexica. All of these practices regarding royal culture are almost exact replicas of the way things worked in Spain during this time.

Chapter 3 discusses similar concepts, but focuses instead on Spanish source material including the writings of conquistadors and early Spanish historians. From these sources we get to see the amazement the Spaniards experienced when they encountered the culture of the Mexica. The Mexica held incredible sway over most of the territories the Spaniards had to pass through, and the fear of Moctezuma II's subjects was very clear to Cortés and his men. The city of Tenochtitlan itself was more incredible than any city in Europe at that time. The architecture and the civilized nature of the people amazed the Spanish conquistadors. The Spanish sources also shed a lot of light on the ceremonial practices surrounding the emperor on a daily basis and the respect shown to him by every single person in the city. He held court like a European king, was carried from place to place in an elaborate litter, and no one was allowed to look him in the eye on pain of death. Many of these practices recorded in the Spanish dialogues are very similar to practices seen in the royal courts of Europe. Even the Spanish chronicles acknowledged many times during the course of their writing how impressed they were with this sophisticated city and its people, and noted how remarkably familiar many of these practices were to them.

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to consider all the information provided in the other chapters and what all of it means for the Colonial society in New Spain after the Conquest. Here it is argued that the culture that emerged in the years following the Conquest was one that was neither completely European nor completely indigenous. It was a miraculous blend of both Spanish and native cultural elements. Since these two societies were so similar to one another they readily borrowed ideas, adapted their own practices to fit the new Colonial order, and came together in a way that was very rare for Colonial projects in the New World. This chapter, like Chapter 1, has a broader focus. Royal culture and its continuation into the Colonial period are, of course, discussed. Other aspects of native cultural survival, such as religion, indigenous conquistadors, and government, are also included in this part of the manuscript. In sum, this chapter focuses on the early post-Conquest years and the institutions that arose during this time. Much of native culture survived the Conquest, and this is clearly shown in the society of sixteenth century New Spain. In what ways were the cultures of Spain and central Mexico similar to one another? What is the significance of examining relationships between the conquerors and the conquered? How is this important to the Colonial period in New Spain? And what does this have to do with the culture of Mexico today? These are some of the questions I intend to answer in detail in the remainder of this manuscript.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO EARLY SPANISH AND MEXICA SOCIETIES

Before I get into the purpose of this work, which is to focus on the significance of royalty in both Spanish and Mexica society, I first want to give a brief background on these two cultures. In addition to having many similarities with regards to royal culture, these two societies also had many other shared characteristics. They were both warrior and conqueror societies, considered religion to be the most important factor in their daily lives, and brought these two ideas together to create a divine righteousness of their conquests. As similar as these two societies were at the moment of contact, their histories in the preceding centuries share many similarities as well. The early beginning of the countries that we now know as Spain and Mexico is the focus of this chapter.

The timeline for this part of the analysis begins with the turn of the new millennium. The eleventh century in Mesoamerica marked the beginning of a decline of the reigning dominant group in central Mexico, the Toltecs. In Spain, the power of the Muslim Moors had passed its peak and was also beginning to decline in power. This left a void in both of these areas that would leave room for new powers to come into play. In Mesoamerica, the Mexica began their push southward and within a few centuries had established themselves as a force to be reckoned with. In the Iberian Peninsula, the divided Christian nations also began a push southward. The famous *Reconquista* (reconquest), which continued until 1492, re-established

Christian dominance in the Iberian Peninsula and formed the framework for modern Spain.

The Mexica in the eleventh century were a nomadic, warrior tribe in what is now the Southwestern United States. Their early origins are known because of their close relations with the Tarahumara natives who still reside in northern Mexico and the Hopi tribes in present day New Mexico and Arizona. Their oral histories claim that their homeland was called Aztlán, which is where the popular nickname 'Aztec' originates. There were a number of small tribes similar to the Mexica in these northern regions during the period of Toltec dominance, but after this society began its collapse, many of these small nomadic tribes began their march toward the Basin of Mexico. According to Chimalpahin, they left Aztlán in 1064; other sources place the beginning of their migration a bit later. Regardless of their initial departure, the Mexica were one of the latecomers to the Valley of Mexico and were at first subjugated by their more powerful neighbors. They finally reached the edge of Lake Texcoco in 1299 where they settled for a time in Culhuacan and were vassals and subjects of this early powerhouse.¹

¹ Gordon Brotherston, *Image of the New World: The American Continent Portrayed in Native Texts*, translated in collaboration with Ed Dorn (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 24.; Donald E. Chipman, *Moctezuma's Children: Aztec Royalty Under Spanish Rule, 1520-1700* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 6-7.; Chimalpahin *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 29, 67, 69, 181.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 19.; Diego Durán, *The Aztecs: The History of the Indies of New Spain by Fray Diego Durán*. translated by Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas (New York: Orion Press, 1964), 9.; Don Diego de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Annals of His Time*, edited and translated by James Lockhart, Susan Schroeder, and Doris Namala (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 117, 119.; Martínez, 92-92.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 4.; Schwartz, 5.; Townsend, 14-15.

Their move southward was slow, and they stopped and briefly settled in various towns along the way. From these settled indigenous peoples that they came into contact with, they learned many things that they would adopt and make part of their own culture including agriculture, religious beliefs, warrior tactics, and architecture. Before their arrival, the area of central Mexico was extremely advanced and well civilized and the Mexica quickly incorporated aspects of these other successful civilizations, including the Maya and the people of Teotihuacan, into their own society. They especially respected and idolized the society of the Toltecs, whose culture influenced many newly arrived peoples in the Valley of Mexico, so much so that many ethnic groups, including the Mexica, claimed to be their descendants.²

The Mexica continued to be buffeted around the Basin of Mexico for many years after their arrival in the Valley of Mexico. They became vassals and mercenaries of established city-states including Colhuacan and Atzacapotzalco and remained subjugated for decades. Finally, in 1325 they settled on some swampy islands in the middle of Lake Texcoco and began building what would become their

² Chipman, 3-6, 8.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 77, 85, 89, 91, 185-209, 221-227.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 19-31, 69-73.; Durán, 9.; Elois Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano Remensis: Ritual Divination and History in a Pictorial Aztec Manuscript* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 201-209, 270-271, 295-302.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 119-125.; Martínez, 92-93.; Schwartz, 4.; Townsend, 14-15.; Alonso de Zorita, *Life and Labor in Ancient Mexico: The Brief and Summary Relation of the Lords of New Spain*, translated by Benjamin Keen (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 3.

capital city, Tenochtitlan.³ During the time when they were subjects of neighboring city-states, they maintained their own identity as the Mexica. Although they incorporated many ideas of these more established communities, they remained loyal to their own culture and people. The idea of loyalty to one's own community and people is a popular pattern seen throughout Mesoamerica during this period. Even when the Mexica grew in power and conquered a large area of territory, the people they conquered retained their own communal identity. Because of this, war was a dominant factor in central Mexico in the years before contact. Each community, whether a dominant power or a subject state, owed their loyalty and allegiance first and foremost to their own local rulers.⁴ These communities often rebelled against the control of their overlords and fought amongst themselves for land and wealth. This instability due to local autonomy and community loyalty is mirrored in the Iberian Peninsula during the pre-contact period.

The idea of a Mesoamerican city-state is extremely important and so it is necessary to explain this concept a bit further before moving on to Spanish culture and society during this period. The center of organization in Mesoamerica during this time was known as the *altepetl*, which refers to an ethnic state or community. Each *altepetl* consisted of a central community, or city, surrounded by a territory of which it held some sway over. Everyone in this area looked first to their local ruler,

³ Chipman, 8.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 31, 71, 103, 105, 211, 227.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 107.; Ross, 18.; Durán, 22.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 29, 125.; Motolinia, 27-28.; Schwartz, 5.; Townsend, 14-15.; Zorita, 4.

⁴ Chipman, 6.; Lockhart, 1992, 1.; Zorita, 73.

although many *altepetl* were under the control of other, more powerful city-states. Following this thread, central Mexico before the contact period was a conglomeration of various ethnic states that were related to one another through tribute agreements. In this area, various dominant groups had come and went, but many *altepetl* survived the various changes in overlordship. Even when the Spanish came to the area, most pre-Conquest *altepetl* survived and became the basis of *pueblos* (towns) in Colonial New Spain. These various city-states were related via ethnic ties because of economic need and social and political factors, but were in no way a unified whole.⁵

In the Iberian Peninsula during this period, there were also groups moving south and conquering new territories. These Spanish kingdoms were united by similar language, culture, and religion, but were not united with one another. In fact, Spain as we know it today was not actually united until many centuries later. Even under the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel, the Iberian Peninsula remained primarily under the control of local nobles, who rose up against the crown often, and fought amongst one another constantly. Local rule and autonomy made the pre-contact period in Spain extremely similar to Mesoamerica with continuous warfare and the absence of any true central power. Although communities in the Iberian Peninsula were technically under the control of the monarchy, they continued to give their loyalty first and foremost to their local rulers. This disunity led to a

⁵ Lockhart, 1992, 14.; Lockhart, 1993, 14.; Martínez, 92-93.; Matthew and Oudijk, 14, 49.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 4-6, 24.; Schwartz, 4.; Townsend, 3, 13-14, 43.; Wood, 106.

continuation of local control and the persistence of locally distinct cultures. This diversity can still be experienced in Spain today where each region maintains its own local history, language, and cultural practices.⁶

Of the counties that make up Europe, those located on the Iberian Peninsula have one of the most diverse and unique cultural histories. The various Spanish kingdoms during the turn of the millennium were not very closely tied to European culture since the Pyrenees Mountain chain separates Iberia from the rest of Western Europe. However, the southernmost point of the Iberian Peninsula is located only fifteen kilometers from the coast of Africa. Because of this, Iberian society was heavily influenced by the cultures of the Moorish people who conquered the majority of the peninsula and maintained control until the eleventh century.⁷ When Islamic power and control began to decline, the small Christian kingdoms began their push southward. It is important to note that these Spanish kingdoms were not united in their conquest. During the centuries of Islamic dominance, the Christian states remained isolated from one another and developed unique cultural practices. They had a common goal of reestablishing Christian dominance, but remained separate entities for many years to come.⁸

Over the next couple of centuries, the Catholic kingdoms slowly began to ally with one another. Castile, León, and Portugal united in 1230; soon after so did the

⁶ J. N. Hilgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms: 1250-1516* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), Vol. 1, vii.; Mariéjol, 3, 329..

⁷ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 3-4.; Mariéjol, 3.

⁸ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 4-5.; Mariéjol, 4.

kingdoms of Catalonia and Aragon. Even when kingdoms united, each polity retained its own separate institutions. Despite being politically united, the populations of Castile and León, for example, did not have an overall sense of unity, and what mattered most to the people was their own city. This was a pattern that would continue for centuries all over the peninsula.⁹

Although alliances began to emerge, the geographical location of each major kingdom heavily influenced its cultural practices. Castilian society, for example, maintained strong ties with the Islamic state of Granada and continued to be influenced culturally by the Muslim Moors. The conquest of Andalusia and Seville by the Castilians meant that many of Castile's major cities had a strong Islamic past and large Moorish populations. The kingdoms of Catalonia and Aragon turned their focus to the Mediterranean and therefore began to make cultural ties with the rest of Europe. Two of their major cities, Barcelona and Valencia were located on the coast of the Mediterranean and were major ports of European trade. Working their way East to secure trade routes, the Crown of Aragon conquered the Mediterranean island of Majorca, and spread their conquest to Italy by acquiring Sicily and Sardinia. This divide between Castile and Aragon would continue politically until the fifteenth century. Culturally, these two kingdoms would remain unique from one another for much longer.¹⁰ Even after the Castilian-Aragonese alliance, which dominated a majority of the land in Iberia, the peninsula was not completely united. The kingdom

⁹ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 299.

¹⁰ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 4-5, 11, 18, 233.

of Portugal remained separate, as did the French satellite of Navarre, and the Muslim kingdom of Granada, which was not conquered until 1492.¹¹ The diversity in the Iberian Peninsula went very deep and was expressed not only in politics, but also in cultural practices such as literature, language, and art.¹²

The fabric of society during the years before the contact period in Mesoamerica and the Iberian Peninsula was marked by disunity and local conflict. The importance of local communities and the lack of central control was a key similarity between the two cultures. When the Spanish conquered Tenochtitlan, it was easy for them to continue to recognize the autonomy of the Mesoamerican city-states because it was a familiar situation to them. The Spaniards were the perfect new overlords for many indigenous communities because they exercised their control in much the same way as the Mexica had. This meant that local Mesoamerican communities were able to maintain their own culture, local rulers, and sense of communal identity. This is simply one example of the way in which the Spaniards and the people of Mesoamerica recognized commonalities in one another. This respect and understanding led to a unique early Colonial culture, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

¹¹ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 18.; Mariéjol, 59.

¹² Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 14-15.

Territorial Expansion in the Iberian Peninsula and Mesoamerica

Another important similarity between Mexica and Spanish society was their conquering mentality. Both cultures began as small, ineffectual communities that used their successful warrior tactics to slowly conquer large areas of land. By the time the two cultures came into contact with one another, they were both imperial powers that exercised a form of indirect control. Their pattern of conquest was similar; both the Spaniards and the Mexica moved slowly southward, incorporating newly conquered territories into their political authority as they went along and leaving local communities with substantial autonomy.

The Mexica conquest did not begin the minute they settled in Tenochtitlan. Although they had their own city and land, they were still subjugated by their neighbors. However, they did decide at this point to elect their own local ruler and begin their own dynasty. The position as their first king fell to a man from Colhuacan named Acamapichtli. Colhuacan was one of the dominant powers in Mesoamerica at this time and they were one of the remaining remnants of the Toltec Empire, of whom the Mexica claimed descent. During their migration to Lake Texcoco, the Mexica had stayed in Colhuacan for a few decades and many of their people had settled and intermarried there. An example of this was a man named Opochtli Iztahuatzin, who was a Mexica warrior and captain. He married a Colhuacan princess, a daughter of the king, and from this union came a son named Acamapichtli. The Mexica decided to make Acamapichtli their first king and the

Mexica dynasty began. To further cement their legitimacy via Toltec blood, Acamapichtli also married into the Colhuacan royal family by marrying the sister of the king.¹³ Throughout the period of Mexica dominance that followed, all rulers were direct descendants of Acamapichtli.

However, Acamapichtli, along with the next two kings, Huitzilihuitl and Chimalpopoca, did not do much conquering. During these three reigns, the Mexica were still establishing themselves in their new city and paying tribute to neighboring communities. Mexica imperial expansion really began with the fourth king, Itzcoatl, who was an illegitimate son of Acamapichtli. During his reign, the Mexica rose up against their overlords from Azcapotzalco and also began conquering nearby cities in the Valley of Mexico including Tlacopan, Coyoacan, Cuernavaca, Tepequacuico, Huexotzinco, Xochimilco, and Cuitlahuac.¹⁴ After Itzcoatl's death in 1440, Moctezuma I, a son of the second king, Huitzilihuitl, was elected as the next emperor.¹⁵ During his reign, the Mexica began to set their sights on areas outside of the Basin of Mexico. During Moctzuma's reign, they conquered the provinces of Chalco, Tehuantepec, Xolotla, Toluca, Xiquipilco, to name a few, and areas as far away as the present day state of Oaxaca.¹⁶

¹³ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 35-37, 113-115.; Durán, 33-34.; Keber, 214.

¹⁴ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 41, 131, 213.; Durán, 58, 62, 68, 73, 78, 81, 83, 84.; Ross, 24.; Keber, 215-216.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 129.

¹⁵ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 43.

¹⁶ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 51, 213.; Durán, 98-100, 105, 117-118, 128.; Keber, 306.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, 129-131.

The next three rulers of the Mexica were brothers, born from the union of Moctezuma I's daughter and Itzcoatl's son. The first of these was Axayacatl, the youngest of the brothers, who conquered many territories including Tlatelolco, Tzinacantépec, Tlacotépec, Teotenanco, Tecalco, Tototlan, and Mixtlan. This spread the Mexica dominance further north in Mesoamerica and also outwards towards both coast lines. Axayacatl's older brother, Tizoc, the next ruler, also expanded the reach of the empire, but was not a warrior at heart and so his conquests were not as vast or memorable.¹⁷ However, the third of these brothers, Ahuitzotl, was an extremely successful warrior. During his reign, over forty provinces came under Mexica control. These included Teloloapan, Acatépec, Huehuetlan, Mazatlan, Chiapan, Acapulco, and Miahuatlan. Mexica rule was now firmly entrenched on both coasts and had penetrated as far south as the northern areas of present day Guatemala.¹⁸

The final pre-contact ruler, Moctezuma II, was the reigning emperor when the Spanish arrived. He was a son of Axayacatl and during his reign the Mexica conquered the provinces of Huilotépec, Tlachinollan, Amatlan, Tiltépec, Caltépec, and Cihuatlan.¹⁹ These conquests built upon previously subjugated territories and expanded the Mexica dominance even further. Although these city-states were

¹⁷ Rafael Tena, trans., *Anales de Tlatelolco* (Mexico City: Dirección General de Publicaciones, 2004), 43.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 51, 139.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 51.; Durán, 157.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 131.

¹⁸ Tena, 43-45.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 53, 215.; Ross, 32-33.; Durán, 200, 202, 216.; Keber, 306-307.

¹⁹ Tena, 45.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol.1, 55.; Ross, 33.; Durán, 226.; Keber, 307.

conquered it did not mean that the Mexica's work was over. Many native communities rebelled against the Mexica, sometimes multiple times as is seen in the case of Chalco where the Mexica had to put down a rebellion on four separate occasions.²⁰ The success of Moctezuma II's rule shows that the Mexica had not yet reached their full potential when the Spaniards arrived. The empire was still expanding, establishing control, and learning from past mistakes in order to cement their imperial power. The conquering mentality of the Mexica was still well entrenched and not yet satisfied when these two cultures finally came into contact with one another.

The conquering mentality was as much a part of life in the Iberian Peninsula as it was in Mesoamerica. As I mentioned before, the Spanish Kingdoms at this time were not a unified whole. At times, however, they did ally with one another against a common enemy. Usually this involved an alliance between the various Christian kingdoms and had a religious undertone, but this was not always the case. For example, in the 1270s, Granada and Castile joined forces in order to keep the rulers of Morocco from conquering any land in the Iberian Peninsula. So there were instances of rulers of different religious beliefs joining up to protect the common homeland of Iberia.²¹

As the Christian *Reconquista* slowly moved south to conquer more and more of the Peninsula, cities were the major target. The Christians tended to settle and

²⁰ Ross, 23.

²¹ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 20-21.

occupy fortified cities as they went along and they claimed the surrounding countryside as theirs also. However, even when territories were taken nominally under Christian control, the majority of the countryside remained populated by Muslims. An example of this is the territory of Valencia, which was conquered between 1232 and 1245 by the kingdom of Aragon. For centuries after the Christian conquest, the population of Valencia remained mostly Muslim.²² From their Muslim subjects, the rulers of the Christian kingdoms learned many new techniques, such as irrigation, which aided in the prosperity of the ever growing Christian kingdoms.²³

To try to promote Christian settlement, new inhabitants of conquered territories were given houses, land, and farms. The amount of property received obviously depended upon one's rank in society so that leading nobles, men of the church, and members of the royal court were given the largest proportion of conquered territories, whereas soldiers from the *Reconquista* were given an amount of land based on their military rank. However, by failing to attract many Christian commoners to settle these newly conquered areas, the growing Christian kingdoms were heavily reliant on their Muslim subjects. Many Muslim commoners remained in their homes after the *Reconquista* as semi-free laborers working the lands for the Christian nobility. Other Muslims decided instead to migrate and either ended up in the Muslim stronghold of Granada, or made their way to North Africa.²⁴ Often during the *Reconquista*, conquered territories were therefore able to maintain some form of

²² Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 28.

²³ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 33.

²⁴ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 22, 24, 27.; Mariéjol, 278-280.

autonomy. For example, when Castile conquered the Muslim city of Murica, the Moorish king remained in charge, but became a vassal of the Castilian Kingdom.²⁵

Because of the lack of central control and Spanish presence, many newly conquered territories retained their traditional cultural practices. Even something as basic as the character of different cities was completely unique to each area of the Iberian Peninsula. In the north, cities were more Christianized since northern territories had remained Christian strongholds during Islamic dominance. These cities had more organized street plans and the houses emphasized the façade since it was important to impress people who were passing by. The southern cities were extremely Muslim in character and were known for their disorganized street plan. The houses were alternatively built for the inhabitants rather than to impress passers-by. Entrances were hidden, and the façade was plain while the interior was where one could show off his family's wealth and prestige. These characteristics remained in place long after the *Reconquista* and local character and culture never completely faded away.²⁶ This meant that in the pre-Contact era, the Iberian Peninsula, much like Mesoamerica, was a territory of immense local diversity.

Cities during this period in the Iberian Peninsula were much like the city-states of Mesoamerica. They were self-sufficient, had their own organization and way of supporting and provisioning themselves, and retained their own rulers, which were chosen by the people of the territory rather than the imperial monarch.

²⁵ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 25.

²⁶ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 66-67.

Barcelona, as an example, had the right to levy its own taxes and was virtually non-reliant on the crown. The monarchy, however, was heavily reliant on its major cities, such as Barcelona, for revenue.²⁷ This is a mirror of the city-state set up in Mesoamerica where Tenochtitlan technically had control over vast areas of land, but each city-state maintained its own autonomy and provided more for the capital city than it received in protection or rewards.

One fundamental aspect of Iberian society that emerged during the Christian conquests was the idea of a city being a state within a state. The overwhelming trend of control in the period following the *Reconquista* is the dominance and power of the local nobility. Lack of control by the king of a territory led to each city being run by its own local rulers who maintained a lot of power over their own territory. They also had some power over the monarch because most of the money in the economy was centered in the major cities. This meant that when the monarch was in need of funds for the crown, they often made deals with local rulers in order to secure finances. In exchange for money and loyalty from a certain city, the monarch would recognize the autonomy and power of the city and not interfere in local government.²⁸ Cities during this period also had a strong medieval character that was based on military strategy, meaning that many cities of the Iberian Peninsula were walled off and well guarded. Each local city-state was truly protected from

²⁷ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 65.

²⁸ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 69, 288.; Mariéjol, 280.

outsiders, well defended from imperial meddling, and able to retain an independent character under the blanket of an imperial kingdom.²⁹

A good description of peninsular society in the fourteenth century comes from a citizen of Barcelona named Ramon Savall.

He laments the disintegration of society. Nobles dislike good government. All they want is war. The leading bourgeois ... 'behave as if they were kings'. Merchants parade their wealth on horseback. Artisans spend their time in eating and blasphemy. Peasants unite in bands, ready to massacre anyone who provokes them. Above this scene there rose a monarchy ... which had ceased to summon the Corts Generals since 1389, violated the privileges of cities, and was swayed by a clique of corrupt courtiers.³⁰

This world that he describes is one of upstarts and marked by social and political upheaval. Everything in society, including positions and titles, was for sale.³¹

These descriptions of Mexica and Spanish societies in the years before contact show us two different worlds that were strikingly similar in character. The idea of communal loyalty was very strong, and local rulers or governors usually had a lot of power not only over their own territory, but also over the monarch. Monarchs usually relied heavily on these local rulers for funds and military support when needed, but local lords could be fickle and would rise up against the monarch in a moment if it suited their interests. This led to a culture of internal struggles and war as these kingdoms expanded. Both the Spanish and Mexica conquered large areas of land during the pre-contact period, but their control was far from firm. This

²⁹ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 70.

³⁰ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 46.

³¹ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 46.

set the stage for each of these two groups of people to recognize similarities in one another and eased the merge of these two societies in New Spain during the early Colonial Period.

Tribute Demands: The Price of Autonomy

In both Mesoamerica and the Iberian Peninsula, the dominant states relied heavily on goods from surrounding areas for sustenance and economic prosperity. In Mexico, these goods came in the form of trade, but also in tribute demands from conquered provinces. Tenochtitlan was an isolated island in the middle of a lake and did not produce much of its own goods. The people of the island had to rely on goods produced in outlying territories for their daily needs. The monarchs adorned themselves with fine jewels, feathers, precious metals, and decorative cloths, which they demanded from areas where these things were locally collected or produced. In the Iberian Peninsula, the Spanish kingdoms relied heavily on trade with others in the peninsula, but they also traded with the rest of Europe and were highly involved in Mediterranean trade networks. The economic success of a territory depended upon the success of the trade agreements that polity had made. This made for an extremely materialistic society in both Spain and Mexico. Especially amongst the upper and royal class, the importance of rich and decorative things to show one's rank was a key factor of royal culture.

By the time the Spaniards arrived in Mesoamerica, the Mexica were collecting tribute from over two hundred and seventy towns across central Mexico.

Although the Mexica had subdued all of these provinces, there still was not much direct control. Instead, Moctezuma ruled by instilling fear in his conquered subjects. Many of his newly acquired city-states chafed under his strict tribute demands but feared going against him because he would threaten them with military violence. If a city-state resisted conquest or rebelled after being conquered, they often lost their autonomy. The Mexica would sometimes wipe out entire towns, repopulate them with people from the central valley, and install their own governors to rule these rebellious territories. On the other hand, many city-states maintained some form of autonomy because they cooperated with the Mexica and met their tribute demands without resistance. If they did not rebel or resist, they were usually able to keep their own dynastic rulers and live their lives in much the same way as they always had. This meant that although the Mexica controlled much of central Mexico, individual cultures still survived.³²

As I mentioned before, tribute demands weighted heavily on the general populous of Mesoamerica. Commoners already had to pay some sort of tribute to their local rulers in order to support the economy of their community. When their city was conquered by the Mexica, it put an even heavier burden on local workers and farmers.³³ Because of the location of the Mexica capital city, in the middle of a lake located in a valley surrounded by mountains, Tenochtitlan itself did not produce much of its own foodstuffs and other goods. The Mexica relied on tribute

³² Ross, 104.; Díaz, 78-79, 88-89, 102, 117, 156-157.; Zorita, 6, 112.

³³ Zorita, 73.

from their vast territories to give them a huge variety of everything produced in Mesoamerica. However, tribute was not only limited to food and other goods; people were also a part of the tribute demands. According to one local ruler of a conquered province, “all the provinces paid tribute of gold and silver, feathers, stones, cloth and cotton, and Indian men and women for sacrifice and others for servants.” Moctezuma was “such a great prince that he possessed everything he could desire ... the houses where he dwelt were full of riches ... all the wealth of the country was in his hands.”³⁴

The variety of goods received by the rulers of Mexico was recorded in great detail in the Codex Mendoza. This list includes large mantles, loin-cloths, smaller colored mantles, tunics, skirts, honey, planks, wood, copal, copper, war-dresses, shields, grain, gold, turquoise, cacao, maize-flour, beans, bowls, incense, rush mats, rush seats with backs, standards, headdresses, bags of lime, live birds, salt, sage, copper axe heads, ornamental stones, red sea shells, cotton, varnish, canes, deer skins, perfumes, cochineal, diadems, headbands, necklaces, bracelets, lip ornaments, amber, rubber balls, tiger-skins, cups, and chili peppers.³⁵ The tribute required from each community depended on the goods produced in that specific area of the empire. With their vast control over such a large area of land, the Mexica rulers had access to every good produced in Mesoamerica. Tribute was also paid in the form of labor in which subjects would serve the capital by constructing and maintaining

³⁴ Díaz, 157.

³⁵ Ross, 37, 41, 42-44, 46-47, 51, 53, 58-60, 62-63.

royal residences, public buildings, temples, dikes, and other fortifications. At the local level, commoners were responsible for serving in their lord's household by providing fuel, water, field labor, and military service. In return, the ruler would provide his household servants with lodgings, meals, and wages, and promised to defend and protect them.³⁶ This is remarkably similar to the feudal system, which existed in Europe and was just beginning to decrease in prevalence during the pre-contact period.

The commoners of Tenochtitlan had their own tribute to pay as well. On a rotating basis, two neighborhoods of the capital city were responsible for providing wood for fires burned daily to honor the gods. This demand was a heavy burden for the neighborhoods that were chosen, but after a year this responsibility moved on to another two neighborhoods.³⁷ So at any given time, the average person was responsible for paying a tribute to their own local community in goods or services, as well as providing a form of tribute to the capital. This was a precarious situation for most and meant that the hard working common folk were very poor and lived simple lives. When natural disaster struck, it rocked this demanding balance to its core. Commoners who were not able to meet tribute demands because of crop failure often had to sell themselves or their children into slavery to pay their debts.³⁸

³⁶ Zorita, 73, 74, 105.

³⁷ Zorita, 73.

³⁸ Zorita, 75.

In the Iberian Peninsula, the abundance and variety of goods was also very important to the economic situation. Each kingdom of Spain established its own trade routes with polities outside of the Peninsula, which meant that goods were brought in from all over the known world. Castile traded mostly with other European kingdoms such as Flanders, Ireland and Italy. Portugal brought in goods such as cloth, grains, minerals, silks, and spices from Italy and countries in the eastern Mediterranean. Aragon had the most advanced and diverse trade route and established trading partnerships with Sicily, Sardinia, Italy, France, North Africa, Alexandria, Cyprus, Constantinople, Morocco, England, Beirut, and Flanders.³⁹ In general, the kingdoms of Spain exported raw materials and received manufactured goods from places such as northern Europe. So Spain itself was not very industrial, and its rural and urban economies were heavily reliant on trade networks.⁴⁰ The monarchy also relied heavily on trade for its wealth. The crown levied taxes on trade and this was a major source of revenue for the royal family and their government.⁴¹ Because of the importance of trade to the wealth and success of the Spanish kingdoms, the Iberian Peninsula at this time is best described as a vast series of interwoven mini-economies that were highly reliant on one another for goods and wealth.⁴²

³⁹ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 41.; Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 20-27.

⁴⁰ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 36-40.

⁴¹ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 293.

⁴² Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 32.

In addition to revenue made through customs dues, there was also a form of tribute payment in the kingdoms of Spain. The majority of the population lived not within the walled cities, but in the countryside and made their living off of farming and labor. Usually, they farmed some Crown lands as a form of tribute to the monarchy, but also had obligations to their own city or community. One farmer often had varying obligations to different governmental entities and was often a subject of more than one lay or ecclesiastical lord. In addition, every seven years all individuals not belonging to the nobility or higher clergy were required to pay a regular tax to the monarchy. The Crown also collected tribute from conquered provinces that were not yet under their control. For example, the kingdom of Castile collected tribute from Granada before it fell in 1492. This was in addition to the tax revenues from taxing the populace, and money required in tribute from the Church and from the Jews. During a period of war, subjects also owed as tribute their service in the military; so tribute was varied, and essential to the maintenance of Iberian society.⁴³

The importance of trade and tribute to economic and governmental success was vital in both the Iberian Peninsula and Mesoamerica. This is just another example of something that the two cultures could easily relate to one another with. When setting up the colonial government in New Spain, Spanish officials did not have to implement their own policies. Trade routes generally remained in place and tribute relationships continued as they had before. The only difference was now

⁴³ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 83, 292.

most of the revenue went to Spanish officials rather than indigenous nobles. Some natives of the royal family did retain quite a bit of wealth and privilege, but the post-Conquest period will be discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter.

The Importance of Religion in Spanish and Mexica Society

It is virtually impossible to talk about the societies of Spain and Mexico without including at least a brief discussion of the importance of religion. Although the religious practices did differ between the two in many ways, they are actually more similar than most people realize. One of the most striking similarities is simply the importance religion held in each of these cultures. Even though specific aspects of Christianity and religion in Mesoamerica differed, the impact of religion on the daily life of society was very similar. Each culture believed that their God (or gods) controlled every aspect of life beginning with one's birth, and to please these gods worship, penance, and offerings were necessary. There were obviously some differences in the practices of the Mexica and the Spaniards. The people of Mesoamerica believed in multiple gods and practiced human sacrifice. But even these practices can be related to similar ones seen in European Christianity.

In addition the overall significance of religion in both cultures, there are some specific similarities, which I will now discuss briefly. The god Huitzilopochtli, who the Mexica honored with their largest temple in Tenochtitlan, had his legendary beginnings in a way which mirrors the birth of Jesus in the Christian tradition. According to Mexica legend, Huitzilopochtli was born to a woman named Coatlicue

in a town near Tula (the capital of the fallen Toltec Empire). One day, Coatlicue was performing penance to the gods by sweeping when suddenly some feathers began to fall around her. She picked these feathers up and put them in her clothing near her waist. When she had finished sweeping, she was going to take the feathers back out and realized that they were no longer there. Instead of feathers, Coatlicue was now carrying a child, Huitzilipochtli.⁴⁴ This legend does not require much explaining to see the similarities with the Christian beliefs of the Virgin Mary. Immaculate conception of a principle person to worship was a key feature of both Mexica culture and Christianity.

The Mexica also had ideas concerning the afterlife and what people were required to do on earth in order to reach their version of Heaven. In Mesoamerican religion, there were three places that one could go after they died. If someone died of some sort of illness, they went to the place of the dead. It was said that in this place there were obsidian bladed winds that lasted for four years. Because of this belief, the dead body was burned along with many of his or her belongings including shields, swords, capes, and clothing. These items would be used by the dead person in the afterlife to protect themselves against the obsidian bladed winds. After the four years had passed, they went to the place of the dead and crossed the broad river with the help of a dog, which was also burned with the deceased person. When they made it across the river, they met with the god Mictlan tecutli with whom they would spend the rest of their eternity. Because of these beliefs, the Mexica took

⁴⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 3, 1-2.

great pride in dog breeding so they could provide deceased people with guidance in the afterlife. This belief also encouraged people to be successful; for men this meant going to war and taking captives and for women this meant learning to weave, sow, and make cloths. The more worldly goods a person had, the more protection they would have during the four years of dangerous winds.⁴⁵ So it was important to be successful in life, no matter what one's position in society might be.

The second place that someone could go to in the afterlife is called Tlalocan. This is the place where the rain gods, the Tlalocs, dwelt and it was a place of great wealth and no suffering. This is the place where people would go if they died from skin sores, festering, gout, dropsy, drowning, or if they were struck by lightning. When these people died they were not burned, but were instead buried with great ceremony; their bodies were painted and images were buried with them.⁴⁶

The third and most prestigious place someone could go in the afterlife was the place of the sun, which was the closest equivalent to heaven. This ultimate, eternal paradise was reserved for those who had died a warrior's death. This included men who died in war, were taken captive, or were sacrificed. This is also where women who died in childbirth would go. In Mexica society, giving birth to a child was as prestigious as taking a captive in war. If a woman died while giving birth, she was considered to have died a warrior's death. Here everyone lived in a

⁴⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 3, 41-44.

⁴⁶ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 3, 47.

place like a desert for four years and then they each became precious birds and lived forever in the home of the sun.⁴⁷

Of course, there are some differences between the practices of Mexica and Christianity. In Christian tradition there was a heaven and hell, and in Catholic tradition there is also a purgatory that some people had to pass through on the way to heaven. When looked at in a broad way, these two religious cultures were very similar in this belief. They both believed that there was an eternal resting place for the dead and where a deceased person went depended on his or her achievements on earth. The path to the most desired resting place differed a bit in Mexica and Spanish culture but the concept behind these beliefs is very similar. Both cultures believed in a sort of intermediate resting place, like a purgatory, where one may suffer for a bit before reaching his or her final resting place. Funeral practices were highly ceremonial and prayers for the dead were important to honor the deceased person's soul and help them reach the ultimate eternal paradise.

In Spain, religion was also central to the everyday lives of its people. One description from 1407 describes a good Christian as someone who "frequented churches, heard the Divine Office, gave alms, confessed once a year, and received friars in his house."⁴⁸ Similar to how religious deeds defined an individual in Mesoamerican society, in the Iberian Peninsula, good Christians were defined by

⁴⁷ Florentine Codex, Vol. 3, 48.

⁴⁸ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 112.

their external activities.⁴⁹ One major point at which many people find discrepancies between religious practices in Spain and Mesoamerica is the practice of polytheism by the indigenous people of the New World. However, a parallel can be found between the many gods worshiped by the people of Mexico and the long list of saints worshiped by Iberian Catholics. In the Spanish kingdoms different groups favored different saints and a “cult of saints” was extremely apparent in Christian tradition. It is true that Christian doctrine preached that there is only one God, but most Mesoamerican societies also had one primary god who was above all the others.⁵⁰

One aspect of Mexica society that truly terrified the Spaniards and made them judge the people of Mesoamerica as barbaric and uncivilized was their practice of human sacrifice. The Mexica believed that to honor their gods, they must feed them by offering the blood of humans. To honor the Tlaloc gods, they sacrificed many children, believing that by doing this the gods would give them rain.⁵¹ War captives were also regularly sacrificed in the temples. Their hearts were usually cut out while they were still alive and their blood was offered to the gods. Sometimes the man who had taken the captive would wear the flayed skin of the deceased for a while after the ceremony. Other times, the body was dismembered and the flesh of the captive was eaten.⁵² One of the most important celebrations was that which

⁴⁹ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 112.

⁵⁰ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 113.

⁵¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 2, 1.

⁵² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 2, 3-4.

honored the god named Titlacauan who was considered the god of all gods. "In his honor, they slew, in this feast, a chosen youth who might have no blemish upon his body, [who was] reared in all luxuries for the space of a year, [and] trained in the playing [of musical instruments], and in singing, and in speaking." Once they sacrificed this young man,

"they at once produced another, who was to die after one year. He walked everywhere in the town finely arrayed with flowers in his hand, and with people who accompanied him. He greeted with good grace those whom he met. All knew that this one was the likeness of Tezcatlipoca, and they bowed before him and worshiped him wherever they met him ... Twenty days before this feast came, they gave this young man four comely young women reared for [the part], with whom for all the twenty days, he had carnal relations ... Five days before he was to die, they celebrated feasts for him and banquets ... Many of the leading men accompanied him. On the arrival of the day he was to die, they took him to a pyramid or sanctuary. ... The women withdrew and left him ... he ascended the steps himself; on each of them he shattered one of the flutes which he had played as he walked, all during the year ... they threw him upon the sacrificial stone; they tore out his heart; they brought down the body, carrying it in their hands; below, they cut the head and ran through it [the crosspiece of the skull rack]."⁵³

This is just one example of the way the Mexica honored their gods. On the surface, it may seem that the practice of human sacrifice makes religion in Mexico and Spain completely different from one another.

However, when examining the concept of sacrifice, and the reasons behind it, it is indeed not too different from some Spanish beliefs. The blood of sacrificial victims was considered the most sacred thing that could be offered to the gods. However, the Mexica also offered their gods the blood of animals, food, incense, and

⁵³ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 2, 9-10.

flowers. Their offerings were also accompanied by celebrations marked by dancing, singing, and feasting. Prayer and penance were also essential to religious well-being in Mesoamerica, as it was in the Iberian Peninsula.⁵⁴ In Iberia, there are examples, especially after the Black Death of 1348 of similarly macabre practices by Christian devotees. For example, in Portugal in 1466, Christians were observed during a funeral to be burning bread and wine, as well as living animals.⁵⁵

In the Spanish kingdoms, appointments to high positions in the church were usually reserved for members of the royal family who were too far removed from the succession to have much hope of success in government. These royal appointees were given land and jurisdiction over a certain area, but hardly ever resided in their territories since they were still for the most part attached to the royal court. Because the higher clergy was generally drawn from the pool of royal or noble gentlemen, it was natural that the church identified with the royalty.⁵⁶ This was also seen in Mesoamerica where royal children were raised within the religious precinct, in houses overseen by priests and priestesses of the temple. If a royal son was not chosen as emperor, he could always find a high position in religious society, which gave him immense privileges and wealth.

Specific aspects of religion in these two cultures may have differed, but the role that religious practices played in the daily lives of people in both Mesoamerica

⁵⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 2, 2, 5, 7, 14-16, 36-38.

⁵⁵ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 114-115.

⁵⁶ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 93, 108.

and the Iberian Peninsula was extremely similar. In this way, although some of these differences may have been points of concern for the Spaniards, many indigenous people were easily able to adopt Christianity because of its similarity with their own religious beliefs. This actually led to a new form of Christianity being developed in New Spain, which incorporated many indigenous elements. The church in New Spain was quite different from the official church in Europe because it was a blend of these two cultures. This concept will be examined further in Chapter. 4.

Other Remarkable Features of Mexica Society

The large civilizations in Mesoamerica were renowned for their high sense of culture and love of beauty. The Nahuatl language itself was complex, ornate, and was described as having a musical quality about it. The people of central Mexico wrote poetry and composed songs and enjoyed music and dancing. Like societies in Europe, the city of Tenochtitlan was known as much for its beauty and culture as for its warrior mentality. In Tenochtitlan's neighboring city, Texcoco, King Nezahualcoyotl (1418-1472) was a huge patron of the arts. He would invite the most renowned artists and craftsmen to his city and established competitions that would regularly judge various pieces of art and award prizes to the most outstanding.⁵⁷ This idea of a highly civilized and cultured society in central Mexico was echoed in the conquistador's own accounts of the early contact period. These will be explored more in depth in Chapter 3, but it is worth noting briefly that the

⁵⁷ Zorita, 5.

Spaniards who accompanied Cortés on his expedition were blown away by the people of central Mexico and highly impressed at what these natives had accomplished.

The Mexica also had a form of writing and they used fig bark as their writing surface as a sort of paper substitute. This tradition of writing was well developed in Mesoamerica before the Mexica arrived, but they used it for their own purposes and kept records of tribute and jurisdiction.⁵⁸ They also kept records of their conquests, their hereditary nobility, and other major events such as natural disasters. Using this system of writing, the Mexica created a very complex calendar, which dictated almost every aspect of their daily lives.⁵⁹

All of these records were pictorial in nature since the Mexica did not yet have a form of alphabetic writing. Because of this, there was a high position in indigenous society that was held by an extremely intelligent individual who was in charge of learning and memorizing the history of their people. They used the pictographic descriptions as a sort of prompt for them to elaborate on in the form of an oral tradition. These wise men were also in charge of instructing young intellectuals who would also dedicate their lives to learning about their history and memorizing it. They were in a sense, walking history books, and were greatly respected by early

⁵⁸ Brotherston, 10.

⁵⁹ Motolinía, 25, 29.

colonial Spaniards who were interested in learning about pre-Conquest culture and society.⁶⁰

The Mexica calendar, like many other aspects of their culture, was borrowed from previously established powers in Mesoamerica such as the Toltecs and the Maya. This calendar was a 260-day “book of days” and it was extremely important for religion because it dictated the specific day for each ceremony. There were twenty day signs (Crocodile, Wind, House, Lizard, Serpent, Death, Deer, Rabbit, Water, Dog, Monkey, Grass, Reed, Flower, Eagle, Vulture, Flint Knife, Rain, Motion, and Ocelot) which were each represented by a specific image. These day signs were combined with a numerical coefficient from one to thirteen represented by dots.⁶¹ Each day had its own significance in Mexica culture. The day determined feasts, rituals, ceremonies, fasting, and sacrifices.⁶²

Each day was believed to be controlled by a certain god or group of gods and this made some days lucky and others unlucky. The luck of a certain day sign was always carefully considered when deciding on a day for a wedding, coronation, or the beginning of a war. When a baby was born, the day sign of his birth was taken into great consideration because it was thought to determine the course of their life. If a child was born on an unlucky day sign, his bathing ceremony (which resembled a Christian baptism) was usually put off until a day with a better fortune associated

⁶⁰ Motolinía, 25, 29.

⁶¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 4 & 5, 1-2, 5.; Keber, 133.

⁶² Keber, 135.

with it. If a child was born on a day full of luck, he or she was bathed and named immediately so that the luck of their day sign would follow them for their whole life. However, it was still important in the Mexica culture to do penance to the gods and to behave in a respectable manner. If someone was born on a lucky day sign, but did not honor their gods or acted in an inappropriate way, then they could taint their day sign and would not be prosperous. Likewise, if someone was born on an unlucky day sign, but always did their penance and behaved the way society expected them to, they could in some ways change the fate of their day sign into something more beneficial.⁶³

Marriages and inheritance were also important parts of pre-Colonial Mesoamerican culture. Royal marriages were of course important and used to cement alliances. But, marriages in general were an important tradition and had strict ceremonial practices associated with them. Each partner brought in his or her own property to the marriage agreement. If two partners separated, they each simply took their own property back for themselves and the marriage was ended. Divorce was a more acceptable practice in central Mexico than it was in Spain. Polygamy was also practiced in Mesoamerica, but it was a practice only allowed if a man was part of the highest echelon of society. If a man did have more than one wife, there was usually one woman who was his primary wife. She was the most

⁶³ Florentine Codex, Vol. 4 & 5, 2, 5-7, 19, 30,34.; Keber, 153-154.

well-bred of his wives and so the children born by her were the man's principle heirs.⁶⁴

In Mesoamerica, weddings were done with a strict adherence to cultural practices and traditions. When parents saw that their son was old and mature enough for marriage, they took him away from the school for young men and decided amongst the relatives which woman he would marry. After choosing a bride, the parents summoned some old, wise women who were known as the marriage-makers and told them of their wish. The marriage-makers would then go speak to the parents of the young woman and request her hand in marriage. Once both parties agreed, then a date was picked out by the marriage-makers who would choose a day that had good luck associated with it. The ceremony itself first involved feasting at both households. Then the young woman was carried in a solemn procession to the house of the parents of her groom. The bride and groom were seated by the hearth and the mothers-in-law both in turn covered the bride and groom with clothing and tied the corner of the groom's cape to the corner of the bride's shift. This concluded the marriage, and celebrations continued with feasting, drinking, and dancing.⁶⁵

Although the specific practices may have differed a bit, in both Spain and Mesoamerica the institute of marriage was an extremely important part of the culture. In both societies, it was decided by the parents when and whom their child

⁶⁴ Brotherston, 53.

⁶⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 2, 40-41.

would marry. Also in both Spain and Mexico there were traditional practices associated with marriage that must be completed in order for the marriage to be legitimate. Both societies had a system of writing and a religious and ceremonial calendar that determined events for each day. Although the Spanish system of writing was more advanced, the people of Mesoamerica did have an exceptionally sophisticated culture. This culture was so remarkable that the Spanish chroniclers could not help but comment on it in great detail and express their admiration. Their accounts will be the focus of Chapter 3, where this will be discussed in more detail.

Conclusions

This chapter focused on giving a broad overview of the pre-Colonial societies in both Mesoamerica in Spain. The emphasis of course is on the shared similarities, of which there were many. Both began as small kingdoms, or groups of individuals, and extended their power to encompass large areas of land by the fifteenth century. Despite the idea of imperial dominance, monarchs of both the Spanish Kingdoms and the Mexica Empire exercised a very indirect form of control. Most local power was given to individual rulers and governors and these local leaders were often at odds with one another. This created an unstable and dangerous society in the years preceding contact for both of these regions. Along with their conqueror mentality and warrior ethos, both Spain and Mesoamerican societies put much emphasis on their religion. Religion dictated almost every aspect of life and was used as a justification for war. An idea of divine right of kings and a divine right to conquer

was popular in both Mexica and Spanish culture. These similarities have often been overlooked, but they are so very important for the understanding of the emergence of culture in colonial New Spain.

What I hope to accomplish with this work is to promote a new dialogue on the history of the Mexica that reexamines their level of civilization and sophistication when compared with their contemporary Spaniards. These two societies are popularly believed to have been extremely different, but in many ways, they were actually quite similar. By looking at some of these popular differences through a new perspective, many similarities can be found that show that these two cultures on a whole shared many ideas and cultural concepts which I believe helped them merge after the contact period. Without these similarities, colonial New Spain may have turned out in much the same way as other colonial projects. Most European and indigenous societies did not come together in such a way as did the Spanish and the Mexica. I believe this merge of cultures is due to the fact that each group recognized many similarities in one another. Indigenous people were easily able to incorporate many Spanish practices because they were not too unlike their own. On the other side, Spanish colonial officials kept many indigenous institutions in place after the Conquest because they were similar enough to what was done in Spain. The Mexica had a pretty good system of dominance, tribute collection, and warrior ethos, and the Spanish respected this and incorporated it into their new colonial structure. The final chapter will talk more about this post-Conquest merge

in great detail. Leaving the broad framework of this chapter's analysis, the next two chapters will dig more deeply into the primary source materials. The focus of these chapters will be the importance of royal culture in both Spanish and Mexican societies.

CHAPTER 2

INDIGENOUS SOURCE DESCRIPTIONS OF PRE-CONQUEST MEXICAN ROYALTY

Before the Conquest, the people of Mesoamerica had sophisticated pictorial writing systems in place. The pictographs were not overly descriptive or elaborate but there were members of the nobility who were trained in reading and interpreting these images. They were chosen from among the elite and were trained from a very young age at the school for the nobility, which was run by priests in Tenochtitlan. By memorizing the history of their people, they were able to use these pictographs as a sort of prompt to elaborate on what was being said. When the Spanish arrived, they taught indigenous noblemen how to write Nahuatl in alphabetic form. These noble indigenous scholars began to produce documents such as codices, which were pictorial and based on pre-Conquest tradition, but were accompanied by glosses in Spanish or Nahuatl so they would be more easily interpreted. Spanish friars also produced a number of documents by interviewing people from the communities in the early post-Conquest years and writing down their history. Eventually, indigenous communities began to produce their own manuscripts and local histories, away from the prying eyes of any Spanish officials. All of these documents, although produced after the Conquest, focus on pre-Conquest years and rely on oral tradition of local history and pre-Conquest documents. Through them we get a sense of life and society before these two cultures collided. It is important to understand that even though the documents

examined in this study were produced after the Conquest, they can still lend insight into certain institutions that existed before these two societies ever came into contact with one another. Each document is briefly described below in order to demonstrate its relevance to the pre-Conquest years and its usefulness as a source for the period directly preceding contact.

The first source examined is by Diego Durán, a Spaniard who traveled to the New World at a young age and grew up in one of Tenochtitlan's neighboring cities, Texcoco. Throughout his childhood Durán was surrounded by indigenous people, became fluent in Nahuatl, and developed an interest in the history of the Mexica. In the 1570s he began writing his seminal work, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme*, by relying on pre-Conquest documents, oral history and interviews with people who had resided in the area before the Spanish arrived.¹ Although he was entirely Spanish by blood, Durán was raised in the central valley of Mexico in the early years after the Conquest. He not only knew the people he interviewed, but he cared deeply for them and was very interested in preserving their history and presenting their culture. His work is not by an indigenous person, but it presents a narrative based on indigenous sources, which is why it is included in this part of the manuscript.

Another Spaniard who took it upon himself to write about the history of the indigenous people of the New World was Fray Toribio Motolinía. He was a Spanish

¹ Durán, xxiii – xxvi.

friar of the Franciscan order and was one of the first twelve to be sent to New Spain in 1524. He traveled all over Mesoamerica for his missionary work and was very interested in the indigenous people, their history, and the country in which they lived. He began writing his detailed manuscript in 1536 and most of his account focuses on his own observations and thus is a post-Conquest narrative. However, he does include some brief sections on the pre-Conquest years and this information likely came from people he was interacting with on a day-to-day basis that had lived in pre-Colonial times.² This, again, is a Spanish post-Conquest narrative, but based on the sources utilized for the sections on the pre-Colonial years, I have placed it with the other indigenous sources. Motolinía had not himself experienced life in pre-Conquest Mesoamerica, but during his travels as a friar, he undoubtedly met many people who had. Their voice is told through his manuscript.

The *Codex Chimalpahin* is another important source for information on the pre-Conquest years. The author, don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, was an indigenous Nahuatl annalist who wrote on the history of Mexico City and the surrounding areas in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He collected and copied many documents by other authors so his work contains writings of his own as well as various individual *altepetl* (Mexica city-state) histories. He utilized myriad sources such as pictorial manuscripts, oral interviews, and his own observations, and covers the pre-Conquest period as well as events in

² Motolinía, 1-2, 7-10, 13-18.

his own time.³ This work, like that by Durán was produced many years after the conquest. However, the sources it references for information are pre-Conquest sources that are no longer extant. This work is a rare look into the pre-Conquest years, and also the time immediately following the Conquest. It is also indicative as to what aspects of Mexica society were important to indigenous intellectuals during the early Colonial period. The amount of narrative on the rulers of Tenochtitlan and other cities, their royal families, intermarriages, and conquests shows that respect and admiration for indigenous royals was still very important to native peoples living in the new Spanish colonial society.

One of the most well-known sources of indigenous Mesoamerican history before the Conquest is the work known as the *Florentine Codex* by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. He arrived in New Spain in 1529 as a member of the Franciscan order, learned Nahuatl, and trained young Mexica noblemen in Spanish, Latin and written Nahuatl. He began working on his famous manuscript in the 1540s and continued to write and edit it for the next three decades. It thoroughly covers the history and culture of the people of the Basin of Mexico in the pre-Conquest years. Sahagún interviewed native “informants” who had lived before the Conquest and had his young indigenous scholars write down their answers in Nahuatl, which he later translated into Spanish.⁴ This work is interesting and relevant for a number of reasons. It was of course, ultimately edited by a Spaniard, but the original writings

³ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, 5-10.

⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex, Introductory Book*, 9-19.

in Nahuatl are thought to be quite authentic. The scholars who were trained to write this manuscript were probably very young and did not remember the Conquest first hand, but they were still born into indigenous culture, and had a lot of knowledge on pre-Conquest times. By interviewing acquaintances that had resided in Tenochtitlan before the Conquest, these men composed an incomparable and heavily detailed piece of literature on the society, culture, and practices of pre-Conquest indigenous peoples.

Codex Telleriano Remensis is another indigenous work, which consists of Mexica pictorial drawings accompanied by descriptions in Spanish. The artists were clearly indigenous and the men annotating the work are thought to be both native and Spanish. The only known annotator, Pedro de los Ríos, was of the Dominican order and it is likely that the other annotators were his colleagues. The codex was finished in the early 1560s and consists of three sections: an indigenous ceremonial calendar, a ritual handbook, and a historical chronicle which covers the migration of the Mexica to the Basin of Mexico and the pre-Hispanic reigns of kings beginning with Acamapichtli and ending with Moctezuma II. The drawings in the codex are believed to be based upon pre-Conquest documents that are no longer extant.⁵ This is another example of a pre-Conquest work that was compiled by a mix of Spanish and indigenous scholars. The drawings in the codex are extremely indigenous in nature, and are entirely pictorial. The writings that accompany the pictographs are in Spanish and give some explanation as to what the document is trying to say.

⁵ Keber, 115-116, 121-129.

However, by interpreting the actual pictographs themselves, the wealth of knowledge in this manuscript is revealed. It is an incredible work not only for learning about pre-Conquest central Mexico, but it is also valuable for studying indigenous pictorial writing before it was too heavily influenced by Spanish culture and practices.

The next source, the *Codex Mendoza*, is a pictographic manuscript named for the man who commissioned it, the first Viceroy in New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza. He had this history of the Mexica prepared so he could send it to the King of Spain, Charles V. It was painted by Mexica artists, using their own form of pictographic writing. In order for Charles V to understand the native drawings, a Spanish priest who understood Nahuatl and the Mexica writing system added explanations of each picture in Spanish. It contains three sections beginning with a copy of a pre-Hispanic chronicle that no longer exists which depicts all the Mexican kings and the towns they conquered from 1325 to 1521. The second part is the Tribute Roll, also a copy of a pre-Hispanic document, which shows the type of tribute paid, the amount, and how frequently it was delivered to Tenochtitlan. The third part of the codex describes day-to-day life events of the Mexica people.⁶ This document is useful for a number of different things, and gives information on the pre-Conquest era and the people of Tenochtitlan. It also gives the most detailed description of the Mexica tribute collection system, the goods available in Mesoamerica, and the number of cities under the control of Moctezuma II.

⁶ Ross, 11-12.

A final manuscript examined for this study is the *Cozcatzin Codex*. This document was composed in the late sixteenth-century, most likely by multiple indigenous scribes. It begins with a list of land given to indigenous people by Itzcoatl in 1439 and is thought to be part of a land dispute that occurred in 1572. The second part, and the part relevant to this study, is comprised of portraits of the rulers of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco from the pre-Hispanic period until well into the Colonial years. Because it is part of an indigenous land dispute, this document was most likely compiled by indigenous authors only. Although they used Latin alphabetic script and their artwork is clearly influenced by European styles, this is more than anything a true indigenous source. It represents a local history of the central regions of the Basin of Mexico.⁷ Unlike most of the documents used for this manuscript, the *Cozcatzin Codex* was likely not done under the scrutiny of Spanish governmental or church officials. It is one of the most authentic indigenous sources that scholars have access to.

These sources represent a variety of indigenous historical documents. Some are based on pre-Conquest pictorials that are no longer extant, and others rely heavily on local oral traditions. Those produced in the years immediately following the Conquest utilize interviews with people who lived in the Basin of Mexico before the Spanish arrived. Although produced in the post-Conquest years, I believe they all offer extremely important insight into the society of the Mexica Empire in the years preceding contact. Concepts of royalty, such as the importance of hereditary

⁷Valero de García Lascuráin and Tena, 33.

nobility, royal intermarriages, and ceremonial practices are clearly illustrated in these indigenous documents.

Hereditary Nobility

Mexican society was very sophisticated when the Spanish arrived on the scene. They had a royal family from which all their kings were selected. Unlike in Spain, where primogeniture was the dominating practice, the Mexica held elections. However, the elections were held by the highest-ranking nobles and there were only four men to choose from, those who made up the royal council of four. These four men were always close relatives of the current emperor, usually brothers, sons, or nephews, and were given the titles, *Tlacoachcalcatl*, *Tlacatecal*, *Ezhuahuacatl*, and *Tlilancalqui*.⁸ Of these four, the one who had distinguished himself the most was chosen as the next ruler. Throughout their short history as an empire, the Mexica had eleven rulers and they all were direct descendants of the first king, Acamapichtli.

Acamapichtli was the son of a Mexican lord and a woman from the royal family of Colhuacan. His reign is estimated to have begun between 1364 and 1384 and ended between 1387 and 1404. After his death he was followed on the throne by his son, Huitzilihuitl, who ruled until approximately 1415. Huitzilihuitl had many sons, the most prominent of which were Chimalpopoca, Tlacaelel (future *cihuacoatl* or supreme councilor), and the future ruler, Moctezuma I. Of his sons, Chimalpopoca

⁸ Durán, 72.

was chosen to succeed on the throne, but his reign was cut short when he was killed by the Tecpanec people of Azcapotzalco. The next king was elected in 1424-28. This was Itzcoatl, an illegitimate son of Acamapichtli. Itzcoatl ruled only fourteen years, but during this time he subjugated the entire area surrounding Lake Texcoco with the help of his nephew Tlacaelel, who was given the title, *cihuacoatl*. Itzcoatl died in 1440 and was succeeded by his cousin Moctezuma I. Itzcoatl did have a son, Tezozomoc, who did not follow him on the throne. He is described as a prince, which probably means that he was one of the royal council of four. He married Moctezuma's daughter, Atotoztli, and from that union came three Mexica kings, Axayacatl, Tizoc, and Ahuitzotl.⁹

During the reign of Moctezuma I (1440-1469) the Mexica Empire expanded outside the basin of Mexico in all directions. Moctezuma's son, Iquehuatzin, was captain general and a member of the royal council of four, a very prestigious position in Mexica society. However, Moctezuma was instead followed on the throne by his grandson, Axayacatl (1469-1481). His short reign lasted only thirteen years and is remembered because of his subjugation of the people of Tlatelolco, Tenochtitlan's closest neighbor. He had many children including the future emperors, Moctezuma II and Cuitlahuac. Axayacatl's grandson, don Diego Huanitzin, also became a ruler in Tenochtitlan in the post-Conquest years. After Axayacatl's

⁹ Ross, 19, 22, 25.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 35-43, 113-115, 119, 123-125, 129-133, 211-213, 229- 233.; Durán, 33-34, 38, 41-49, 51-53, 60, 84, 91.; Keber, 61-64, 66, 211-214, 216, 271-272; Motolinía, 28.; Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 8, 1, 15.; Valero de García Lascuráin and Tena, 45-46, 97.

death in 1480, his brother Tizoc was elected as the next emperor. Rumors of his death claim that he was poisoned by his own noblemen because of his lack of ambition and warrior attitude, so his quick reign ended in 1486. He was followed on the throne by another brother, Ahuitzotl. During his reign, the empire expanded even more to reach both coasts, and extended south all the way into the southern regions of present day Mexico and northern Guatemala. Also during Ahuitzotl's reign, Tlacaelel died. He had been the second most important man in the empire since the reign of Itzcoatl. His eldest son Cacamatzin had the title, *tlacochcalcatl*, one of the royal council of four, and another son, Tlilpotonqui, became the next *cihuacoatl*. Tlacaelel's grandson, Tlacotzin was also *cihuacoatl* during the time of the Spanish and was the last one to hold that position. He was eventually baptized and renamed Juan Velásquez and became ruler of Tenochtitlan in the Colonial period.¹⁰

In 1503 Ahuitzotl died and left many children. Of his sons, Chimalpilli was the ruler of Ecatepec, Atlixcatzin was *tlacateccatl* and captain general, and Cuauhtemoc would become the last pre-Conquest ruler of the Mexica. Ahuitzotl was succeeded by his nephew Moctezuma II. Although he was a successful ruler, he is primarily remembered because during his reign the Spanish came. He was killed in 1520 while being held prisoner but many of his children survived the Conquest and lived among the Spaniards in Mexico and Spain. They intermarried with the Spanish and enjoyed many benefits due to their royal blood. Moctezuma II's brother, Cuitlahuac,

¹⁰Ross, 25, 28, 29.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 47-53, 57, 133-135, 141, 149-155, 169, 213-215, 235.; Durán, 150-151, 159, 178-180, 183, 208, 222.; Keber, 72, 76, 80-82, 220-222, 224-227, 273-274; Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 8, 2.; Valero de García Lascuráin and Tena, 46, 97.

was chosen as the next emperor but ruled for only eighty days before dying of the smallpox epidemic, which hit Tenochtitlan in 1520. He was followed on the throne by Cuauhtémoc, who was in power when Tenochtitlan fell to the Spanish in 1521. He continued to reign after the Spanish took over but was killed only a couple years later by Cortés because of his supposed involvement in a rebellion plot.¹¹The reign of this Mexica dynasty lasted almost two hundred years and there is a direct line from the first king, Acamapichtli, to the last emperor, Cuauhtémoc.

When looking at Spanish royalty during this time, some similarities can be found. Spanish society practiced primogeniture, which means that the eldest male heir inherited upon the death of his father. However, there was a system in place where a group of people, known as the *cortes*, needed to approve the next ruler. So, like the Mexica, the Spanish had a way of controlling the succession. When the Spaniards first began exploring the New World, Spain was not yet a nation but broken up into a number of territories. The most important of these territories was Castile and the monarch at this time was Isabella. She was married to Ferdinand, the King of a neighboring territory called Aragon. After their deaths, their two kingdoms united forming the basis for what is now modern day Spain.

Isabella was part of the house of Trastámara and their rule in Castile had started around the same time Acamapichtli became the first king of the Mexica.

¹¹Ross, 33.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 53-57, 157-159, 165-167, 217, 235.; Durán, 218, 220, 224, 301, 322-323.; Keber, 85, 227-228, 274.; Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 8, 2, 4.; Valero de García Lascuráin and Tena, 46-47, 97-98.

During the start of Acamapichtli's reign, there was a struggle for the crown and a major civil war happening in Castile. The king, Alfonso XI, had died in 1350 and his son, Pedro, was the new king. However, in 1369, Alfonso's illegitimate son, Enrique of Trastámara, killed his half-brother and took the throne, beginning the Trastámara dynasty. Ruling as Enrique II until 1379, he was followed as King of Castile by his son Juan I (1379-1390). Juan's son Enrique III (1390-1406) became the next king followed by his son Juan II (1406-1454). Juan II had three children: the eldest son became Enrique IV (1454-1474), the second son died when he was only fifteen, and the third child, Isabella, became Queen of Castile in 1474. When the Spanish conquered Tenochtitlan, Isabella's grandson Charles V was on the Spanish throne. With the beginning of his reign in 1516, the Trastámara dynasty ended and that of the Hapsburgs began.¹²

The system of hereditary nobility was firmly entrenched in both Mexico and Spain before the Conquest. The Spanish followed primogeniture; however, a ruler could not take the throne without the permission of the *cortes*. In Mexico, the eldest son did not necessarily inherit but the heir was always a close relative of the emperor who had distinguished himself above the other candidates. Like the *cortes* in Spain, the royal council of four in Mexico had to approve the next ruler. The

¹² Peggy K. Liss, *Isabel the Queen: Life and Times* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), xv, 10.; Angus MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages: From Frontier to Empire, 1000 – 1500* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 121-122, 133, 141.; Townsend Miller, *The Castles and the Crown: Spain: 1451-1555* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1963), 22.; Glyn Redworth, *Government and Society in Late Medieval Spain: From the Accession of the House of Trastámara to Ferdinand and Isabella* (London: The Historical Association, 1993), 24-25.; Christopher Storrs, *The Resilience of the Spanish Monarchy, 1665-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.

dynasty of Acamapichtli and his heirs parallels almost directly the Trastámara dynasty in Spain. There was a clear royal family in both societies and from this family all the rulers were selected. Thus, the importance given to a hereditary ruler was strikingly similar in both cultures.

Strategic Royal Marriages

Another important element of Mexica society that was paralleled in Europe is the importance of intermarriages with other states in order to cement alliances. The Mexica intermarried with other indigenous royal families from neighboring domains the way that the Spanish married into the royal families of Portugal, France, and England. The Mexica royals also married very close relatives, which was commonly practiced throughout Europe. One major difference is that Mexican noblemen were allowed to have multiple wives. This makes their web of royal intermarriages even more complex.

In Mexico this began with Acamapichtli who was married to a noblewoman from Colhuacan, named Ilancueitl. Chimalpahin claims that Acamapichtli's wife was sterile, so he was given the daughters of many high ranking men in the area to produce offspring who were fit to rule, since they did not consider his first son Itzcoatl a legitimate heir. Of these children, one was the second king, Huitzilihuitl, one married the daughter of the king of Tlacopan, and another married the ruler of Chalco. Huitzilihuitl married a daughter of the ruler of Tlacopan, Miyahuaxochtzin, who was the mother of Chimalpopoca. He also married the daughter of the king of

Quauhnhuac, apparently to secure the import of cotton. One of Huitzilihuitl's children married the ruler of Itztapalapa and had a daughter. This Itzpalapan princess eventually came back to Mexico to marry her first cousin, the Emperor Axayacatl. Huitzilihuitl also had a daughter who married the ruler of Coatl Ichan and another who married the king of Texcoco. Moctezuma I's daughter was married to her cousin, a son of Itzcoatl. Another daughter married a nobleman from Tepexic Mixtlan and because he married a Mexican princess, Moctezuma confirmed this nobleman as the next ruler of Tepexic Mixtlan.¹³

Axayacatl had children with a noblewoman from Tollan. One of his sons with her went to rule in Tollan since his mother was the daughter of the previous ruler. Axayacatl also had children with Cuetlaxxochitzin, the daughter of the ruler of Ticitl Cuitlahuac. One of his daughters married the ruler of Tecamachalco and her son eventually became the ruler of that city. During the time when Tlatelolco was conquered by Tenochtitlan, the Tlatelolcan ruler, Moquihuix was married to King Axayacatl's sister. The next ruler, Moctezuma II, married his first cousin, the daughter of Ahuitzotl. He also had a second wife who was the daughter of Tlacaelel, another close relation. When Moctezuma II conquered the city of Tehuantepec in the area of present day Oaxaca, he gave one of his daughters to be married to the heir of that kingdom to help cement the new alliance. Cuitlahuac married a granddaughter of Nezahualpilli, ruler of Texcoco. The son from this union also married a Texcocan

¹³ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 37-39, 43- 51, 119, 123-125, 133.; Durán, 34, 37, 41-42.

noblewoman, another granddaughter of Nezahualpilli.¹⁴ Cuiltahuac was also married to Moctezuma II's daughter, doña Isabel. After Cuitlahuac's death, she married the next ruler, Cuauhtemoc. So, she first married her father's brother, and then her father's cousin.¹⁵

The confusing web of intermarriages within the royal family and with rulers of other states is seen in Spanish society as well. Enrique III, the third King of Castile, was married to Catherine, sister of Henry IV of England. Their son, Juan II was Isabel's father. His first wife, María of Aragon was his first cousin, and his second wife was a princess of Portugal. Isabel would eventually marry Ferdinand, whose father was the brother of Juan II's first wife María. Enrique IV's first wife was a princess of Navarre. They divorced without having any children and Enrique subsequently married the sister of the King of Portugal, Princess Juana. As a child, Isabel was promised to the heir of the kingdom of Navarre and on his death in 1461, she was proposed as a wife for the King of Portugal, Alfonso V. Isabel was also coveted by the King of France Louis XI who wanted to marry her to his brother and heir, the Duke of Berri, and was proposed as a wife for the future Richard III of England. However, she took matters into her own hands and on October 19, 1469, she married Ferdinand of Aragon.¹⁶

¹⁴ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 55, 135, 149, 151, 165, 167.; Durán, 152, 154, 228.; Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 8, 7.

¹⁵ Chipman, 40-41.

¹⁶ Hillgarth, Vol. 2, 350.; Liss, xv, 57.; MacKay, 123.; Miller, 24, 28, 44-45, 55, 63.

Of Isabella and Ferdinand's children, all of them had royal marriages. Their eldest son, Juan, married the daughter of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor. Their daughter Juana married Philip, also a child of Maximilian I. Another daughter, Isabel, first married Alfonso, a prince of Portugal. Upon his death she was forced to marry his uncle, Manuel, who became King of Portugal. Isabel died soon after and her sister María married Manuel. Finally, the youngest daughter, Catherine, married Arthur, heir to the English throne. However, when he died she married his brother, Henry, who became the infamous Henry VIII. Henry and Catherine's daughter Mary would eventually marry back into the royal family of Spain when she wed King Philip II. He was the son of Charles V (son of Juana and Philip) and Isabel (daughter of María and Manuel). Philip II's parents were first cousins, his grandmothers María and Juana were sisters, and their sister Catherine was the mother of his wife Mary.¹⁷

These webs of intermarriages are confusing at best yet very significant. They show the importance of royalty in both cultures. Marrying a commoner was not something either society practiced. They held royalty to a different standard and a very distinct barrier separated the royal family from everyone else in society. In both Spain and Mexico, marriage alliances with other states were extremely common. This suggests that both of these cultures recognized the divine right of all rulers, not just those of their own society. The similarity in this sense between the Mexica and the Spaniards explains the respect shown to indigenous nobility by the Spanish both during and after the Conquest.

¹⁷ Hillgarth, Vol. 2, 350.; Liss, xv, 248-249, 378, 380, 387.; Miller, 68, 106.

In a League of their Own: Distinguishing Royalty

Another similar aspect of both Mexica and Spanish society was the importance of distinguishing the nobility from the commoners. Not only was it important to marry and reproduce with other nobles to continue a pure bloodline, it was also important to distinguish the royal class from everyone else. This included special privileges for royal relatives, including land, titles, and other honors. In addition to this separation of classes, it was also important for the King (or Queen) to be even one step higher. In both societies, the ultimate royal individual was to be in a class of his or her own, distinguished from not only the lower classes, but from the lower ranking royals. Kings and Queens were looked on as god-like, even God's representative on earth. In the Mexica society, these distinctions are described in many texts. Here I will present the way indigenous sources described these royal privileges and in the next chapter I will show how these distinctions are described in Spanish colonial texts as well.

As I have previously described, the royal family in central Mexico was vast. They intermarried with other city-states all over Mesoamerica to form a complex web of nobility. However, because of this and the practice of polygamy, there was often a plethora of royal men to choose from as the next heir. Of course, only one of these men could be chosen as the Emperor of the Mexica. Other Mexica noblemen were thus presented with other titles and honors. For example, during the initial and aggressively successful expansion period under King Itzcoatl, the title of captain

for the various conquest expeditions was given to Itzcoatl's nephews and brothers. When lands were successfully conquered, the best land was distributed amongst these royal relatives. This newly acquired land came with an important economic prize as well: tribute. These cousins, brothers, and nephews of Itzcoatl were given land, peasants to work that land, and tribute payments from their newly acquired city-states.¹⁸ Along with land and tribute, these men were given titles. Durán describes the titles as similar to how “the King of Spain gives titles to his great men, such as that of Duke, Count, Marquis, Viscount, Archduke, Master of a Military Order and Governor of a Conquered Province.”¹⁹

One of the provinces that was conquered during Itzcoatl's time was the neighboring lakeside city of Xochimilco. Since the Xochimilcan ruler decided to surrender, Itzcoatl granted him the privilege of becoming one of his councilors, which allowed him to attend the Emperor's meals and eat in his presence. Itzcoatl also proclaimed that the rulers of Texcoco and Tacuba (Tlacopan) were to be the second and third ranking monarchs in the area, respectively. This was the birth of the Triple Alliance between these three cities. Each of the members of the Triple alliance ruled over their own domain, but the Mexica were ultimately the most powerful and thus they were in charge. The monarchs of Texcoco and Tacuba were also granted the privilege of taking part in the election of a new Mexica ruler. It is believed that Itzcoatl married his sister to the ruler of Texcoco during this time.

¹⁸ Durán, 58-60, 70, 72.

¹⁹ Durán, 70.

They had a son, Nezahualcoyotl, who would become the next Texcocan king. His descendents ruled in Texcoco until the post-Conquest period, thus ensuring Mexica blood on multiple thrones.²⁰

During the reign of Moctezuma I, a stronger notion of class-consciousness and royal distinction was developed. Every member of society was to have his or her own specific rank and everyone was to be treated in a way that was appropriate to that status. These distinctions were rigorously enforced and described in detail by Durán.

... in the palaces were special rooms for people of different rank, and when one visited the palace one knew his place and went there directly. The common people had no business entering the royal buildings and never did so unless it was their turn to render personal services such as scrubbing, sweeping and other menial tasks. Only the lords, noblemen and chief warriors wore sandals on their feet. The rest of the people did not dream of doing so since there were grave penalties involved.²¹

Moctezuma even declared a new set of laws in order to thoroughly describe these distinctions so they were clear and enforceable. Included among these new laws are the following:

1. The king must never appear in public unless the occasion is extremely important
2. Only the king may wear a golden diadem in the city, though in war all the great lords and brave captains may wear such. It is considered that those who go to war represent the royal person.

²⁰ Durán, 80, 84, 90.

²¹ Durán, 122.

3. Only the king and the Prime Minister Tlacaelel may wear sandals within the palace. No great chieftain may enter the palace shod, under pain of death. The great noblemen are the only ones allowed to wear sandals in the city and no one else, with the exception of men who have performed some great deed in war. But these sandals must be cheap and common; the gilded, painted ones are to be used only by noblemen.

4. Only the king is to wear fine mantles of cotton embroidered with designs and threads of different colors and featherwork. He is to decide which type of cloak may be used by the royal person to distinguish him from the rest.

5. The great lords, who are twelve, may wear certain mantles, and the minor lords wear others.

6. The common soldier may wear only the simplest type of mantle and is prohibited from using any special designs or fine embroidery that might set him off from the rest.

7. The common people will not be allowed to wear cotton clothing, under pain of death, but only garments of maguey fiber. The mantle must not be worn below

the knee and if anyone allows it to reach the ankle, he will be killed, unless he has wounds of war on his legs.

8. No one but the great noblemen and chieftains is to build a house with a second story, under pain of death. No one is to put peaked or round gables upon his house. This privilege has been granted by the gods only to the great.

9. Only the great lords are to wear lip-plugs, ear-plugs and nose-plugs of gold and precious stones, except strong men, brave captains and soldiers, but their ornaments must be of bone, wood or other inferior materials.

10. Only the king and the sovereigns of the provinces and other great lords are to wear gold arm-bands, anklets, and golden rattles on their feet at the dances. ... They alone may adorn themselves with chains of gold around their necks, with jewelry of this metal and of precious stones, such as jade. The other valiant warriors may wear common garlands and eagle and macaw feathers on their heads. They may put on bone necklaces and those of small snails ... and small cheap stones.

11. In the royal palace there are to be diverse rooms where different classes of people are to be received, and under pain of death no one is to enter that

of the great lords.²²

In addition to this, the king was to eat alone. He was to eat first and after he finished, other royals were given the plates that were left over. It was considered an honor to eat from plates that were “remainders from the royal mouth.”²³

Moctezuma II followed in his namesake’s footsteps and instituted a number of his own reforms. When he was elected he dismissed all of the household servants who had served the former king, his uncle Ahuitzotl. Ahuitzotl had put people who were not of noble rank in his household, something that Moctezuma did not agree with. He declared that this was undignified and would only be served by men who were high ranking, like himself. He did this in part because he found his uncle’s servants unworthy, but also because he wished to teach his young royal relatives courtly practices and manners. He also wished for these young men to learn the art of ruling the empire in case one of them was chosen as the next king. These young noblemen were to be drawn from the vast pool of royal nephews, cousins, and brothers, but his servants also included the sons of rulers from conquered provinces. No sons of illegitimate unions were allowed to serve Moctezuma, even if they were his own brothers since he considered bastards unworthy to be in his presence. Moctezuma also had strict rules as to how people were to show their respect and reverence. No commoner was to look at him. If he appeared in public, the people were to lower their eyes to the ground in respect and prostrate

²² Durán, 131-132.

²³ Durán, 142.

themselves while he passed. If someone disobeyed this rule of etiquette, they would be killed. Durán claims to have interviewed a man who had lived during the reign of Moctezuma. He asked this man what Moctezuma had looked like and the man responded, "Father, I will not lie to you or tell you about things which I do not know. I never saw his face!"²⁴

Like excess Mexica noblemen, Spanish and other European royals who were not destined to inherit the throne were given other positions of power and prestige. For example, one of Ferdinand's illegitimate sons, Alonso, was made Archbishop of Zaragoza at the early age of six. The heir to the throne, Juan, was of course prepared for his role as future king. He was given his own miniature court, which was comprised of noble children close to his age who shared his education and helped him practice for his future role. The royal daughters, as discussed in the previous section, were married off to heirs of other kingdoms to cement alliances. Ferdinand and Isabella's daughters María and Catherine eventually became the queens of Portugal and England, respectively. When Ferdinand married Isabella, his father was still alive and King of Aragon. Because of this, Ferdinand was given other positions until he inherited the throne including the title of King of Sicily and Naples. Other European countries gave similar titles to heirs and other royal family members. Ferdinand and Isabella's daughter Juana married the son and heir of Maximilian, Holy Roman Emperor. This couple, as heirs to the Austrian throne, had the titles Duke and Duchess of Flanders. In England, Catherine was married to the

²⁴ Durán, 233, 224

Prince of Wales, heir to the English throne. She was likewise given the title of Princess of Wales.²⁵

Similar to Mexica society, Spanish society was highly stratified. The King and Queen were of course at the top, in a class of their own. There were then various groups of ranked nobility who usually owned and dominated large tracts of land in the Iberian Peninsula. These nobles were generally relatives of the monarchs and had been given land because of their status. Under the royal class was, of course, various levels society to which the commoners belonged. In Spain, high-ranking nobles were often exempted from certain taxes the same way that Mexica nobles were excluded from tribute payments. These nobles who owned land and were exempt from taxes were also, in a way, “given” the people of the lands they controlled. They were similar to Mexica noblemen who were given governorships of recently conquered lands in Mesoamerica. Their lands were worked for them, they collected taxes, which gave them a huge source of income, and they had semi-autonomous control over their own mini-kingdom. These nobles were subject to the King or Queen, in the same way that rulers of allied or subject city-states in central Mexico were subject to the Mexican Emperor.²⁶

Royal privilege and prestige was extremely important to both Mexica and Spanish societies. Their rulers were always at the top of the social hierarchy, above everyone else in the realm. Kings, Queens, and Emperors were considered god-like,

²⁵ Miller, 56, 153, 159, 160, 173.

²⁶ Redworth, 6, 10, 11.

chosen by God, and the gods' representatives on earth. Other members of the royal family also held prestigious titles, which usually included gifts of land, tribute, tax exemption, and control over small areas of the kingdom or empire. But of utmost importance was that these nobles were still subject to the crown. These social distinctions between classes made it easier for these two cultures to merge when they came in contact with one another. Spanish officials recognized the prestige of the Mexica royals and often granted them special privileges in the post-Conquest society. This integration of Mexican royalty into New Spain's colonial society will be discussed more in Chapter 4.

'Pomp and Circumstance': Royal Celebrations

For any major event, such as a funeral or coronation, an elaborate celebration was held whose purpose was to show off royal grandeur and power. This was commonly practiced in both the Mexica Empire and in Spain. Not only did it give the royals a chance to show off, it also gave the commoners a reason to celebrate their royal family and even catch a glimpse of their elusive rulers. These celebrations were often based on traditional practices and were a very important part of each of these pre-Conquest cultures. Some of the actual practices during these celebrations differed between the Mexica and Spaniards, but the importance of celebration was clear in both societies. Some of the practices, such as coronations, were actually strikingly similar between the two.

Mexica coronation ceremonies evolved overtime to become more elaborate, but even with the first king, Acamapichtli, there was some form of celebration. When he married his wife, Ilancuítl, the couple was brought to Tenochtitlan. They were welcomed by all the people of the town and were carried through the city to their royal apartments where they were seated upon a Mexican variation a throne and declared rulers of Mexico. The people of the city vowed loyalty and obedience and diadems were placed upon their heads. When the second king, Huitzilihuitl, was elected, he was likewise taken to the royal palace, seated, and crowned with a diadem. He was also anointed with oil, which was used by the Mexica to anoint the statue of their god Huitzilopochtli. This was not only a similar practice to one seen in European coronation ceremonies, but the use of the same oil to anoint both the new king and their primary god showcases the belief that their rulers were god-like creatures and above everyone else. When the third ruler, Chimalpopoca, was elected, similar ceremonial practices were held. In addition, one he was seated, crowned, and anointed, he was given a shield and a sword to hold. These weapons represented a specific god, which the Mexica hoped would be represented through their king.²⁷

When Moctezuma I became ruler, all the usual ceremonies were observed. Following the mourning of the recently departed king, the city began to rejoice and celebrate their new king with dancing and singing. At this point, the empire had begun to expand and so also present at these ceremonies were the rulers of subject

²⁷ Durán, 34, 35, 40, 47.

and allied city-states such as Nezahualcoyotl, the king of Texcoco. These kings came to acknowledge the new ruler and his preeminence over the land and people of central Mexico and brought him gifts to celebrate. Coronations were also used as an economic strategy. When Axayacatl was elected, he invited rulers from coastal towns that had not yet been conquered. This was done because if the rulers refused the invitation, the Mexica would have reason to wage war on those lands and conquer them. These coastal lands had resources the Mexica did not yet have access to so they were looking for a reason to subjugate these areas. During the coronation of the next king, Tizoc, the ruler of Texcoco began to take a more prominent role in the ceremony. He was the one who crowned the new king and also ceremoniously pierced his nose and ears with gold and jade jewelry. Tizoc was led to his throne, which was decorated in jaguar skins and eagle feathers. The king of Texcoco and other noblemen picked up the throne and carried the king to the main pyramid. At the pyramid, Tizoc pricked himself with a knife made of jaguar bone and offered his own blood as penance to the gods. At this point, self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of war captives became an important part of coronation ceremonies. After Tizoc offered his own blood to the gods, the Mexica waged war on Metztitlan in order to obtain captives to offer as sacrifices for the coronation ceremony. Rulers of allied and subject provinces were invited to these festivities and this coronation practice continued until the reign of the last pre-Conquest king, Moctezuma II.²⁸ In future

²⁸ Durán, 87, 163, 178, 179.

coronation ceremonies, neighboring provinces were asked to provide their own victims for the Mexica to sacrifice in order to celebrate their new king.

Although coronations are the ceremonies described in the most detail in indigenous accounts, it is clear while reading these sources that other royal events, such as funerals and the birth of royal children were also celebrated with great pomp. In Mexica culture, these celebrations often included feasts, dancing, and human sacrifice. It was important that all Mexica nobles be present, but it was also imperative that nobles of allied and subject states be present as well. These rulers were often expected to bring gifts and this sometimes included their own individuals to offer as sacrifice.²⁹ This practice shows the importance of their religion in all their royal ceremonies. Religion was a part of every event, and was incorporated into each major royal festivity.

This blending of religion into royal ceremonies was also seen in Spain. When Enrique IV died, his sister and heir Isabella arranged and attended a funeral mass. Changing quickly out of her mourning clothes she changed into her coronation robes to get ready for the next ceremony. In her jeweled coronation gown, she processed through the streets of Segovia followed by the entire clergy of that city. She was presented with a sword in the town plaza and then climbed up a platform that had been prepared and seated herself on the royal throne for all of the city to see. She was crowned and then led another procession to the cathedral for the rest

²⁹ Durán, 43, 47, 150, 174-178, 218.

of the coronation ceremony. Following the coronation, a new royal court had to be formed. Similar to how Moctezuma II replaced his predecessor's entourage with his own, Isabella surrounded herself with servants that she handpicked and knew she could trust. A religious based ceremony was also seen with the birth of Ferdinand and Isabella's first and only son, Juan. In Iberian culture, a baptism was held after the birth of a child. For a royal baby and heir, high ranking church officials and other members of the royalty served as godparents. For Juan, this included the Papal ambassador and the Duchess of Medina Sidonia. There was another procession through the city to the cathedral to continue the celebration and give thanks to the Christian God followed by a bullfight to entertain the masses of the city.³⁰

Juan's wedding to Margaret, the daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor, was likewise celebrated with tremendous splendor. The whole town of Burgos was prepared. Streets were carpeted and balconies were decorated; there were fountains of wine, fireworks and jousts to celebrate. Following the wedding was a grand banquet with a royal feast and dancing. Solemn events, such as funerals, also called for elaborate ceremonies. When Queen Isabella died in Medina Spain in 1504, she was richly dressed before being placed in her coffin. The royal court then undertook a three-week procession through Spain, visiting cities important to various events in Isabella's life, before reaching Granada where the funeral ceremony took place and Isabella was finally laid to rest. Isabella's heir was her daughter Juana, who was married to the son and heir of Maximilian, Holy Roman

³⁰ Miller, 81, 82, 85, 104, 105.

Emperor. When Juana's husband Philip died, there was also a grand ceremony practice beginning with a procession where the body was carried through the city to the religious center of town. Since he was heir to the Austrian throne, his funeral ceremonies were done in the Austrian fashion. His brain was removed followed by his heart, which was sent in a gold box to Flanders, where Philip and Juana had been duke and duchess.³¹

There are some similarities between the Mexica and Spanish with regards to ceremonial practices. Most obviously, ceremonies were of great importance to both cultures and celebrated whenever a royal event took place. Both societies celebrated their royal family's marriages, royal births, and funerals in a grand fashion. Religion was also of the upmost importance to both cultures, so it was a central to these royal celebrations. Although their religious beliefs differed in many ways, most notably the Mexica's practice of polytheism and human sacrifice, both societies looked to religion and reverence to their god(s) as the single most important thing. Processions through the city to show off the royal person's prestige and importance were practiced by Mexica and Spanish royals. This was often followed by lavish feasts with dancing and celebration. While the Mexica practiced human sacrifice, the Spaniards also celebrated with grisly practices such as bullfights. These ceremonies were not only meant to celebrate certain royal life events, but also to give the common people a reason to celebrate and show their loyalty and reverence to their sovereigns.

³¹ Miller, 172, 234, 264, 265.

Conclusion

The idea of royalty in both Mexica and Spanish culture was fundamental. There was a strict concept of a royal family and that family dominated not only the imperial crown but integrated itself into neighboring states as well. In both societies, this web of nobility was woven through the strategic intermarriages with other royal families. In Spain, this included other countries such as England, France and Portugal. In the Basin of Mexico, the Mexica emperors married their children off to rulers all over Mesoamerica. Sometimes this was to cement a friendship with an allied territory. Other times, the Mexica conquered an area and either installed one of their own nobility as the new ruler or let the existing ruler remain but only on condition that he marry a prince or princess of Mexico. Instances of marrying close relatives were also very common in both cultures. Keeping the royal bloodline pure seems to have been extremely important to both groups. These similarities are well documented in post-Conquest sources. Unfortunately, most pre-Conquest documents, especially in the Basin of Mexico, were destroyed during the Spanish Conquest. However, early Spanish and indigenous scholars took it upon themselves to preserve some of this history. They relied on pre-Conquest sources for their writings, which included documents that are no longer extant and oral interviews with people who lived in pre-Colonial times. Because of sources such as the ones examined for this chapter, we are able to catch a glimpse into pre-Conquest royal society, which was remarkably similar to its European counterpart. Chapter 3 will

continue this discussion of the idea of royalty in Spain and central Mexico, but will instead concentrate on Spanish colonial sources.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTIONS OF MEXICA SOCIETY BY SPANISH CHRONICLERS

The purpose of this analysis is to emphasize the remarkable similarities between the Mexica and Spanish cultures before and during the contact period. The previous chapter emphasized the information we can get from indigenous sources, and compared aspects such as hereditary nobility, royal intermarriages, and the importance of celebration. This chapter continues to focus on royalty, but focuses instead on information gained from sources written by Spanish conquistadors. These sources are extremely important because the men of Cortés' expedition were able to see Mexica society before it was ever influenced by European culture. It is a raw look at royal culture, imperial control, the city of Tenochtitlan, and the Emperor Moctezuma himself. Spanish sources also have a different focus. For indigenous historians, it was important to emphasize certain aspects of their history, especially important events and past rulers. Spanish sources have a different focus, one that emphasizes their own experiences and observations. They tell us more about the control the Mexica had over their neighbors and give us more detailed accounts of the city of Tenochtitlan, its people, and its ruler. They show us a bit of everyday life in Tenochtitlan and how this highly advanced society functioned. The two sides of the narrative focus on different aspects of Mexica society, and together they give us a more complete view of the culture of central Mexico. From these European accounts we can see that first and foremost the Spanish conquistadors had found

something worth writing about. They marveled at Tenochtitlan, at the fear and respect inspired by Moctezuma, and the way ceremony seemed to be a part of every aspect of the emperor's life. Many of these things were also seen in Spanish society and a more in depth analysis of these societal aspects shows an even clearer picture of the similarities between the two cultures.

An Introduction to the Sources Examined

Each of the Spanish sources used for this part of the analysis come from men who were part of the Cortés expedition. They were able to see the control the Mexica held over neighboring lands as they marched toward the city of Tenochtitlan. They stayed for many months in the capital city and described their experiences in brilliant detail. Most of these men met Moctezuma and knew him personally. More strikingly, these chroniclers seemed to hold Moctezuma and the people of Tenochtitlan in very high regard. These descriptions are not from men who were unimpressed by their surroundings. The conquistadors were amazed and what they saw and marveled at this culture that had developed in this remote area of the world. I will first introduce each of our Spanish authors before diving into the first-hand descriptions of Mexica society and the similarities that can be found with contemporary Spain.

Hernando Cortés, leader of the expedition that would overthrow the Mexica capital city of Tenochtitlan in August of 1521, wrote a number of letters to the Spanish monarchs during the different stages of contact with the people of

Mesoamerica. Known as the *Cartas de Relación*, these are political documents that detail Cortés's interpretation of events. However, his narrative of the Conquest is often embellished or manipulated in order to justify himself and his expedition to the Spanish monarchs. He exaggerates the wealth of the country to show that his efforts are lucrative and over emphasizes the strange practices of the native peoples in order to justify his treatment of them. Despite this, his letters clearly show a high degree of appreciation and amazement at this rich and sophisticated culture. Numerous times in his letters to Spain, Cortés compares aspects of Mexica culture and society to their parallels in Spain, and this practice was common amongst most Spanish Chroniclers who were part of the Cortés expedition.¹

Spanish chronicler, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, supplies another narrative of the period of contact with the people of Mexico. He arrived in 1514, like many conquistadors with the hope of getting rich, and was part of the Cortés expedition in 1519. His work, the *True History of the Conquest of Mexico*, was written some forty years after the events it describes, it is still a useful work for scholars because it is one of the most complete accounts of the Conquest. With less to prove than Cortés, Díaz's account may be considered a bit more trustworthy.²

Andrés de Tapia was another one of Cortés' military captains who recorded his experience. He was twenty-four when he set out on his first expedition, and was one of Cortés' most trusted men, giving him access to some of the most important

¹ Cortés, xxi-xl.

² Díaz, xiii, xv, xvii, xix-xx, xxiv-xxvi.

events that occurred. Although his account stops abruptly before the Spanish expulsion from Tenochtitlan in 1520, it still gives a clear and detailed account of the Spaniards' first experiences with the people of central Mexico and their awe-inspiring city.³

Another important Spanish chronicle we have access to is by Fray Francisco de Aguilar. He came to the new world as a conquistador and was part of the Cortés expedition. By distinguishing himself, he was privy to the innermost aspects of the conquest and its events. One of his assignments was guarding the Mexica emperor, Moctezuma, so he had first-hand knowledge of the Mexican court and its practices.⁴

One of the most intriguing Spanish accounts is that of the man known as "the anonymous conquistador." Although he never gives his name, it is widely believed that he was an important figure during Cortés' expedition. He describes things that are overlooked in other accounts and seems to know the Mexica pre-Conquest culture and practices quite well. He gives vivid descriptions of the land, cities, people, and practices, which suggest a first-hand experience. The lack of identification on the author's part makes this a unique Conquest narrative. As stated before, conquistadors generally used the chronicle genre as a way to gain fame and

³Andrés de Tapia, "Chronicle of Andrés de Tapia," in *The Conquistadors: First-Person Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, edited and translated by Patricia de Fuentes (New York: The Orion Press, 1963), 17-18.

⁴Fray Francisco de Aguilar, "The Chronicle of Fray Francisco de Aguilar," in *The Conquistadors: First-Person Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, edited and translated by Patricia de Fuentes (New York: The Orion Press, 1963), 134.

prestige. That being said, this account lacks a lot of the bias that is inevitably found in the other Spanish accounts.⁵

'Who can there be who is not a vassal of that lord?':

Pre-Contact Descriptions and Moctezuma's Imperial Control

Before Cortés and his men ever marched down that causeway, came face to face with Moctezuma, or beheld Tenochtitlan for the first time, they were already describing the city and its people in amazement. The fascination is obvious in the numerous times Cortés questioned the people he came into contact with. Whether they were allies, enemies, or scared tributaries, the other indigenous groups held Moctezuma and the power of Tenochtitlan in high regard. In addition to showing the control wielded by the Mexica king, the time the Spaniards spent in Mesoamerica before entering the capital city of the Mexica also shows us how Moctezuma went about observing and trying to understand these newcomers. It is clear from his behavior that he did indeed perceive them as some sort of threat, but that he also viewed them the same way he would have any other group of outsiders. Without the context of knowing another continent, the way the Spaniards had known the New World for almost thirty years, Moctezuma had no choice but to try to fit the Spaniards into the only world he knew. To him, they were just simply another group

⁵Anonymous Conquistador, "The Anonymous Conquistador," in *The Conquistadors: First-Person Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, edited and translated by Patricia de Fuentes (New York: The Orion Press, 1963), 165-166.

of foreigners and the Mexica had plenty of experience dealing with this type of situation.

In his letters, Cortés describes the beautiful country he passes through and the people he encounters on his march toward Tenochtitlan.⁶ Díaz describes the people of this part as intelligent, with sophisticated architecture, and simply superior to the other indigenous groups they had encountered before.⁷ Tapia focuses on the control the Mexica seemed to have over other city-states. The way he described it, each indigenous community had its own lord or governor, but that they were all vassals of Moctezuma.⁸ One lord he questioned replied by saying, “And who can there be who is not a vassal of that lord?”⁹ Another described the respect and fear Moctezuma inspired by saying, “He is like our gods, who know all; there is no use denying it to him.”¹⁰ Aguilar, in his account, emphasizes the feeling of fear felt by indigenous people and Spaniards alike because of Moctezuma and the city of Tenochtitlan. Whether it was fear felt by the people of surrounding areas that was passed on to the Spaniards or a fear that Aguilar developed during his years of participating in the conquest, the powerful emotion instilled by the power of the Mexica was formidable. The Spanish were cautioned by their indigenous allies many times to not go to Tenochtitlan since the city was so well fortified and protected, the

⁶ Cortés, 29.

⁷ Díaz, 7.

⁸ Tapia, 24.

⁹ Tapia, 28.

¹⁰ Tapia, 36.

army so fierce, and the king wily, vicious, and feared by all.¹¹ Because of their early interest in the capital city, Spanish chroniclers describe Tenochtitlan, without ever having seen it, as a city built with remarkable skill upon a great lake and under the control of a powerful, feared, and respected lord and king.

From questioning lords of nearby city-states, the Spanish conquistadors learn that Tenochtitlan is a great fortress and can only be entered by four causeways that connect it to the main land.¹² From this city, the Mexica controlled a large area of Mesoamerica via intimidation and fear. The Spanish notice this control on their journey from the coast and are well received in many towns because Moctezuma has ordered the lords to feed and shelter the Spaniards. What the Spanish do not realize is these men of Moctezuma are also spies sent to learn as much as they can about these newcomers and report back to him.¹³ In this way, Moctezuma had set up quite a large intelligence system throughout his conquered lands by the time of the Spanish arrival. He had in fact known about the Spaniards since they had first landed on the Yucatan Peninsula years earlier. His agents were immediately informed of Cortés' arrival and came to observe and paint pictures of the newcomers and bring this information back to Moctezuma.¹⁴

Based on numerous Spanish narratives recording their march inland, Moctezuma began to realize that despite their small number (only a few hundred

¹¹ Aguilar, 144-145.

¹² Cortés, 47, Díaz, 24, 117.

¹³ Cortés, 50, 55-56.; Díaz, 69.

¹⁴ Díaz, 72-73.

men accompanied Cortés), the Spaniards were continuing along relatively unscathed and had defeated a number of Mexican tributaries. By analyzing his behavior, it is clear that Moctezuma began to see the Spaniards as a legitimate threat that needed to be dealt with. Mexica messengers emphatically encouraged the Spaniards to turn around and go back to where they came from.¹⁵ Moctezuma offered the King of Spain an annual tribute and agreed to become one of his vassals, but only if the Spaniards did not enter his city.¹⁶ Many scholars, and generations of indigenous Mexicans, have perceived these actions as cowardly and not fit behavior for a strong ruler of an empire. However, placing these actions in the context of Mesoamerican history, where conquered people often became vassals and paid tribute, his behavior is in fact very appropriate. In the world of the Mexica (who themselves were usually the conquerors and not the conquered), if a group of people gave in to a conquering force without a fight, the local rulers would get to keep their own authority and would usually retain some autonomy in return for the payment of a yearly tribute. If they put up a fight, however, the Mexica would slaughter their warriors, take captives and slaves, depose the rulers, and desecrate their temples and homes.¹⁷ So, for Moctezuma, this was not cowardice but an appropriate reaction to a threat and an intelligent move of self-preservation.

As Moctezuma continued to struggle with how best to handle this novel situation, the Spaniards continued their journey toward Tenochtitlan and

¹⁵ Díaz, 75-76.

¹⁶ Cortés, 69.

¹⁷ Tapia, 24.

encountered people along the way from numerous Mesoamerican city-states. Some of these areas were allies of the Mexica and paid an annual tribute, others were subject states that had been brutally conquered, and another few were unconquered regions and fierce enemies of the people of Tenochtitlan. Regardless of their relationship with the Mexica, other indigenous groups the Spanish encountered usually described Moctezuma as someone to be respected, albeit usually grudgingly. While staying in one of Moctezuma's subject towns, Cortés asked the local lord if he was Moctezuma's vassal. The man was apparently very taken back by this question "and asked who was not a vassal of Mutezuma, meaning that here he is king of the whole world."¹⁸

However, not all towns the Spaniards passed through felt this way, and this was one of the most crucial aspects of Spanish Conquest: Moctezuma and the Mexica had enemies, and lots of them. Even people who were vassals of the Mexica, people from Cempoala, Cholula, Chalco, and many others, complained bitterly to the Spaniards about their treatment at the hands of Moctezuma. Some, like the Cempoalans, had recently been conquered; all their valuable metals and jewels had been taken, their people were demanded for sacrifice in Tenochtitlan, and they feared doing anything against Moctezuma's wishes.¹⁹ In addition to tributaries chafing under imperial control, the Mexica also had some fierce enemies, most notably the Tlaxcalans. The Mexica and Tlaxcalans had a long, bitter history and

¹⁸Cortés, 56.

¹⁹ Cortés, 50-51., Díaz, 88, 101.

Cortés knew how to manipulate these rivalries. By doing so with the Tlaxcalans, he secured the most valuable asset the Spaniards would have in the conquest of Tenochtitlan: thousands and thousands of indigenous allies. Cortés, throughout the period of initial contact, played on the grievances and rivalries abundant in Mesoamerica in order to gain the upper hand. With a promise of Spanish protection, a large number of indigenous city-states agreed to ally themselves with Cortés as he made his way towards Tenochtitlan.²⁰

From these Spanish accounts we learn that the Mexica did not have direct control over their subject states and many of their territories maintained some autonomy in their own communities. However there was some form of control which was wide spread and could not be escaped, and that was fear. When analyzing these sources, it is easy to compare the imperial nature and administration of the Mexica with that of the contemporary Spaniards. Spain, before, during, and after the Conquest, is not the Spain we think about today and was definitely not altogether united. Most cities during this period were predominantly self-governing and self-sufficient. A city had its own army to defend the surrounding territories it controlled, its own administration and organization, and its own rulers who were elected each year by a city council.²¹ As an example, the city of Barcelona had the power to levy taxes on its subject people without the permission of the king.²² Local governors were able to keep some or all of the taxes they collected, which made

²⁰ Cortés, 50, 51.; Díaz, 88, 101.

²¹ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 80.; Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 65.; Mariéjol, 282.

²² Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 65.

them extremely wealthy, and also allowed them to pay for city upkeep. Rulers generally respected the privileges they bestowed upon their governors, which allowed these noblemen to have almost royal honors including their own domains and vassals, in return for obedience to the ultimate seat of power.²³

One of the most striking similarities between the Spanish and Mexica was their conquering mentality and how they rewarded their loyal, noble subjects. In Mesoamerica, Mexica kings gave newly conquered lands to their close relations and fiercest warriors. In Spain during the *Reconquista*, newly acquired lands were likewise given to people of high rank who had distinguished themselves in war. The nobility, who had their own mini royal courts and jurisdiction over their subject lands and people, dominated city administration in both societies. These local governors were treated in a way that fit their position as pseudo-rulers and were surrounded by people who served them and treated them with appropriate deference.²⁴ These noblemen were not only given lands, titles, and power, but also many other privileges including tax-exemption. They were generally not judged as harshly for crimes and were not allowed to be tortured. In return, these nobles were responsible for the upkeep of their city and were tasked with looking after the wellbeing of their subjects. They had their own private armies, which were used mainly for local protection, but were also at the service of the crown if they were called to war. However, because these cities were ruled as their own mini-states,

²³ Mariéjol, 272, 277.

²⁴ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 63.; Mariéjol, 247, 266, 280.

there was a lot of rivalry between competing nobility for power and private wars between cities was seen as relatively normal. The cities were united in their reverence to the Crown, but not united with one another.²⁵ Sometimes the nobility would unite in rebellion against the Crown and the people and soldiers of the cities generally followed the lead of their respective rulers rather than maintaining an allegiance to the Spanish monarchs.²⁶ When examined in this way, it seems that the Spanish rulers did not have direct control over their territories, and ruled indirectly in a way similar to the practices seen in Mexico. Rivalries between Spanish nobility mimicked the rivalry seen between city-states in Mesoamerica. In both instances there was a lot of local autonomy and the first and most important loyalty was that to one's own community.

Both Spanish and Mexica rulers did not have complete, centralized control over their territories. They designated men of rank as their governors to rule many of their territories for them. Unlike the Mexica, who had an established royal capital city, the Spanish did not yet have a capital but moved around between major cities throughout their land. The royal court, during this period, was virtually a moving city and its ceremonies and government were held wherever the ruler happened to be at the time. This was a common medieval practice of European kings which had the purpose of bringing the royal family into closer proximity with more of its

²⁵ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 60.

²⁶ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 73.

subjects in order to quell rebellions and maintain loyalty.²⁷ In comparison, the Mexica used fear of attack, which their powerful military instilled, as their form of control and the ruler stayed mostly in his capital city except when at war. When the Spanish moved court to a new location, they established the royal government, for a time, in that city, but when they left the responsibilities and government fell back to the local nobility and ruler.²⁸ In sum, both societies exercised a relatively un-centralized control of their territories. Although they had the general obedience of each city, local governors were the rulers of their own smaller states and were looked on as royalty and the holders of all the control by the people of their community.

A Royal Welcome: First Impressions of Lake Texcoco and the city of Tenochtitlan

In this section more than any other, it is difficult to do a side-by-side comparison of the Mexica and the Spaniards. The Spanish descriptions of their first glimpses of Tenochtitlan are described in detail in almost all of the chronicles. We do not have a counterpart of these descriptions from Mesoamerican chroniclers because of the few Mexica that were taken to Spain in the early years, no record of their first impressions of Spain and European cities has been found. What can be used instead as a comparison tool for this part of the chapter are the comparisons that are made by the Spanish chroniclers themselves that describe the similarities between Spanish and Mesoamerican cities. Spanish conquistadors readily compared

²⁷ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 51.; Mariéjol, 238, 243.

²⁸ Edwards, 135.

Tenochtitlan and its people to Spain and other European cities. Cortés himself described the city in the following way:

This great city of Temixtitlan [*sic*] is built on the salt lake ... There are four artificial causeways leading to it ... The city itself is as big as Seville or Córdoba. The main streets are very wide and very straight; some of these are on the land, but the rest and all the smaller ones are half on land, half canals ... All the streets have openings in places so that the water may pass from one canal to another ... The city has many squares where trading is done and markets are held continuously. There is also one square twice as big as that of Salamanca ... more than sixty thousand people come each day to buy and sell, where every kind of merchandise produced in these lands is found.²⁹

How the Mexica would have reacted to encountering a Spanish city in the same way is something we do not know. Would they have regarded Spanish cities with amazement the way the Spaniards regarded Tenochtitlan? Perhaps. But the Spanish reactions do suggest a huge appreciation and an impressive respect for what the people of central Mexico had created. It must have indeed been a magnificent sight to behold if men who had seen Constantinople, Paris, Granada, and Rome described it in this way.

Of all the chroniclers, Bernal Díaz describes the Spaniards' first impressions in the most detailed and entertaining ways. When they first came within sight of Lake Texcoco and the cities built upon it and its shores, Díaz says, "we were amazed and said that it was like the enchantments they tell of in the legend of Amandis, on account of the great towers and cues and buildings rising from the water, and all

²⁹ Cortés, 102-103.

built of masonry. And some of soldiers even asked whether the things that we saw were not a dream.”³⁰ The first city on the lake that the Spaniards stayed in was Chalco where they were housed in a newly built dwelling so large that it was able to comfortably house all the Spaniards plus the native allies, which Cortés estimated to be around four thousand at this point.³¹ Continuing their journey, they halted next at Iztapalapa, a lakeside city ruled by Moctezuma’s brother Cuitlahuac. This city was on the edge of Lake Texcoco where half of it was built on land and the other half on water. The Spanish were lodged in spacious multi-story palaces that were built of stone and wood, and decorated with stone carvings, statues, paintings, and elaborate cloths. Inside the palace of Iztapalapa was a splendid garden with a large diversity of trees and flowers, and a pond that was connected to the lake by an opening in the building so that the palace could be entered by water.³²

From Iztapalapa, the Spanish continued towards Mexico by crossing a long man-made causeway that stretched from the lakeshore all the way to Tenochtitlan. Díaz again gives us a first-hand account of the awestruck Spanish: “Gazing on such wonderful sights, we did not know what to say, or whether what appeared before us was real, for on one side, on the land, there were great cities, and in the lake ever so many more ... and in front of us stood the great City of Mexico.”³³ The fact that Tenochtitlan was built in the middle of the lake not only made it unique,

³⁰ Díaz, 190-191.

³¹ Cortés, 79.

³² Cortés, 82-83.; Díaz, 191.

³³ Díaz, 192.

captivatingly beautiful, and awe-inspiring. It also made it a well-defended fortress, which the Spaniards were soon to find out. Along the long causeways were deep, wide gaps covered with wooden bridges. During an attack, these bridges could be removed to keep enemies out or, as what happened to the Spanish, to prevent enemies from escaping. Entering this formidable city, Aguilar claimed that he could see over one hundred thousand houses in the city, and a population this huge was not only impressive to the Spaniards, it was also terrifying.³⁴

Reaching the lakeside cities, the area under direct Mexica control, gave the Spaniards their first look at the splendor of Mexican ceremonial practices. These men of humble birth in Spain were now the subjects of an elaborate royal welcome. Although they may have witnessed this type of royal procession by the Spanish nobility, the conquistadors had definitely not ever been a part of something so grand. As the Spaniards approached the city of Tenochtitlan, the lake was filled with canoes of onlookers and the rooftops were full of eager citizens hoping to witness these mysterious newcomers. Two columns of people approached the conquistadors, one along each side of the causeway, and all dressed in a way that suggested they were part of the nobility. Between the columns of richly dressed lords came an elaborate litter draped with embroidered cotton mantles carrying Moctezuma. Supported by the lords of his city, Moctezuma's royal litter approached, and the Spaniards noticed that all the people, including the nobility, averted their eyes in respect. Preceding the emperor came a man with a long staff to signal to

³⁴ Aguilar, 146.

everyone that Moctezuma was approaching and behind the litter came another entourage of great Mexica noblemen. When Moctezuma descended from his litter to greet Cortés, the ground was swept in front of him as he went along. He was easy to pick out in the crowd as he was more richly dressed than any other, and was the only one allowed to wear sandals on his feet. The two men exchanged gifts amicably, but when Cortés leaned in to embrace Moctezuma, the Mexica lords stopped him immediately because they believed that touching the body of their emperor was a great indignity.³⁵

As I said before, it is impossible here to do a comparison of first impressions since we do not have any personal descriptions by Mexica people of Spanish cities. However, some comparison may be done about the actual cities themselves. In general, Spanish cities were not quite as grand as those of central Mexico. There was definitely not a Spanish city that was as unique and remarkable as Tenochtitlan. This can be widely attributed to the fact that Spain did not have a capital, but the rulers instead moved around from city to city. Thus, their royalty and splendor was displayed more through clothing and decoration, rather than through architecture. Jewels of gold and precious stones and extravagant clothing were common in both societies, but for the Spanish monarchs, this was their main way to show their superiority over people of lower rank.³⁶ In Spain, the ideal king “should be God’s image and representative on earth ... He should stand out visually ... by being more

³⁵ Aguilar, 146.; Cortés, 84.; Díaz, 193.; Tapia, 38.

³⁶ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 52.; Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 48.

finely dressed than his courtiers."³⁷ Although written about Spanish monarchs, this quote is equally applicable to the society of the Mexica and could easily be used to describe the idea of royalty in Mesoamerica.

With regards to city layout, the ideal city in Spain was to be square, with straight streets laid out in an organized, efficient way. However, many Spanish cities, especially those conquered from the Moors, were built haphazardly, with no organization, and crooked narrow streets. The city of Tenochtitlan, in comparison, was built on an island and unlike any city in the Spanish territories. It was not square, like an ideal Spanish city, but was extremely well laid out and organized, with straight, well-kept, and clean roads. Although some cities in Spain, such as Barcelona and Valencia, were visually striking to foreign travelers of the time, the awe with which the Spanish conquistadors describe Tenochtitlan and other central Mexican cities shows their comparability, if not excellence, when compared with the cities in Spain.³⁸

In the Spanish territories, towns and cities were not extremely populous during this time since they had a very agricultural and rural society that was leftover from feudal times. Houses were not built in any regular alignment and streets were not very well kept, often making travel difficult. However, during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand, who were ruling at the time of Columbus' discovery, architecture and city planning were becoming increasingly

³⁷ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 50.

³⁸ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 66, 67.

more important. The monarchs built over seven hundred bridges during their reign and increasingly elaborate architecture began to be important for secular buildings, whereas before this time it was reserved mainly for religious establishments.³⁹ So although cities had not been an important part of Medieval Spain, and astonishing architectural feats were still a novel idea, these things were beginning to gain importance during the years before the Conquest. Just like in Mexico, Spanish society was still coming together and remarkable cities were a huge part of this new process.

'Behold the Splendor': The Architecture, People, and City of Tenochtitlan

After being welcomed into Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards were lodged magnificently in a palace that had belonged to Moctezuma's father, Axayacatl, the 6th Emperor of the Mexica. The newcomers were escorted to the palace by two of Moctezuma's nephews, the Lord of Texcoco and the Lord of Coyoacan. The palace was large enough to house the entire Spanish entourage and was decorated with elaborate cloth canopies.⁴⁰ This welcoming of foreign leaders into the capital city was not a novel occurrence. Many times in the Mexica's history, foreign lords, both allies and enemies, had been welcomed into the city and housed in royal palaces for diplomatic and celebratory reasons. The Spaniards, in the eyes of the Mexica, were simply another foreign group and were treated as such. They claimed that they were

³⁹ Mariéjol, 227.

⁴⁰ Aguilar, 146.; Cortés, 85.; Díaz, 194.; Tapia, 38.

emissaries of a great king and so they were treated the way foreign emissaries were customarily treated in the city of Tenochtitlan.

Like European kings, Moctezuma had many palaces and personal residences at his disposal both inside and outside the capital city.⁴¹ He had palaces in Tenochtitlan where most of his business was conducted and where he received foreign and domestic entities and held court. His land holdings outside the city were more for pleasure purposes including a private island where only he was allowed to hunt.⁴² In the city he had a house where all of his tribute records were kept and another two that were full of every kind of weapon, many elaborately decorated with stones and gold.⁴³ He also had a personal aviary that housed eagles, parrots, ducks, and all other types of birds found in Mesoamerica. These birds were used for Moctezuma's pleasure so he could go visit and enjoy them whenever he liked, but they were also kept for their plumage, which was used to decorate royal clothing.⁴⁴ Another house kept many other wild animals including lions, tigers, wolves, and snakes, and was used as a personal zoo for Moctezuma to visit. In order to care for these animals, over three hundred men were given this job as their official court position.⁴⁵ Moctezuma had another house in which he kept deformed or unusual

⁴¹ Cortés, 91.

⁴² Cortés, 91, Díaz, 238

⁴³ Díaz, 211.

⁴⁴ Díaz, 212.; Tapia, 40.

⁴⁵ Cortés, 110.; Díaz, 213.; Tapia, 40.

men and women including hunchbacks, dwarfs, and albinos, which were also cared for by hundreds of individuals and used for entertainment.⁴⁶

His residential palaces inside the city were so magnificent that Cortés said that describing their grandeur and excellence was impossible but that “in Spain there is nothing to compare.”⁴⁷ Aguilar said that he had walked around one of Moctezuma’s palaces four different times, simply to marvel at it, and had explored it for hours but had never been able to see it all because of its grand size.⁴⁸ In the royal bedchambers, “there were canopied beds with mattresses made of large mantles, and pillows of leather and tree fiber; good quilts, and admirable white fur robes; also very well made wooden seats, and fine matting.”⁴⁹ Most of these houses contained lavish gardens with all types of flowers and trees organized around walkways, and ponds filled with fish and small birds. Balconies and corridors surrounded these indoor parks so that Moctezuma could walk around and enjoy them at his leisure.⁵⁰

In addition to the royal residences, the Mexica had a huge marketplace held daily in the neighboring island town of Tlatelolco, which had been incorporated into the capital city years before. Bernal Díaz was “astounded at the number of people and the quantity of merchandise that it contained, and at the good order and control

⁴⁶ Cortés, 111.; Tapia, 40-41.

⁴⁷ Cortés, 109.

⁴⁸ Aguilar, 180.

⁴⁹ Aguilar, 147.

⁵⁰ Cortés, 110.; Díaz, 214.

that was maintained,” for the Spaniards “had never seen such a thing before.”⁵¹ All types of goods could be found at this market, as it was a central trading hub for all of Mesoamerica. The Spaniards saw cloth, animal skins, vegetables and animal meat for consumption, herbs, timber, paper, tobacco, precious metals, and pottery. It was all well controlled by a small group of leading men who saw to the maintenance of the marketplace. Local officials patrolled the market, inspected the merchandise, and reported any ill doing to these local magistrates who presided over the marketplace from a building similar to a courthouse.⁵²

The great pyramid and religious complex of Tenochtitlan was also a sight to behold. The main temple was reached by climbing over a hundred stone steps and was surrounded by two large, stone walls. Inside the walls was an impressive paved court area, which according to Spanish chronicles was larger than the plaza of Salamanca in Spain and could fit in its precinct a town of five hundred inhabitants.⁵³ In this complex were a number of tall beams where human skulls from sacrificial victims were displayed, which of course disturbed the Spaniards greatly. From one account, it is estimated that there were over 136,000 skulls on display in the religious complex.⁵⁴ From the top of the temple, the whole city of Tenochtitlan could be seen and Díaz, in his loquacious way describes this experience:

⁵¹ Díaz, 215.

⁵² Aguilar, 178-179.; Cortés, 103-105.; Díaz, 216-217.

⁵³ Aguilar, 179.; Anonymous Conquistador, 168, 175.; Cortés, 105.; Díaz, 217.; Tapia, 41.

⁵⁴ Tapia, 41-42.

So we stood looking about us, for that huge and cursed temple stood so high that from it one could see over everything very well, and we saw the three causeways which led into Mexico, that is the causeway of Iztapalapa by which we had entered four days before, and that of Tacuba, and that of Tepeaquilla, and we saw the fresh water that comes from Chapultepec which supplies the city, and we saw the bridges on the three causeways which were built at certain distances apart through which the water of the lake flowed in and out from one side to the other, and we beheld on that great lake a great multitude of canoes, some coming with supplies of food and others returning loaded with cargoes of merchandise; and we saw that from every house of that great city and of all the other cities that were built in the water it was impossible to pass from house to house, except by drawbridges which were made of wood or in canoes; and we saw in those cities Cues and oratories like towers and fortresses and all gleaming white, and it was a wonderful thing to behold.⁵⁵

Around the large pyramid and within the religious precinct were a number of beautiful buildings which were elegant and elaborately decorated houses for the religious men to live in.⁵⁶ According to Tapia, over five thousand men, similar to Spanish priests, lived and served in this temple complex and were ranked in a way that mimicked the Clerical hierarchy in Spain, with the high priest being the one that all the others obeyed.⁵⁷

In addition to the royal and religious dwellings, there were numerous other magnificent living quarters that caught the eye of the Spaniards. These houses were larger than that of the average citizen, had multiple stories, and beautiful rooms and gardens. These were the personal houses of noble lords who served Moctezuma.

Both lords who permanently resided in Tenochtitlan and those who governed

⁵⁵ Díaz, 218.

⁵⁶ Cortés, 105.; Díaz, 224.

⁵⁷ Tapia, 41.

another territory, such as the ruler of Texcoco, had houses in the capital where they were required to reside for a period of time each year. Forcing his leading men to spend part of their year near his court and in his capital city gave Moctezuma a better relationship with his nobility and also let him keep tabs on some of the most powerful and important men in his land.⁵⁸ This was similar to European noblemen having a house in the city, or rooms at the royal court, where they stayed for part of the year in addition to a home in another city or the countryside. Many sons of the nobility, domestic and foreign, were in the service of Moctezuma and lived either in the royal palace or had a residence nearby. This again gave the emperor some control of outlying territories. These young men would grow up to be governors or lords of subject domains and would always have a connection to the capital city and its emperor since they were brought up in his service.⁵⁹ Rulers of both societies used this system of a central royal court to impose control over their powerful and dangerous nobility.

Another aspect of Mexica society that the Spanish chroniclers described in splendid detail were the people themselves. Cortés says it beautifully in one of his letters to the King of Spain:

The people of this city are dressed with more elegance and are more courtly in their bearing than those of the other cities and provinces, and because Mutezuma [*sic*] and all those chieftains, his vassals, are always coming to the city, the people have more manners and politeness ... I will say only that these people live almost like those in Spain ... and considering that they are

⁵⁸ Aguilar, 180.; Cortés, 107.

⁵⁹ Cortés, 109.

barbarous and so far from the knowledge of God and cut off from all civilized nations, it is truly remarkable to see what they have achieved.⁶⁰

Aguilar said that the people of Tenochtitlan were the most clever and skillful people in the world and could pick up any task after only observing it one time. Because of this there were many different trades that the common people could make a living at and therefore, there were varied goods and services available the cities and everyone seemed to have their own specific place in this well-organized society.⁶¹

Mexica rulers and the monarchs of Spain seem to have had similar desires when it came to their palaces. Although their movements differed – the monarchs of Spain moved from palace to palace and the Mexica rulers tended to stay in Tenochtitlan – both had numerous royal residences that were richly decorated and filled with things to please and divert the monarchs. Royal palaces in both societies were used not only to house the rulers but also to entertain guests and take care of important matters of state, such as receiving foreign embassies. These palaces were used in both societies to bring up noble children and teach them proper court etiquette. Moctezuma did this by using sons of noblemen as his primary servants. Queen Isabella in Spain raised the daughters of noble families in her own household and gave them the education that was required of ladies of noble birth. As non-religious architecture was becoming more important to the Spanish monarchs in the years preceding the Conquest, the decoration of their palaces became as important

⁶⁰ Cortés, 108.

⁶¹ Aguilar, 181.

as clothing for them to distinguish their rank. By decorating the palaces from floor to ceiling with paintings and tapestries, a ruler could show his or her authority to people who were deemed important enough to visit the royal residence.⁶² From their many recent conquests in the Iberian Peninsula, the Spanish monarchs had also inherited beautifully built and lavishly decorated Moorish palaces, which they happily used to hold their royal court and stage elaborate celebrations.⁶³

Having pleasant diversions from matters of state were important to the rulers of both societies. A major past time of Moctezuma was also the most popular diversion of the Spanish rulers. Spanish rulers loved to hunt and were raised to do so from a very young age since hunting, which was related to the arts of warfare, was seen as one of the key parts of a noble's education.⁶⁴ Other royal diversions included those found within the walls of the royal palaces. Similar to the royal residences of Tenochtitlan, the Spanish rulers' private houses included elaborate gardens within its walls and many of them contained their own private zoos. The Spaniards imported lions, leopards, wolves, camels and other animals to fill these private menageries, many of which came from Alexandria.⁶⁵

Two other aspects of architecture and city planning are also remarkably similar in the societies of the Spanish and the Mexica. Both cultures put a huge emphasis on trade and religion, to keep their territories prosperous and their gods

⁶² Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 51, 56.; Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 50-51.; Mariéjol, 237.

⁶³ Mariéjol, 244-245.

⁶⁴ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 51, 56, 62.; Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 51.

⁶⁵ Díaz, 205.

happy. Like the Mexica, the Spanish also had regularly held and highly regulated markets. An official known as the *Mustacaf* presided over the Spanish markets and made sure they were run legally and smoothly. He inspected the goods for sale, controlled the prices, and made sure the guilds were following Crown and city regulations. Most of the time these markets were held in large squares or *plazas* in the center of the major cities. With the growth of cities, these *plazas* became even more important, and many more, larger squares were created during the reign of Juan II (1406-1454), Isabella of Castile's father. They were used not only for markets, but also for processions and other entertainments such as plays and tournaments.⁶⁶

The dominance of religion was also very apparent in the architecture of both Spanish and Mesoamerican cities. In Tenochtitlan, the main temple and surrounding religious complex dominated the skyline and was in the most centrally located and important part of the city. In Spain, religious buildings were the most beautiful and elaborate until the fifteenth century when secular architecture became important as well. In the Spanish royal court, religion was the center of everyday life. There was a Royal Chapel in most palaces that was used for daily activities such as Mass and Hours, which were celebrated throughout the year. It was also the scene of religious celebrations, including Christmas, Easter, and Holy Week. Celebrations of the Virgin Mary and other Saints also filled up the religious calendars of the Catholic monarchs.

⁶⁶ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 80.; Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 67, 73.

At these services, offerings were always made, usually in the form of money or gifts to the church.⁶⁷

Within the church, the religious men made up their own society and had their own royalty and class system. There was a strict hierarchy in the church, which resembled the secular hierarchy of kings, nobles, and commoners. The Archbishop of Toledo was the most important churchman in Spain and ranked only below the king and queen in his wealth and power. Below him were the noblemen of the church, the high clergy. This higher echelon of religious society was generally made up of men of noble birth. For example, King Ferdinand's bastard son Alonso was the Archbishop of Zaragoza. These titles were often inherited; in the case of Alonso, his Archbishopric was passed to his illegitimate son after his death. Younger sons of kings and other nobles, who were lower in the line of succession, often entered the church as their source of power and wealth and were given priority when church offices were rewarded.⁶⁸

Overall, Spanish and Mexica cities shared many similarities. The two most important things in both societies were the rulers and religion. Rulers in Spain showed their grandeur primarily by wearing fancy clothing, but elaborately decorated palaces also became an important distinguishing factor. In Mexico, the emperor also dressed in a fashion that designated his rank and made sure that his palaces were the most exceptional of all the residential buildings in Tenochtitlan.

⁶⁷ Edwards, 130, 132-135.

⁶⁸ Edwards, 129-130, 132, 134.; Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 108.; Mariéjol, 251, 254.

Rulers in both societies enjoyed private gardens and zoos in their own personal palaces, but also relished escaping from the city for a while to enjoy the royal pastime of hunting. Main squares with well-regulated markets made it possible for the general public to have access to all the goods of the land and plazas also gave them a place to celebrate major festivals and catch glimpses of royal processions. Above all other buildings stood out those dedicated to religion. Religious complexes were the home of many men of rank, and the leading nobles occupied the highest positions in religious society. The hierarchy of Spanish royal society was replicated in the hierarchy of the church and this was seen in Mexico as well.

A Mesoamerican Royal Court: Courtly Grandeur in Tenochtitlan

The courtly practices of the Mexica were very elaborate and specifically adhered to in a way that echoed practices in Europe at the time. Moctezuma received guests, such as Cortés in a special hall in his palace where only certain members of Mexica society were allowed to go. In this audience chamber, Moctezuma was attended to by his nephews, brothers, and other close relations. No other lords, however important, were allowed to enter this sacred space. This was where he received Cortés for the first time in the palace, which shows the regard he held for the Spanish leader. In his palace Moctezuma had a large guard to protect and converse with him, which was made up of over two hundred noblemen. Most of these men came to the palace every day but were kept in separate rooms, where they conducted business amongst one another. When they did enter the presence of

the emperor they were required to take off their richly decorated clothes and to put on something more plain. They had to enter the audience chamber barefoot and with their eyes lowered towards the ground in reverence and respect. They would bow three times before speaking and upon leaving the chamber were not permitted to turn their back on the king, but were forced to back out of the room while keeping their eyes on the ground.⁶⁹

Royal meals were also elaborate affairs with their own rules and regulations. For every meal the royal cooks prepared over thirty dishes, which were placed over pottery braziers so that the food would not get cold. Moctezuma sat on a low, richly decorated stool at a large table covered with beautiful cloths, napkins and dishware. Before eating he was brought a water basin to wash his hands, and when he began to eat a screen was put up in front of him to give him privacy. His four chief advisors, the men of the royal council of four, kept him company during his meals and ate standing up at Moctezuma's side.⁷⁰ The towels he used to dry his hands and the plates and bowls he ate from were so sacred that after they were used they could never be used again.⁷¹ At these meals there sometimes was entertainment including hunchbacks, jesters, acrobats, or other performances. When Moctezuma was finished with his meal the table was cleared, and Moctezuma's hands were washed with great ceremony. After this, all the other noble men in the antechambers would

⁶⁹ Aguilar, 147.; Cortés, 111-112.; Díaz, 208-209.

⁷⁰ Cortés, 111.-112.; Díaz, 209-210.; Tapia, 40.

⁷¹ Cortés, 112.; Tapia, 40.

be able to eat. Leftovers from the nobles' meals were given to the servants and entertainers.⁷²

The Emperor Moctezuma himself was extremely hygienic and bathed two times each day, which made him more concerned with his cleanliness than any European ruler. He had many wives and mistresses, all daughters or nieces of other great, noble lords. This practice of polygamy was reserved for only men of noble rank. Commoners were only allowed to have one wife and adultery was punishable by death. Moctezuma changed clothes four times a day and never wore the same clothes twice. His clothing was brought to him wrapped in cloth so that it would not be touched by the hands of his servants.⁷³ Whenever Moctezuma left the palace, he always did so with great pomp and ceremony. He would exit the palace in a richly decorated litter carried by some of his great lords and noblemen. This procession was preceded by men carrying long, decorated poles that signified to onlookers that their emperor was approaching. No one he passed was allowed to look him in the face. The citizens bowed their heads or prostrated themselves until his litter had passed by.⁷⁴

Even when the Spaniards took Moctezuma prisoner, he was still treated in a manner that fit his position. He was watched over by Spanish guards but was still allowed to hold court and have any amusement or entertainment that he wished. He

⁷² Díaz, 210-211.

⁷³ Aguilar, 147.; Cortés, 112.; Díaz, 208.; Tapia, 40.

⁷⁴ Díaz, 215, 238.

still had all of his attendants and continued his usual daily practices, such as his twice-daily baths, elaborate meals, and meetings with domestic and foreign officials. He continued to entertain himself with banquets and other elaborate festivities.⁷⁵ From his “prison” he still punished rebel Mexica nobles who were trying to overthrow the Spaniards, and received news about activities in his territories the same way as before. When another group of Spaniards reached the coast, with the aim of arresting the rebellious Cortés, Moctezuma heard about their landing three days before Cortés’ men found out.⁷⁶

While in captivity, the Spanish seemed to hold Moctezuma in high regard. From their descriptions, they seemed to have genuinely liked him as a person and respected him as a noble man of a royal family. Díaz, who was for a time placed as a guard over Moctezuma, describes his imprisonment in the following way:

Whenever we passed before him, even if it was Cortés himself, we doffed our mailed caps or helmets ... and he treated us all with politeness ... it was not necessary to give orders to many of us who stood guard over him about the civility that we ought to show to this great cacique; he knew each one of us and even knew our names and our characters and he was so kind that to all of us he gave jewels ... whenever I was on guard, or passed in front of him, I doffed my headpiece with the greatest respect.⁷⁷

This respect for Moctezuma is a very important aspect of the conquest. Not only did the conquistadors seem to marvel at him, his city, and its people, but they also

⁷⁵ Tapia, 40.; Aguilar, 147-148.; Cortés, 92.; Díaz, 230-231.

⁷⁶ Díaz, 243, 257.

⁷⁷ Díaz, 233, 236.

seemed to generally like Moctezuma as a person. They acknowledged him as a legitimate ruler from a royal family and treated him as such. This respect for Mexica nobility is significant especially since it carried through to the post-Conquest years where indigenous people of royal descent were given high positions in the colonial society. This aspect of post-Conquest society will be discussed more in the next chapter.

As in Mexico, all aspects of court society in Spain were attended to with the upmost pomp and ceremony. The grandness of the royal court was meant to shock and awe, but also to show the monarchs' power and authority. Other nobles had their own palaces as well, which were generally a smaller, less grand version of the royal court. It was very important in Spanish society for people to dress and act according to their rank and not to display themselves in a way that was above their current station. For example, in the fifteenth century, women with the rank of "lady" could wear dresses with trains twice as long as those of women without a title of nobility. Most noble titles were inherited, but the king had the power to grant titles such as duke, marquis, count, and baron for exceptional service. Although certain clothes were only allowed for the highest members of society, not even the highest ranking noble was allowed to outshine the monarch.⁷⁸

A glittering court life that is associated with European royalty really began to develop in Spain during the reign of Isabella and Ferdinand. Isabella loved having

⁷⁸ Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 48.; Mariéjol, 268-269.

the noblemen and ladies with her at court so she could always play her role as queen with as much pomp as she liked. Her closest servants were members of the noble class, and many governmental offices at court were also reserved for those of the aristocracy. Having these people close to her at court was not only for vanity; it also had a diplomatic purpose. Keeping the noble families at court and appointing them to the best offices meant that not only could the monarchs keep their eyes on the members of the noble class, they could also use important positions as rewards for loyalty. Having a royal court society was a way to keep society as a whole intact.⁷⁹ Other members of the royal family sometimes had their own courts to look after. This included the son and heir to Isabella and Ferdinand, Juan, who had his own palaces and royal court that mimicked the court of his parents but on a smaller scale.⁸⁰

In the royal households, everything was done for the monarchs from morning until night. They were never alone, but were always accompanied by servants of some sort. Because of this, there were many positions available at the royal court and every servant had his or her own place and duties. One of the highest positions one could have at court is that of *mayordomo mayor*, the man who oversaw all palace expenses and many of the offices of the court. Every meal was attended to by servants who made sure that each royal dining experience was done with appropriate ceremony. There were servants to prepare the royal bedchambers,

⁷⁹ Mariéjol, 37.

⁸⁰ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 52.; Mariéjol, 238.

set the tables, clean the palace, and even dress the royal family. There were cobblers, barbers, people in charge of wardrobe and entertainments such as books, physicians, cooks, and all other sorts of positions that were necessary for maintaining a royal household. The monarchs were always surrounded by royal guards and high-ranking knights were assigned specially to watch the royal bedchamber at night and accompany the royal family wherever they went.⁸¹

The monarchs went out amongst their people often for processions and ceremonies. It was deeply important for the Spanish king and queen to be visible to their people and be seen to be generous, compassionate, and powerful rulers. They generally went out carried in litters and were accompanied by a procession of court figures. The royal monarchs reveled in going amongst their people in royal splendor and also enjoyed hosting elaborate ceremonies during which the court spared no expense. Formal ceremony surrounded the monarchs entering the city and other royal processions, receptions of foreign diplomats, and the opening of the *Cortes*, the Spanish version of Parliament. Isabella especially loved dressing the part for these royal events and taking part in the dancing and other courtly activities.⁸² The grandest ceremonies of the year, apart from religious festivals, were ones that centered on the noble family themselves including baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Religion was often the basis of most ceremonies, but after the religious solemnities were observed, exuberant celebration would follow. There were

⁸¹ Edwards, 135-136.; Mariéjol, 239-243.

⁸² Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 50.; Mariéjol, 244-245, 247.

banquets with music and dancing, bullfights, plays, and tournaments. The city population also celebrated these major events by watching the royal processions and then holding their own celebrations in the main plaza. Another important aspect of court celebrations was the idea of chivalry. Spain was a very war oriented society and liked to celebrate great victories to encourage a knightly culture that promoted enthusiasm for wars, such as the *Reconquista*. Because of this there were often jousts and other knightly games, which were entertaining but also served a bigger purpose.⁸³

When looking at the societies of the Mexica and Spanish side-by-side, it is easy to see the great importance both placed in the idea of a royal court. The court served many purposes from entertainment to politics. It was a way for the monarchs to show their status, to the common class of course, but also to the nobility whom they surrounded themselves with. Using the gifts of court positions, rulers could secure alliances from some of the most powerful families in the kingdom. They could also show off their royalty and power at celebrations, which were regularly held throughout the year. Every aspect of their daily lives was overseen by servants, and the highest positions in the household were generally recruited from the upper echelons of society. Young noblemen and women were sometimes raised and trained in the royal palace to implement loyalty from a young age and to teach the next generation the ways of court life and rulership. The grand ceremonies were meant for entertainment but usually also had some sort of religious undertone,

⁸³ Edwards, 133, 136.; Hilgarth Vol. 2, 64.

since each society held religion in such high regard. Both societies were also warrior cultures and displayed this fact as often as they could.

Conclusions

It is easy to see by examining some of these societal aspects that the cultures of the Mexica and the Spanish shared some striking similarities. They both controlled huge areas of land, yet most territories maintained some sort of autonomy. In Mesoamerica, the Mexica monarchs ruled by fear and maintained their power by promoting a strong warrior culture and maintaining a powerful army. The Spanish monarchs, on the other hand, used their presence to keep outlying territories in check and traveled through their lands throughout the year, staying in cities all over the peninsula.

When it comes to the cities themselves, the conquistadors admitted that there was nothing in Spain to rival the Mexica capital city of Tenochtitlan. In Spain, there was no capital city and so no one city had yet been singled out and made exceptionally grand. Spanish society had their idea of a perfect city, square and well laid-out, but most cities did not meet these standards since many had been recently conquered from Moors who had haphazard, unorganized city planning. The Mexica, on the other hand, had an extremely well laid out and maintained city, with straight rows of streets and canals, which made travel throughout the city extremely easy. Religious buildings dominated the architectural feats since both societies were heavily based on religion. Royal palaces were the second most impressive buildings

in both Spain and Mexico and were used as a status symbol for the royal families. They were also the home of the royal courts, which formed an integral part of both societies. Royal courts were used as the backdrop of extravagant ceremonies. Servants constantly surrounded the royal family in both societies and they were attended to every moment of every day. Every aspect of their daily lives was treated to great ceremony and they were always protected by a royal guard. The palaces were also the home of many other nobles who served the monarchs in return for titles and a higher rank in society. Celebrations, usually with religious and secular parts, were celebrated to show the courtly grandeur and give the common people a reason to celebrate as well. Royal processions, and being amongst the people were also important events since it gave the common people a chance to see their monarchs and cemented loyalty.

This chapter focuses on these aspects of society from the viewpoint of the first Europeans to come into contact with such a highly advanced indigenous civilization. The conquistadors' accounts are so unique because they were among the few European individuals who were able to see the Mexica Empire, Moctezuma, the city of Tenochtitlan, and the Mexica people before it was ever influenced by Spanish culture. They saw the raw character of Mesoamerican society as it was in the time before the Conquest. These accounts are invaluable for the descriptions they give us, and are so detailed and remarkable, that they easily paint a picture of pre-Conquest Mesoamerica. They give us exceptional narratives about the grandeur

of the Mexica royal court because they found it remarkable and felt the need to record their experiences in great detail.

With their descriptions we are able to see that the Mexica cities, architecture, ceremonies, and courtly practices shared many similarities with those seen in Spain. In some cases, especially when it came to the exceptional city of Tenochtitlan, the Mexica seem to have outdone their contemporary Spaniards. Cortés was so impressed with the city that he is said to have been heartbroken to cause so much destruction to it. Díaz also reflects in his old age the sadness he feels at the destruction of such a remarkable city. “Of all these wonders that I then beheld to-day (*sic*) all is overthrown and lost, nothing left standing.”⁸⁴ The capital city of Spain’s new territory was built on top of the ruins of Tenochtitlan, which shows the regard the Spaniards held for the lost city. Tenochtitlan may have been destroyed, but not all aspects of indigenous royal culture vanished after the conquest. This continuation of indigenous noble authority is discussed more fully in the following chapter.

⁸⁴ Díaz, 109.

CHAPTER 4

POST-CONQUEST MESOAMERICA: THE BLENDING OF SPANISH AND MEXICA SOCIETIES AND THE SURVIVAL OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE

The society of central Mexico in the years following the conquest was not one marked by indigenous defeat or desolation. Tenochtitlan may have been destroyed and the Mexica Empire overpowered, but the people of Mesoamerica did not see themselves as conquered, vanquished, or subordinated.¹ In reality, 1521 is not a year that marks the “Conquest” of Mesoamerica; it instead signifies the end of a two-year war between the Spaniards and the people of Tenochtitlan. It also marks the beginning of further conquest expeditions to gain control of the rest of New Spain. The ruined capital city of the Mexica Empire was rebuilt and became the capital city of the new Spanish colony. The main plaza in Mexico City was built over the great central square of Tenochtitlan, Cortés had his home built in the same place where Moctezuma’s personal palace had been, and the cathedral of Mexico City was built in the same place where the Mexica great temple had once stood.² The rebuilding effort of the new city of Mexico was done by pre-Hispanic residents of Tenochtitlan and the surrounding areas. These indigenous survivors also made up the majority of the population of the new city. So in a way, Tenochtitlan survived, although as the

¹ Wood, 142.

² Martínez, 2, 105.; Restall, 65, 70.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 8.; Schwartz, 214.; Townsend, 132.

capital of New Spain it was undoubtedly in a very new form than it had been in pre-Conquest years.³

Overtime, the Spanish presence in Mexico City and the rest of Mesoamerica increased as newly conquered territories were incorporated into the new colony and colonial institutions were set up. The Spaniards tried setting up their own institutions in these new areas, but often found that working within the framework already established by the indigenous people was the most efficient and effective. The following quote by Spanish historian and chronicler Alonso de Zorita explains how people in Colonial times viewed the resilience of native communities and culture:

When New Spain was conquered by the Spaniards, this mode of government of the natives was retained and continued for some years. Moctezuma alone lost his kingdom and dominion, which were vested in the royal Crown of Castile. Some of his towns were given in *encomienda* to Spaniards. All the other lords of provinces, both those who were subject to him and those who were independent, including the rulers of Texcoco and Tacuba, possessed, ruled, and governed their lands, but they did this as representatives of Your Majesty or of *encomenderos*. These lords did not have as much land or as many vassals as they had once had, but the people brought them tribute of produce and other things as before the Conquest, and they were obeyed, feared, and respected.⁴

The *encomiendas* Zorita mentions refer to grants of native labor and tribute, which were awarded to Cortés's favorites and a few even went to indigenous nobles in

³ Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 7.

⁴ Zorita, 113.

recognition of their status. In a relay fashion, newly conquered territories were used as launching pads for successive conquest efforts and new colonies were exploited for their resources, funding, and people as workers, tribute payers and warriors. Wars aimed at conquering indigenous peoples in Latin America persisted well into the twentieth century and it can even be argued that what is known as “the Conquest” is still incomplete.⁵ The Spaniards may have thought that indigenous peoples were completely loyal to the Crown, but natives saw themselves as subjects of their own lords first, and the Spanish king second.⁶

In the years following the Conquest, the native populations in New Spain continued to greatly outnumber the populations of Spanish settlers. But because of a number of factors, including the disunity of indigenous communities, Spaniards were able to continue their conquering expeditions with great success. Epidemics also helped the Spaniards gain footholds in their new colony and allowed them to not only settle in these new areas, but also made their control of native communities a bit easier. Some estimates suggest that native populations declined by as much as 90 percent in the century after smallpox and other diseases were first introduced to Mesoamerica. During this time, indigenous city-states often lost their own rulers, in addition to the huge majority of their population, so the new Spanish colonial

⁵ Martínez, 2, 105.; Restall, 65, 70.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 7.; Schwartz, 214.

⁶ Restall, 76.

government was able to gain a stronger foothold than they would have in the absence of such epidemics.⁷

Because the population density outside of the major cities was relatively low, a large number of people survived the waves of epidemics. These people living in rural areas were also not as directly touched by Spanish culture and were therefore able to preserve their pre-Conquest way of life. Undoubtedly, indigenous culture was changed by European influence, but in many areas of Mesoamerica the culture remained more indigenous than anything else.⁸ Even in the urban areas, native culture survived. Native elites, especially, fared well in the new cultural setting if they were willing to take advantage of the new situation.⁹ An example of this is the rulers of Tlaxcala who were able to negotiate themselves into the role of Spanish allies after the initial battles did not go their way. This may seem almost like a betrayal of indigenous interests, but for native noblemen, this was the most realistic path to survival and success in the new Colonial order.¹⁰ So for indigenous peoples to succeed, they had to work with the Spaniards. However, this practice went both ways. The Spanish colonial project only worked well in Mesoamerica when it coincided with pre-existing practices. When it did not, it was met with fierce resistance. So this was really a two way street. Both cultures recognized similarities

⁷ Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 7.; Townsend, 147.

⁸ Wood, 10.

⁹ Restall, 102.

¹⁰ Wood, 106.

in one another and they also realized that the only way to succeed in Colonial New Spain was to work together and adapt.¹¹

Post-Conquest Society: An Overview

Outside of the few cities where Spaniards settled and established their presence, many indigenous people continued to live in predominantly native communities during the Colonial period. They continued speaking their own languages, learned to write these languages using Roman letters, dressed the same way that they had in pre-Colonial times, farmed and ate traditional Mesoamerican crops such as maize and beans, and built houses using their own architectural techniques.¹² For many communities, this meant that local autonomy was not lost in 1521, but slowly eroded over the centuries. From the perspective of many natives in Mesoamerica, the Conquest was not a single, dramatic event, but a long, drawn out process of adaptation and evolution.¹³

One reason for this persistence of native culture was the Spaniards' tunnel vision when it came to Christianizing their new indigenous subjects. The spreading of Christianity was, after all, the ultimate justification for their conquest campaigns and subsequent repressive and often vicious behavior. But because the Christianization project was so important, every other aspect of native culture was secondary, and often not important. For example, there were no major efforts on the

¹¹ Restall, 104.; Townsend, 144.; Wood, 59.

¹² Wood, 10.

¹³ Restall, 74.

part of the Spanish to make native peoples learn the Spanish language. In fact, Spaniards, especially friars, were encouraged to learn indigenous languages in order to more easily spread the teachings of Christianity. This led to the development of written indigenous languages so that religious literature could be printed in local native vernacular. Privileged, upper class men were often instructed in the writing of their own languages, leading to the numerous surviving indigenous documents in archives today. Native dress was another aspect of Mesoamerican Colonial society that remained relatively unchanged after the Conquest. It slowly changed and adapted over the coming centuries and was even adopted by Spanish settlers who found indigenous clothing more appropriate for Colonial life. The complete Hispanization of native peoples was not a concern for the Spaniards during the Colonial years, and was not implemented in full until well into the nineteenth Century.¹⁴

Because of this, so many aspects of pre-Conquest indigenous society survived into the Colonial period, either untouched or barely influenced by European culture. Factors that were so important to each society before the Conquest, including the idea of royalty, the importance of religion, and the way of governance were each detailed in depth in the previous chapters and will also be the focus of this post-Conquest narrative. Many communities retained their traditional ruling in elite in the Colonial period and still highly respected the royal families of pre-Conquest times. Christianity was of course imposed upon the natives of Mesoamerica by the

¹⁴ Restall, 74 - 75.

Spaniards, but the religion that was practiced in Mesoamerica was a Christianity heavily influenced and shaped by traditional Mesoamerican spirituality. Colonial government was likewise a blend of both cultures and even had separate Spanish and Indigenous institutions where the natives of Mesoamerica enjoyed quite a bit of autonomy when it came to their own governance at the local level.¹⁵ Another important aspect of Colonial society that will be explored is the idea of indigenous people as their own conquistadors in the years after the fall of Tenochtitlan. All of these societal and cultural aspects show the perseverance of indigenous heritage, the adaptability of the Mesoamerican natives, and the survival of local culture.

The Survival of Royal Indigenous Lineages and Prestige

The major theme of this chapter is the survival of Mesoamerican culture in the wake of defeat and conquest. One of the most important aspects of this is the continued dominance of traditionally noble lineages. Indigenous royals not only continued to demand respect from their communities, they were also highly respected by the Spanish conquistadors. The family of Moctezuma, for example, was recognized as being worthy of royal distinction. They received titles of nobility, were given Spanish *encomiendas* from which they earned tribute, and were generally exempt from taxes.¹⁶ In Tenochtitlan, the last independent Mexica ruler was Cuauhtemoc, who surrendered (or was captured, depending on the source) in 1521. He was able to continue as ruler of Tenochtitlan even after the Conquest until

¹⁵ Wood, 10.

¹⁶ Chipman, xx, xxii.; Martínez, 2.; Wood, 142.

he was executed in 1525, supposedly for plotting rebellion.¹⁷ Following this pattern, the Spaniards were quick to execute local rulers who were not flexible and amenable to Spanish interests. However, rulers who cooperated and accepted the new Colonial order often found themselves in the same seat of power they had always occupied, without much interference from the new European power.¹⁸

Descendants of the first Mexica emperor, Acamapichtli, continued to occupy places of power in Mexico City for over four decades after the Conquest. The emperor of the Mexica at the time of the fall of Tenochtitlan was Cuauhtemoc. After the Conquest, he was allowed to remain as the ruler of the Mexica and was baptized and renamed don Hernando de Alvarado.¹⁹ After his death in 1525, Cortés elected a man known as Juan Velásquez Tlacotzin cihuacoatl. He was the last *cihuacoatl* (second in command after the emperor in Mexica society) before the conquest, and was the grandson of the great captain, and first *cihuacoatl*, Tlacaelel. He only lived a little over a year after his election and on his death he was replaced by a Mexica private citizen named don Andrés Motelchihtzin.²⁰ The next ruler, don Pablo Xochiquentzin, was a nobleman but not a member of the royal Mexica family. He ruled for only three years, and after his death, the rule of Mexico was returned to the royal family when don Diego Huanitzin was chosen as ruler of Tenochtitlan. He was

¹⁷ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 59, 169.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 39, 79.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 135.; Lockhart, 1993, 148 – 150.; Schwartz, 215.; Townsend, 120, 127, 159.

¹⁸ Martínez, 111.; Restall, 124.

¹⁹ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 57.

²⁰ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 57, 59, 169.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 39.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 135, 147.

a grandson of Axayacatl, the sixth emperor of the Mexica.²¹ He was followed as ruler of Tenochtitlan by don Diego de San Francisco Tehuetzquititzin who was a grandson of Tizoc, the seventh ruler of the Mexica.²² He ruled for thirteen years and was succeeded by don Cristóbal de Guzmán Cecetzin, who was a son of don Diego Huanitzin, and a great-grandson of Axayacatl. After his death, don Luis de Santa María Nacacipactzin became the last indigenous ruler of Tenochtitlan to come from the Mexica royal dynasty. His death, in 1565 marked the end of this great dynasty begun by Acamapichtli almost two hundred years earlier.²³

The descendants of Moctezuma II were undoubtedly the native people who fared the best in the new Colonial society. After the two-year battle with the Spaniards, the devastation and destruction of Tenochtitlan, and wave after wave of epidemics, only a few of Moctezuma's children survived. Those who did were treated like royalty and the Spanish Crown recognized them as such and insisted that their royal blood be honored and respected. Of his surviving children, the one who was considered his principle heir was a girl named Tecuichpotzin. Born around the year 1509, Tecuichpotzin was about ten years old when the Spaniards first entered Tenochtitlan. Her importance in Mexica society is shown by her first three

²¹ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 171.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 39, 41.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 135, 137, 147.; Valero de García Lascuráin and Tena 45, 47.; *Códice Cozcatzin*, foja 13 verso.

²² Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 173.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 41.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 137, 147.; *Códice Cozcatzin*, foja 13 verso.; Valero de García Lascuráin and Tena, 45, 47.

²³ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 175.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 41, 43.; Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 137, 139, 147.; *Códice Cozcatzin*, foja 14 recto.; Valero de García Lascuráin and Tena, 45, 47.

marriages to Mexica princes who were in line to inherit the throne. She was first married to Atlixcatzin who little is known about, but the “tzin” attached to his name signifies his place as royalty. Her second husband was her uncle Cuitlahuac, who followed Moctezuma on the throne but only reigned eighty days before succumbing to the smallpox epidemic. Tecuichpotzin was then married to her father’s cousin, Cuauhtemoc, the final Mexica emperor elected before the Conquest. Her marriage to these three men is significant because by marrying her, Cuitlahuac and Cuauhtemoc were able to legitimize their right to the throne. Since Tecuichpotzin was Moctezuma’s principle heir and born from the union with his primary wife, she was used as a way to secure and confirm these newly elected emperors’ claim to the Mexica throne.²⁴

After the Conquest, her position did not diminish. She was baptized and given the Christian name Isabel and was quickly widowed a third time when her husband Cuauhtemoc was executed by Cortés for his supposed involvement in a plot to revolt. After this she was subsequently married to three different Spaniards who all held a high place in the new Colonial society. Isabel’s first Spanish husband was a conquistador and loyal friend of Cortés’ named Alonso de Grado. After only a year, Isabel was widowed for a fourth time and moved in to Cortés’ household where she soon became pregnant with his child. She was quickly married off again to Pedro Gallego de Andrade, another conquistador. Six months after her marriage to Gallego,

²⁴ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 55 – 57, 163.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 87.; Chipman, xxi, 40, 64.; *Códice Cozcatzin*, foja 1 recto.; Martínez, 111.; Townsend, 95.; Valero de García Lascuráin and Tena, 35.

Isabel gave birth to Cortés' child who was named Leonor Cortés Moctezuma. The child was taken to be raised by a relative of Cortés and Isabel soon became pregnant again, this time by her husband, and gave birth in 1530 to a son named Juan de Andrade Moctezuma. Gallego died soon after the child's birth and the twenty-one year old Isabel was a widow for the fifth time. Her sixth and final marriage took place in 1532 and lasted until Isabel's death in 1550. From this union came five more children: Pedro Cano de Moctezuma, Gonzalo Cano de Moctezuma, Juan Cano de Moctezuma, Isabel Cano, and Catalina Cano.²⁵

In addition to arranged marriages with Spanish Colonial officials, Isabel also received one of the wealthiest *encomiendas* in New Spain. As *encomendera* of Tacuba, a city that had once been part of the Mexica Triple Alliance, Isabel received tribute, labor, and wealth from 1,240 tributary units.²⁶ Receiving an *encomienda* in New Spain was a rare honor. Cortés was in charge of distributing the *encomiendas*, some of which he kept for himself. The rest of the grants went to his favorite countrymen and conquistadors, and two of Moctezuma's daughters.²⁷ In addition to Isabel, another daughter of Moctezuma, christened Mariana (later known as Leonor), received the *encomienda* of Ecatepec, another important city in central Mexico. Mariana was the daughter of Moctezuma and his secondary wife, which placed her below Isabel in the hierarchy of the royal family. However, she also fared

²⁵ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, 55-57, 163 - 165.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, 87.; Chipman, 49, 51-52, 58-59, 95.; *Códice Cozcatzin*, 35.; Martínez, 111.; Townsend, 164 - 165.

²⁶ Chipman, xxi, 49.; Martínez, 111.

²⁷ Chipman, 45 - 46.

very well in the Colonial Era. In addition to the *encomienda* of Ecatepec, Mariana was also married to successful Spaniards.²⁸ Her first marriage, which took place in 1527 to Juan Paz did not last long since Paz died soon after. Mariana then married Cristóbal de Valderrama and with him had a daughter named Leonor de Valderrama y Moctezuma.²⁹

The third and final heir of Moctezuma's who was recognized by the officials of New Spain was known as Pedro Moctezuma. Born from the union of Moctezuma II and the female heir of Tula, Pedro is thought to have been about eighteen when Tenochtitlan fell. He was set to inherit the throne of Tula at this time and was therefore most likely residing in that city and was therefore away from Tenochtitlan during the wars, destruction, and epidemics. Because of his status as Moctezuma's only recognized son who survived the Conquest, Pedro was given the *encomienda* and governorship of Tula.³⁰ He married three times during his life (all three of his wives were indigenous) and he even traveled to Spain on multiple occasions. Once was with Cortés in 1528 and a second voyage took place in the 1530s. During this venture he met with the Emperor Charles V who granted him a coat of arms bearing thirty-two gold crowns that symbolized the many territories Moctezuma had had control over.³¹

²⁸ Chipman, xxi.

²⁹ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 143, 163.; Chipman, 70-71.

³⁰ Chipman, 81 – 82, 84.

³¹ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 161.; Chipman, 85, 89.; *Códice Cozcatzin*, 35.; Townsend, 188 - 189.

This first generation of the Moctezuma family was not the only group of indigenous royals to receive special treatment; the family name “Moctezuma” continued to hold significant clout in the Colonial Era and beyond. Isabel’s two daughters became nuns, which was an unusual fate for indigenous women since these positions were usually reserved for wealthy Spaniards. Isabel’s eldest son, Juan de Andrade Moctezuma, became her heir and inherited the majority of her Tacuba wealth.³² Her third son, Gonzalo Cano, married a Spanish woman named Ana de Prado Calderón and remained in New Spain to inherit the *encomienda* of Tacuba after the death of his half-brother Juan de Andrade Moctezuma. Gonzalo Cano’s grandson eventually entered into a prestigious military order in 1620 when he became a knight of Santiago in Spain. This branch of the Moctezuma family continued to receive monetary payments from the government of Mexico until the 1930s. Isabel’s most successful son was Juan Cano de Moctezuma who moved to Spain and married Elvira de Toledo in 1559. This branch of the family became peers of the Spanish nobility and earned the titles of Counts of Enjarada and Fuensalida and Dukes of Abrantes and Linares.³³ Isabel’s illegitimate daughter, Leonor Cortés Moctezuma was given large dowries from both her mother and father and married Juan de Tolosa, a very wealthy Spaniard who had discovered silver mines in the Zacatecas region of New Spain. Their son became a vicar in New Spain and one of

³² Chipman, 65 – 68.

³³ Chipman, xiv, 72 – 73, 139, 140-141.

their daughters, Isabel de Tolosa Cortés Moctezuma, married the future *adelantado* of New Mexico, Juan de Oñate.³⁴

Another descendant of Moctezuma, Diego Luis, son of Pedro Moctezuma, inherited his father's governorship in Tula and married a Spanish heiress. Diego Luis's wife was Francisca de la Cueva y Valenzuela, who was a lady-in-waiting to the queen of Spain and a granddaughter of the Duke of Albuquerque. As part of the Spanish nobility, Diego Luis and his wife did not have to pay taxes to the Crown. Their principle heir, Pedro Tesifón became a member of a Spanish military order and married into another noble family in Spain. His wife, Gerónima de Porras y Castillo was a daughter of a Marqués. Pedro Tesifón became nobility in his own right when Philip IV granted him the title of Viscount of Ilucan in 1627. Pedro requested that this title be changed to Count of Moctezuma de Tula y Tultengo, reflecting the importance of his indigenous royal heritage. When he died, Pedro was not only Viscount of Ilucan and Count of Moctezuma de Tula y Tultengo, he was also a Knight of Santiago, Lord of Tula, Lord of Peza, and perpetual Regidor of Guadix. This branch of the family continued to pass these titles from generation to generation, and also added to it the title of Marquesses de Tenebrón. Pedro's granddaughter Gerónima María de Moctezuma Loaysa de la Cueva married Joseph Sarmiento de Valladares, who eventually became the Viceroy of New Spain in the late seventeenth century.³⁵

³⁴ Chipman, 68, 101 – 103, 105.

³⁵ Chipman, 91, 94 – 95, 124, 126, 129, 131 – 133, 137.; Martínez, 111.

Many of these titles of nobility that were granted to the descendants of Moctezuma are still to this day held by members of that indigenous royal family.³⁶

Not only did the line of royalty continue in Tenochtitlan after the Conquest, but also heirs of Moctezuma excelled greatly in the new Colonial Era. Members of the Mexica royal family, as well as nobles from other indigenous cities, were recognized as the equals to the Spanish titles of duke, marquis, and count. They were usually exempt from paying tribute to the Spanish Crown and obtained great wealth from collecting tribute from their own communities. Moctezuma's daughters were some of the richest people in the colony of New Spain and their descendants became governors of New Spain territories and peers in the Spanish nobility. Most of Moctezuma's sons were either killed during the Conquest wars or died of epidemic diseases, but the one who did survive inherited vast wealth in New Spain and his descendants achieved great success as well. Spanish peers and wealthy families in Mexico still claim descent from these royal indigenous lineages and can trace their ancestry back to that great emperor of Mexico, Moctezuma II.³⁷

Indigenous Nobility in the Post-Conquest Years

As was discussed in previous chapters, indigenous rulers in pre-Conquest times were extremely preoccupied with distinguishing themselves from others in the community by wearing certain clothing and jewels and demanding respect in

³⁶ Chipman, xiv, 147.

³⁷ Chipman, xiii – xxii.; *Códice Cozcatzin*, 41.; Martínez, 107, 111.

very ceremonial ways. In the Colonial period, many of these practices remained in place. The hereditary rulers were still in power in many areas, they continued to visually distinguish themselves, and demanded the respect of their subjects in much the same way. These rulers also adopted new, Spanish ways of distinguishing themselves from the common people. It is important to note that there were different hierarchies in the Colonial society. There was an indigenous hierarchy, which had survived from pre-Conquest times, which distinguished native nobles and commoners from one another. There was also a racial hierarchy that placed Spaniards above indigenous peoples and in between the two was a gradient of people of mixed ancestry known as *mestizos*.³⁸

An example of indigenous distinction in the Colonial times is naming practices, which were different among the various societal classes. In pre-Conquest times, Mesoamerican names were often based on native calendars or physical characteristics. However, early on in the Colonial period, many indigenous people began to adopt Spanish style naming patterns in order to reflect their status in the new Colonial society. People of the lower classes usually took common Spanish names for their first name and surname, whereas indigenous nobility took a Spanish name as their first name and combined it with a pre-Hispanic surname. This not only showed their rank in the new Colonial society; it also signified the important noble or royal family that they were descended from. High-ranking indigenous

³⁸ Martínez, 2, 106.

nobles were also given the privilege of attaching the Spanish prefixes *don* and *doña* to their names.³⁹

Another important way native peoples distinguished themselves as being of a higher rank in Colonial society was to try to pass as a Spaniard. This was a privilege reserved only for indigenous people of very high social standing and these native nobles adopted many aspects of Spanish material culture to flaunt their position including clothing and weapons.⁴⁰ The Tlaxcalteca, for example, were allowed to use Spanish weapons in return for aiding the Spanish in their siege of Tenochtitlan. Using Spanish style visual distinctions also made it clear which side of the battle the different indigenous groups were on. By bearing certain European material elements, groups such as the people from Tlaxcala were clearly stating which side they were fighting for.⁴¹

Spanish-style coats of arms were also adopted by indigenous cities and their rulers as a way to signify their continued social status in the new Colonial world. An example of this is Moctezuma's son Pedro who was granted a Spanish coat of arms by the Emperor Charles V in 1539. In recognition of his father's success and dominance in Mesoamerica, Pedro's coat of arms included thirty-two gold crowns,

³⁹ Martínez, 107 - 108.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 10, 127.; Wood, 59.

⁴⁰ Florine G. L. Asselbergs, "The Conquest in Images: Stories of Tlaxcalteca and Quauhquecholteca Conquistadors," in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 79.; Martínez, 107.; Schroeder, 22.; Wood, 59.

⁴¹ Asselbergs, 79.

which represented the various major cities that Moctezuma had controlled.⁴² Indigenous people had a similar way of distinguishing different cities during the pre-Conquest years. Warriors of different city-states, and even different regions within each city, wore certain clothes to signify their community. Standards and clothing were also used to distinguish different ranks within the many companies of fighting men. Coats of arms in the European style were adopted as a new form of social distinction, which still mimicked pre-Colonial practices. They generally included some aspect of the Spanish Royal crest, along with indigenous depictions and symbols. Coats of arms had to be given by the crown, so many indigenous leaders and communities applied for them and received permission directly from Spain. This new adaptation showed not only social rank between indigenous people, it also showed that some indigenous nobles were recognized as being equal in status to Spanish natives. They were not only allowed to have their own coats of arms, but were also allowed to wear Spanish-style clothing, armor, hats, and use horses and Spanish weapons, but only if they were approved to do so by the Spanish Crown.⁴³

When it comes to the ideas of royalty and nobility, both Spanish and Mexican cultures had a relatively synonymous view of these concepts. This meant that in the new Colonial order, certain common practices, such as the distinction of classes based on visual material belongings, continued to thrive. Whether it was via clothing, furniture, or naming practices, both Spaniards and indigenous people in

⁴² Chipman, 85-121.

⁴³ Asselbergs, 74.; Wood, 57-58, 90.

New Spain sought to show off their social standing. This idea was intricately linked to blood ties, ancestry, and community histories, which were important documents that were created en masse during the Colonial period. By recognizing indigenous royals as authentic pre-Conquest dynasties, Spanish society allowed indigenous noble culture to survive throughout the Colonial period.⁴⁴ Visual reminders of this elevated status are important to study, but the ideas behind these practices show another thread of common culture that brought the Spaniards and Mexica together in the Colonial years and which helped create a culture of blended identities in New Spain.

A New Christianity?

One of the most important things the Spaniards wished to complete in the New World was the conversion of indigenous peoples to Christianity. Friars and priests set up Spanish parishes, which were based on the organization already established in Mesoamerica. Each parish generally coincided with a previously established indigenous city-state and new churches were often constructed in the same area where indigenous temples had been. Known as the “Spiritual Conquest” this effort was the prime focus of the new Colonial government and the Hispanization project. The focus on conversion is one reason why many other aspects of indigenous civilization and culture still survived. Converting to Christianity was seen as the most important element to acceptance in the new

⁴⁴ Martínez, 95, 105 - 106.

Colonial order, but when it came to most other aspects of indigenous life, people were generally left alone. It may seem therefore that the Spiritual Conquest was complete, and thoroughly wiped out indigenous religion. However, recent scholarship has shown that this is not the case.⁴⁵

Some scholars argue that behind a façade of conformity to Christian practices, indigenous people still continued to hold native religion in high regard and continued certain ceremonial practices. Other scholars have said that during the Colonial period in New Spain, a new form of Christianity was created; one that blended aspects of native and European religions. Matthew Restall argues that the soundest argument is one that combines both of these elements. “Natives accommodated and understood Christianity and its place in their world in ways that we are only just beginning to grasp ... Few would disagree that the spiritual conquest, as conceived almost five centuries ago, remains very much incomplete.”⁴⁶ I would agree that this explanation fits the atmosphere of Colonial New Spain the best. Christianity certainly did not dominate. It was combined with indigenous elements to create a new form of Christianity in the Spanish colonies of the New World. However, strictly native practices never completely disappeared, and many indigenous people continued to covertly worship their own gods in their own way.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Restall, 74.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 9, 174 - 175.

⁴⁶ Restall, 74.

⁴⁷ Townsend, 147.

Of course, the practice of native religions was not taken lightly, and those who were caught were faced with tried and true Spanish methods of dealing with heretics: prosecution for heresy, public humiliation, and execution. One of the most popular examples of this was the grandson of the most famous ruler from the city-state of Texcoco, Nezahualcōyotl. This native lord, baptized don Carlos de Texcoco, was found to be encouraging his people to continue practicing their ancient beliefs and reject Catholicism. He was tried for heresy, convicted of being an idolater and a heretic, and was subjugated to an embarrassing public procession and ceremony which resembled the popular Inquisition method known as the *auto de fe*.⁴⁸

With all this being said, it is clear that the Spiritual Conquest in New Spain was never entirely complete and this was, to a large extent, due to the fact that despite their differences, European and Mesoamerican religions actually shared a number of characteristics. By recognizing similarities between Christianity and their own religion, indigenous peoples were able to incorporate Christian ideas into their previously held beliefs fairly easily. In doing this, indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica made Christianity in New Spain a distinct religion from traditional Christianity practiced in Europe. They still celebrated their religion on the same ground they always had, as the new churches were built out of stones from the old temples and located in the same place in the city. Native elites were given most of the positions in the church, and these men had often had similar duties in their own temples in pre-Conquest times. Spaniards introduced their cult of saints, where each

⁴⁸ Martínez, 101.

community had their own patron saints. Mesoamericans readily adopted this practice since it coincided so directly with the pre-Conquest practice of each city having its own patron deity. Traditional Mesoamerican feasts and religious celebrations were made to coincide with religious events on the Catholic calendar. The Spaniards learned quickly that the practices most readily adopted by the indigenous people of the New World were ones that coincided with pre-Conquest religious beliefs. Because of this, many indigenous people did not believe they were rejecting their old gods and continued to worship in their own way and treat Christianity as a new form of their traditional religion. In this way, the conversion of the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica was incomplete. They never gave up their old beliefs; rather they manipulated Christianity to fit their own purposes.⁴⁹

Post-Conquest Government

Very soon after the fall of Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards set up their colonial government to oversee and control their interests in the New World. They established the old Mexica capital as the new capital city for the Viceroyalty of New Spain. The highest position in this new government was that of the viceroy, who was the representative of the Crown's interests in New Spain. This meant that the viceroy was in charge of the Viceroyalty, but was ultimately loyal and responsible to the King of Spain and the Crown. In cities, Spanish officials were elected to oversee the Crown's interests at the local level and collect taxes to support the new

⁴⁹ Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 174 – 176.

government and to boost the revenues of the Spanish Empire. However, despite the physical presence of Spanish officials, especially in the major cities, the indigenous citizens maintained a lot of autonomy and were only controlled indirectly by the Crown. Native peoples made up the vast majority of the population, so the Spaniards had little choice but to allow indigenous nobles to continue exercising their own control over their people.⁵⁰

For centuries after the Conquest, indigenous communities were able to exercise substantial governmental autonomy at the local level. Spanish officials recognized that the best way to establish control was to work with local indigenous institutions that were already in place. This meant that the Spanish controlled the government at the upper most levels, but at the local level, control remained in the hands of local indigenous elites. These communities continued to speak their own languages, elect their own rulers, and living their lives as they always had. Since the Spanish settlers were generally not farmers, but instead working class artisans or skilled laborers, they left the agricultural land to the indigenous communities. Obviously, this system worked best where there was already a well-established, sedentary, agricultural society. This is why major urban areas, such as Tenochtitlan, were the focus of colonial efforts. However, this also meant that outside of the major cities, indigenous life was generally left alone. Because of this, native communities

⁵⁰ Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 8, 158.

were able to persevere as self-governing city-states and their culture remained alive and flourished.⁵¹

One of the most interesting and unique aspects of the Colonial project in New Spain was the implementation of a dual mode model of social and governmental organization. In the cities and towns of New Spain, there were two separate polities or “republics” that ultimately worked in conjunction with one another when necessary, but remained independent. There was, of course, the Spanish Republic, which was in charge of the Spanish settlers in New Spain and was also in charge of the highest offices in the Colonial government. Alongside this was another institution known as the *República de Indios* (Indian Republic), which represented the interests of the indigenous people in the new Colonial order. The head of the Indian Republic was generally a native governor who was a part of the local dynasty or royal family that had been in power before the Conquest. At the same time that it subjugated the indigenous people to the ruler of the Spaniards by its lower placement in the Colonial government, it also gave native people of New Spain some autonomy and a special status as vassals of the Spanish Crown. In exchange for these republics paying tribute to the crown and converting their subjects to the Catholic faith, the indigenous communities were allowed to maintain their own

⁵¹ Martínez, 98.; Restall, 73.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 8 – 10, 158.; Schroeder, 12.; Townsend, 146 – 147.

nobility and internal hierarchies, keep their traditional lands, and for the most part govern their polities in much the same way as they had in pre-Conquest years.⁵²

Indigenous Conquistadors

Another major theme within the idea of native cultural survival is the role of indigenous people as “conquistadors” rather than the ones who were conquered. When looking at indigenous source documents from Mesoamerica that depict regional histories it is clear that the Conquest was not always defined as the Spanish defeat of the Mexica in 1521. Most indigenous records do not have clear pre-Conquest and post-Conquest sections, but instead tend to move seamlessly from year to year even during the fall of Tenochtitlan. These records often show the local migration stories, founding of communities, and local rulers, but leave out or only briefly mention the seizure of power by the Spaniards. Following this thread, indigenous local histories tend to place the community in question at the head of all activity. This means that in documents from the Colonial period, many indigenous communities portrayed themselves not as the conquered people, but as the ones doing the conquering. Their defeat is not only denied, but the entire idea of conqueror and conquered is completely inverted.⁵³

⁵² Martínez, 5, 92.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 8, 13, 62 – 63, 71, 158.

⁵³ Asselbergs, 86.; Laura E. Matthew, “Whose Conquest? Nahua, Zapoteca, and Mixteca Allies in the Conquest of Central America,” in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 103.; Restall, 123.; Wood, 143.

In the years following the conquest of Tenochtitlan, native allies were just as important in the spread of Spanish power and influence. Indigenous warriors, mostly Nahuatl-speakers from central Mexico, were used in the campaigns to conquer the lands of present day Central and South America. The Spanish conquistadors continued to choose indigenous warriors from the areas surrounding the former capital city of the Mexica Empire because they believed that these natives were more civilized, intelligent, and capable than the other indigenous populations in Mesoamerica. These natives were often chosen because of their abilities as warriors and were often from the upper class. They were carefully selected so that they would be able to use their high social rank, intelligence, and civility as settlers in the newly conquered territories. They were expected to spread the more highly advanced form of civilization of the natives of central Mexico to other areas in Mesoamerica. Indigenous warriors in these conquests were often under the direction and influence of their own native captains and because of this they saw themselves as partaking in their own conquest expeditions rather than working for any European power.⁵⁴ Matthew Restall puts it well when he says that “in many ways, these campaigns were a continuation of the Mexica expansionism that had gone almost unchecked for a century before Spanish invasion.”⁵⁵ It is clear that these indigenous warriors were not fighting solely to assist the Spaniards, but

⁵⁴John F. Chuchiak IV, “Forgotten Allies: The Origins and Roles of Native Mesomamerican Auxiliaries and Indios Conquistadores in the Conquest of Yucatan, 1526-1550,” in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 198 – 199, 211.; Matthew, 103, 105, 120.; Restall, 123.; Townsend, 128 – 129.

⁵⁵ Restall, 123.

were perusing their own local interests and continuing pre-Colonial expansion efforts.

A striking similarity between the Spanish and Mexica in the pre-Conquest years can be found in the tactics used in conquest and expansion efforts. One example of this that continued to be heavily used in the post-Conquest years was the sequential strategy of expansion, where a newly conquered location, its resources and warriors, was used as a sort of stepping stone for the next conquest. Local rivalries and antagonisms were often exploited to benefit the conqueror and both Spanish and Mexica conquistadors used intimidation as one of their foremost tactics.⁵⁶ The similar conquest practices used by both European and indigenous societies meant that during the various “conquests” made by the Spaniards, their indigenous allies had a different idea about what was taking place. When the Spaniards claimed that they had conquered the Mexica Empire, indigenous allies such as the people from Tlaxcala, saw it as an indigenous victory. Indigenous allies of the Spaniards often saw themselves as the victors and considered their people the conquerors, not the Spanish. It is important to realize then that the importance of conquests, and the similar practices seen in both of these societies, led to a continuation of the conquering mentality in the new colony. Although the Spaniards often saw themselves as the victors, indigenous groups had their own motives for participating in the conquest expeditions. It was not to help the Spaniards, but to

⁵⁶ Michel R. Oudijk and Matthew Restall, “Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 46.

increase their own, or their community's, prestige and power.⁵⁷ The Spanish thought they were controlling and manipulating the natives, but really, the indigenous people of Mesoamerica were using the Spaniards, and their more advanced weaponry, for their own selfish purposes.

The presence of central Mexican indigenous culture in newly conquered areas far from the Basin of Mexico is shown in many ways, including the fact that Nahuatl became almost a second "official" language of New Spain during the Colonial years. Another evidence of Nahua presence is that many cities in Guatemala, which had been primarily Mayan in culture, were given Nahuatl names.⁵⁸ Colonies formed by central Mexican conquistadors in other areas of Mesoamerica were usually named after the city-state that the conquerors had originated from. They formed satellite communities away from their homeland, but continued to practice their own cultural customs and kept alive their own traditions.⁵⁹ An example of this is the use of families from Tlaxcala to settle on the frontiers of New Spain. They were looked on as an advanced culture because they were more Hispanicized than other indigenous people since they were one of the first groups to ally themselves with the Spaniards. They had also accepted Christianity and were a highly advanced and civilized sedentary agricultural community, which made them a perfect group of people to help civilize other

⁵⁷ Asselbergs, 84.; Matthew, 103.; Oudijk and Restall, 54.

⁵⁸ Asselbergs, 83.; Restall, 123.; Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 17 - 18.

⁵⁹ Asselbergs, 71.

indigenous people from areas outside the Basin of Mexico.⁶⁰ Because of this, Nahua culture was even more widespread in the post-Conquest years than it had been in the years preceding it. This begs the question then if the Mexica, and Nahua culture were truly conquered in 1521. This is obviously not the case since their culture continued to spread.

Indigenous women also played an important role in the conquest of lands in Mesoamerica. Women from the local nobility could be especially useful to their communities because they were given to Spanish men in order to cement alliances. On the other hand, the Spaniards also benefited from this arrangement because princesses of local noble families demanded a lot of respect from the community. An example of this is found in the city of Tlaxcala where the king Xicotencatl gave two of his daughters, Doña Luisa and Doña Lucía to Pedro de Alvarado and his brother Jorge. Because of the position they held in the Tlaxcalteca society, these princesses gave authenticity to conquest expeditions and were used to encourage local warriors to partake in conquests all over Mesoamerica and South America.⁶¹ Using marriages to cement alliances, as discussed in depth in Chapter 2, was a practice

⁶⁰ Bret Blosser, "By the Force of Their Lives and the Spilling of Blood': Flechero Service and Political Leverage on a Nueva Galacia Frontier," in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 291.; Yanna Yannakakis, "The Indios Conquistadores of Oaxaca's Sierra Norte: From Indian Conquerors to Local Indians," in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 237.

⁶¹Robison A. Herrera, "Concubines and Wives: Reinterpreting Native-Spanish Intimate Unions in Sixteenth-Century Guatemala," in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 121, 129, 131 – 133.; Oudijk and Restall, 45.; Schroeder, 20.

seen in both the Iberian Peninsula and Mesoamerica. This practice is another example of a similarity between the two societies in the pre-Conquest years, which translated to the Colonial period and continued to be used to the benefit of both groups of people.⁶²

Conclusions

On Tuesday, the 15th of February of the year 1600, don Juan Cano de Moctezuma, a Spaniard, produced [a representation of] the late Moteucçoma. Don Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomocztzin impersonated Moteucçoma. They carried him on a platform and went sheltering him with a canopy. In his presence people went dancing as he came in front of the palace ... the Spaniards celebrated.⁶³

This quote from one of Chimalpahin's many works shows the survival of respect for indigenous nobility during a celebration of the great emperor, Moctezuma II. Juan Cano de Moctezuma, the son of Isabel Moctezuma and grandson of Moctezuma II carries a representation of his grandfather through the crowds in Mexico City. Another member of the old indigenous nobility, Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomocztzin, is dressed up to impersonate Moctezuma. He is carried on a canopy-covered platform, which is how Moctezuma had gone about the city and is celebrated by the people of the city. Not only was he still being celebrated by the indigenous people of central Mexico, but Chimalpahin's testimony states that even the Spaniards were celebrating. He was respected by Cortés and beloved by many of

⁶² Asselbergs, 83.; Oudijk and Restall, 45.

⁶³ Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 67.

the Spanish men who were keeping him hostage. This respect and honor lived into the Colonial period with the treatment of his descendants. Moctezuma may have been killed and his city destroyed, but indigenous culture in Mesoamerica was alive and well for a long time after the event known as the Conquest.

Before beginning this manuscript, I had a strong sense that many of the scholarly sources which claimed that the culture of the Mexica was barbaric and uncivilized, that the Spaniards were superior in every way, that the Mexica were devil worshipers with no sense of religion, and that the Conquest completely wiped out the culture of native Mesoamericans, were missing a few key elements. Now that the research process is almost over, I can definitively say that all of these claims are indeed wrong. The Mexica were extraordinary. Their civilization was remarkably sophisticated, their religion extremely advanced, their culture so adaptable that it not only survived the Conquest but is still alive today, and they were in many ways superior to their contemporary Spaniards. In fact, their culture was remarkably like that of their “conquerors.” This allowed the Colonial society in New Spain to merge the two cultures, blend their practices, and form a very unique identity.

The Colonial experience in New Spain was unique because indigenous culture was not overpowered and replaced by the culture of the Spanish conquerors. Likewise, the two cultures were not entirely isolated from one another either. Because Mesoamericans and Spaniards had a great deal of cultural traits in common, they easily saw parallels in one another’s practices. This allowed for

indigenous culture and society to survive into the Colonial period, only gradually changing as it incorporated Spanish ideas, yet still remained recognizable as the civilization that had existed in the pre-Conquest years. In Mesoamerica, indigenous culture not only survived, but it thrived and readily adapted and evolved. In order to keep their culture alive, indigenous people of central Mexico sought out familiar aspects of the new European culture and incorporated into their own societies. By selectively adapting to certain aspects of Spanish culture, they were fulfilling the colonial government's wishes of becoming "Hispanicized." On the other hand, by reworking new ideas to fit their own traditional beliefs and values, the newly introduced culture was completely redeveloped into something entirely novel.⁶⁴ It was neither European nor indigenous culture; it was a unique blend of two societies more similar than most people would care to admit.

⁶⁴ Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano, 10.; Wood, 10.

CONCLUSION

The Spanish Conquest of Mexico has often been reduced to a simple, singular event. Because of the importance of impressing the Spanish Crown and securing royal funds, early Spanish conquistadors (most notably Cortés) emphasized the incivility of the natives of the New World and the abundant riches to be found in the new lands. Early historians continued to follow this Hispanicized narrative and for many centuries, the indigenous voice was suppressed. Native peoples were portrayed as barbaric and backwards, as easily conquered and manipulated, and as completely absorbed into Spanish culture. By focusing on similarities between the Spanish and Mexica cultures in the years before the Conquest, I hope to show that the relationship between these two societies was much different than what is popularly believed.

The year 1521 marks the end of a two year war and the fall of Tenochtitlan, but it does not signify the end of indigenous culture in Mesoamerica or the disappearance of Mexica society. Because the Mexica and Spaniards had so many cultural aspects in common, indigenous culture was allowed to survive within the new colonial order. In the pre-Conquest years, both the Spanish and Mexica were conquering societies; as the Spanish Kingdoms struggled to regain control of the Iberian Peninsula during the infamous *Reconquista*, the Mexica migrated to central Mexico, built an imposing capital in the middle of a lake, and gained control over

much of central Mexico. Both of these cultures were also extremely religious. They both believed that a higher being controlled every aspect of an individual's life. Praying, giving gifts and sacrifices, and performing penances for sins were common practices seen throughout Europe and Mesoamerica. When focusing on the specifics, there were of course some differences between the religions these two groups practiced, but by looking at the bigger picture, it is clear that the *importance* of religion was the central factor in both Spain and Mexico.

The importance of royalty in both societies was also a key similarity in the pre-Conquest years that translated into Colonial society. For this aspect of society, I have delved deeper into some of the specific similarities. Both Spaniards and the Mexica had a strict form of royal inheritance and gave preeminence to the dynastic royal family. In Spain, this was the Trastámara family which began their reign when an illegitimate son stole the throne from his brother in 1369. This family passed on the rule of Castile from father to son (and brother to sister) until Charles V came to the throne in 1516 and began the Hapsburg dynasty in Spain.¹The inheritance of the royal crown followed a similar pattern in the Mexica Empire beginning with Acamapichtli, who took the throne sometime between 1362 and 1384. The rule of central Mexico was passed from father to son, brother to brother, and uncle to nephew in a direct line of male descendants. The final Mexica ruler before

¹Liss, xv, 10.; MacKay, 121-122, 133, 141.; Miller, 22.; Redworth, 24-25.; Storrs, 11.

Tenochtitlan fell in 1521 was Cuauhtémoc, a great-great-grandson of Acampaichtli.² The direct line within a royal family, and the importance of keeping the crown within that specific dynasty is something that the Spanish and Mexica readily recognized as something they had in common. In the post-Conquest years this meant that the Spanish greatly respected the descendants of the Mexica dynasty and these indigenous nobles were able to find some success in the new colonial order.

To keep the bloodlines pure, marriages were often made within the extended royal family. Marriage was also used in both cultures as a strategy to cement alliances with other polities. This similarity in the pre-Conquest years was carried on into the Colonial era and represented a blend of these two cultures and their practices. The Spaniards readily made marriage alliances with indigenous noblewomen in order to cement friendship and gain the cooperation of the native people. The best example of this is the marriage of Moctezuma II's daughter Isabel to three high-ranking Spaniards in quick succession.³ The king of Tlaxcala, Xicotencatl, also gave two of his daughters to Spanish conquistadors in order to cement the alliance between the Spanish and their indigenous allies.⁴ So this idea of blood purity, and keeping the royal family pure and also using daughters to make strategic marriage alliances readily became a part of Colonial society since it had

² Ross, 19, 22, 25, 33.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 35-43, 53-57, 113-115, 119, 123-125, 129-133, 157-159, 165-167, 211-213, 217, 229-233, 235.; Durán, 33-34, 38, 41-49, 51-53, 60, 84, 91, 218, 220, 224, 301, 322-323.; Keber, 61-64, 66, 85, 211-214, 216, 227-228, 271-272, 274.; Motolinía, 281; Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Vol. 8, 1, 2, 4, 15.; Valero de GarcíaLascuráin and Tena, 45-47, 97-98.

³ Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 1, 55-57, 163-165.; Chimalpahin, *Codex Chimalpahin*, Vol. 2, 87.; Chipman, 49, 51-52, 58-59, 95.; *Códice Cozcatzin*, 35.; Martínez, 111.; Townsend, 164-165.

⁴ Herrera, 121, 129, 131-133.; Oudijk and Restall, 45.; Schroeder, 20.

already existed in both cultures' pre-Conquest past. Marriage alliances between the Europeans and indigenous was one of the most important solidifying factors in the early Colonial years, and led to the *mestizaje* character of Latin America that still exists to this day.

Another aspect of pre-contact culture that was apparent in both societies was the distinction between classes and especially the visual distinction of the rulers and the royal family. Members of the royal family who were not close enough to the throne to have a hope of ruling were often given other prestigious positions in society to show their status. In Spain, this included positions in the church and noble titles such as duke, count, and marquis. In Mexico, extra male heirs were often part of the royal council of four, which had the power to elect rulers and make major governmental positions. These noblemen were also given large tracts of conquered lands to rule in their own right and were often given the lordship over neighboring city-states.⁵ These practices created very complicated webs of nobility in the Iberian Peninsula and Mesoamerica and were merged and incorporated into the new Colonial order. Visual distinctions such as clothing were also important to both the Spanish and Mexica and continued to be an integral part of society in the Colonial period.

Pomp, ceremony, and showing off royal prestige and power in a elaborate public way was a huge part of the culture in the Iberian Peninsula as well as in

⁵Durán, 58-60, 70, 72.; Miller, 56, 153, 159, 160, 173.; Redworth, 6, 10, 11.

Mesoamerica. Especially events surrounding the religious calendar and the royal family (such as weddings, funerals, and royal births) were not only celebrated by a grand feast at the royal palace, but were also celebrated by the common people. The royals usually used these events as an excuse to stage elaborate procession through the major cities to show themselves to their subjects and give their people a reason to celebrate their reign.⁶ These ceremonial practices did not stop after the Conquest. The Spanish brought their own celebrations to the New World and the indigenous people adopted many aspects of Spanish ceremonial culture. Yet the indigenous people also continued to celebrate their own important events and people and did so in traditional native ways.

Another aspect of society that was similar in both the Iberian Peninsula and Mesoamerica is the importance of cities, local communities and governance, and regional autonomy. In central Mexico, the Mexica ruled a vast area of land from their capital city Tenochtitlan. However, the regions that they had control over still maintained much of their autonomy and were generally allowed to keep their own local dynastic rulers in place and continue traditional regional practices.⁷ This form of indirect imperial control has often led scholars to dismiss the idea that what the Mexica had built up was indeed an empire. However, their form of control was normal for Mesoamerica and was even replicated in the Spanish Kingdoms. The royal court moved about in the Iberian Peninsula and so they had no capital city.

⁶Durán, 34, 35, 40, 43, 47, 87, 150, 168, 174-179, 218.; Miller, 81, 82, 85, 104, 105, 172, 234, 264, 265.

⁷Tapia, 24, 28.

When they were residing in a major city, the imperial government took over the reigns for a time, but as soon as the royal court moved on, governmental control was restored to local officials. In this way, most cities and regions of the Iberian Peninsula were under the control of the kings and queens of the Spanish Kingdoms, but other than owing loyalty and tribute, these cities were self-governing.⁸ The idea of a city being its own state, within the larger imperial state, was a popular practice in both Spain and Mexico in the pre-Conquest years. After 1521, the city-states of Mesoamerica often remained intact and relatively autonomous in the new Colonial order. Major indigenous cities became the framework of new Spanish colonial cities and outlying towns were generally left to their own devices. Local rulers remained in control of the region their family had traditionally held power over, and so for the average person, local life in the new Spanish society was not any different than it had been before.

City architecture was just as important as the cities themselves and the major infrastructures of the cities in both Spain and Mexico showcased the two most important aspects of society: religion and royalty. Royal palaces were of enormous significance to the Mexica rulers, and as the Spanish Monarchs began to establish more control, they also realized the importance of this visual representation of wealth and prestige. In Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma's palaces were the grandest residential monuments in the cities. They were complete with rooms to hold court, conduct government, and had elaborate royal living quarters. These palaces also

⁸ Edwards, 135.; Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 51,80.; Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 65.; Mariéjol, 238, 243, 272, 277, 282.

contained elaborate gardens, aviaries, and zoos for the rulers to distract themselves from the demands of governance.⁹ Spanish rulers also built elaborate and extravagant personal residences, which they used in the same way that the Mexica used theirs, to conduct business but also to entertain themselves and others.¹⁰ Religious architecture was also very dominant in both societies. In both Spanish and central Mexican cities, the religious complex was located at the center of town and dominated the skyline of the city.¹¹ The importance of religion for showcasing power, wealth, and the importance of religion was carried on into the post-Conquest years. The new Catholic cathedral was built on the site of the old Mexica pyramid using the stones from the demolished indigenous temple. Cortés's home was built on the same site where Moctezuma's palace had been, showing that the Spanish not only recognized the importance of these structures and locations, but respected the importance of them for the indigenous people.

Within the royal palaces of the cities, another important aspect of royal culture was strictly observed and that was the practice of courtly ceremonies. To be a royal person in both Spain and Mexico meant that each aspect of one's daily life was strictly dictated by ceremony. Each meal was an elaborate affair which was carried out with adherence to structured sequential events. A person of non-royal birth had to behave in a certain way and make obeisances to the ruler if allowed to enter the royal presence. The idea of courtly practices was one of the first

⁹ Aguilar, 146, 147, 180.; Cortés, 85, 91, 109, 110.; Díaz, 194, 211-215.; Tapia, 38, 40.

¹⁰ Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 51, 56, 62.; Hilgarth, Vol. 2, 50-51.; Mariéjol, 237, 244-245.

¹¹ Aguilar, 179.; Anonymous Conquistador, 168, 175.; Cortés, 105.; Díaz, 217, 218.; Tapia, 41, 42.

similarities I noticed between the Spanish and Mexica and which prompted the desire for this more in depth study of the similarities between these two cultures. Because of these similarities, the Spanish knew how to treat Moctezuma when they first approached him and were willing to show him the respect that he deserved. Both cultures dictated that rulers were divine people and the representative of the gods on earth, and so this concept was easily adhered to when the Spanish first entered Tenochtitlan and came face to face with the Mexica emperor.¹²

All of these aspects of pre-Conquest culture survived into the Colonial Era. The importance of the similarities between Spanish and Mexica culture is evident in the society that arose in the early Colonial years. It was not an overarching European culture and indigenous practices did not disappear. The relationships between these two civilizations in pre-Colonial times meant that many aspects of society that arose after 1521 were a combination of both European and indigenous culture. The new Spanish settlers learned a lot from the indigenous people, and this process of learning went both ways. These two cultures came together in a way that was unique for colonial projects. They did not completely isolate themselves from one another, and one culture did not dominate. Instead, the Spanish and Mexica knew that the most successful route for each of their societies was to work together to create the new institutions of colonial New Spain. They observed one another,

¹² Aguilar, 147, 148.; Cortés, 92, 111, 112.; Díaz, 208-211, 230, 231, 233, 236.; Hilgarth, Vol. 1, 50.; Mariéjol, 37, 244, 245, 247.; Tapia, 40.

borrowed ideas, and meshed their traditions into a brand new society in the New World.

This manuscript only scratches the surface of the work that can be done with regards to relationships and similarities between pre-contact Spanish and Mexica societies. Some ideas that I only touched on briefly, such as religion and warrior ethos, can and should be examined in full. Many works have been done on Mesoamerican religion and many have also focused on the Spiritual Conquest in the New World. But a comparison between the two religions in the years before contact is lacking and would be a great endeavor for further study on the relationships between these two cultures.

This work is not only important for scholars of Mesoamerica and early Colonial New Spain. A new approach to understanding the development and implementation of colonial projects can be applied to colonization across the world. By looking at the relationships between indigenous inhabitants and their European conquerors, we as scholars can better understand the interactions between the conquerors and the conquered. We can use relationships to understand why colonial states use the tactics they do, why and to what extent indigenous people resist, and what this all means for the countries of the modern world. In sum, Mesoamerican historians and scholars of early Colonial New Spain can use this work and approach to colonial societies, but it can also be useful to scholars studying colonialism all over the globe. It is also relevant to the study of modern nations that

evolved from colonial projects. The colonial past of a country or region can tell a lot about how that area evolved into the nation it is in the modern day. I hope that this work can be used as a platform for other studies to further the understanding of the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, their relationship to contemporary Spanish society, and why this colonial experience led to the country we know as Mexico today. These questions can be answered by exploring the relationships during the colonial past of the sixteenth century.

In further projects I would like to examine further the institutions that arose in Tenochtitlan and the surrounding area of central Mexico in the early years of colonialism in New Spain. The focus will continue to be royalty, royal culture, and courtly life, but will move from pre-Conquest similarities to post-Conquest realities. How did indigenous royalty survive in the Colonial years? Which aspects of Mexica society were adopted by the Spaniards and which ones were manipulated into a more European form? Was there still a royal court in early Colonial Mexico City? These questions can be answered by looking further into the colonial documents of New Spain and will shed more light on the integration of both European and indigenous culture into the new colonial order.

I would also like to compare the colonial experience in central Mexico with other colonization projects across the world. This will include looking at other Spanish colonies in Central and South America and the Caribbean. I will also explore other European imperial cultures such as England and their experiences in North

America, Belize, Australia, and India, and France in North Africa, South America, and the Caribbean. Portuguese colonization will also be a focus of this study, and their colonial projects in Africa and Brazil will also be used for comparison. The focus of this large comparative global colonial study will be the relationships between European and Indigenous culture before contact and how similarities (or lack thereof) contribute to the society that is found in colonial states. Understanding colonial society, and pre-contact similarities, is crucial for the understanding of modern nation states today. With this project and the ones I hope to explore in the future, I intend to contribute to the colonial narrative, and help shed light on indigenous viewpoints, cultural survival, and success.

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