



## PRE-HISPANIC CENTRAL MEXICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Los indígenas no sólo de México, sino de toda Mesoamérica, poseían una verdadera vocación histórica y relataban y *escribían* historia . . . No me parece justo, después de quemarles a los indios sus historias, declarar que no las escribían.

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the leading diagnostics of the Mesoamerican Area Co-Tradition was the detailed recording of past events over relatively long time spans. This “chronicle consciousness”, as I have elsewhere (Nicholson 1955b) referred to it, was much more fully developed here than in any other aboriginal New World region. Even many Old World cultures assigned to a substantially higher rung on the ladder of cultural complexity cannot offer historical records nearly as rich or extending over such long periods. Students interested in the historical aspect of Mesoamerican studies have always intensively utilized these native chronicles, but less attention has been directed to the native *concepts* of history and to *transmission media and techniques*. In a preliminary paper, delivered orally 9 years ago and published only in brief abstract form (Nicholson 1963), I briefly discussed the former aspect. Mesoamerican concepts of history—which would include consideration of why such a strong interest in history flourished in this area—deserve much more analysis than they have yet received.<sup>1</sup> However, this paper will not be concerned with concepts but rather will focus on the methods employed to transmit knowledge of the past and the kinds of events recorded—its historiography, if you will—in one Mesoamerican sub-area, Central Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Citing only recent students, Radin (1920), Garibay (1953-1954, I: 275-329, 449-478; 1963: 71-90, 117-138), and Leon-Portilla (1956 [1959, 1966]: 258-264 [1963: 154-166]; 1961: 48-75), among others, have concerned themselves with this topic to some extent.

<sup>2</sup> Typical previous discussions of significance would include: León y Gama 1832, Pt. 2: 29-45; Aubin 1849 (1885); Brasseur de Bourbourg 1857-1859; Bancroft 1874-1875, v: 133-149; Orozco y Berra 1960 (1880, I: 231-340); Chavero 1887: Introducción; Simeon 1889: iii-xii; Lehmann 1909: 10-30; Radin

Central Mexico is of key importance in relation to this topic because it offers by far the largest number and variety of surviving Mesoamerican historical records and also because the cultures which generated them can be most fully reconstructed. As with so many other aspects of Mesoamerican culture, this extensively documented area serves as a useful touchstone for the less well documented regions. Although Central Mexican historiographical techniques cannot be mechanically projected into the rest of Mesoamerica, the area co-tradition clearly possessed sufficient overall similarity in fundamental culture patterns that many, if not most, of the devices employed to transmit knowledge of past events in this area undoubtedly were utilized—to a greater or lesser degree and with various regional modifications—in other parts of Mesoamerica, above all in the other “nuclear” or “climax” zones.<sup>3</sup>

Some professional historians might be disposed to question the legitimacy of the term “historiography” in this context on the ground that it normally connotes a tradition of *written* history—and Mesoamerica lacked a fully developed phonetic system of writing. However, the essentially picto-ideographic system—with limited use of the homophonic or rebus principle—of late pre-Hispanic Central Mexico can certainly qualify within abroad definition of “writing”, and I submit that only an over-literal definition of “historiography” would exclude the methods of historical transmission (including oral) of pre-Hispanic Central Mexico.

Our knowledge of this subject is largely derived from 3 major categories of sources, which represent the 3 major types of history transmission techniques in the area: 1) “archaeological”; 2) “written” records; 3) orally transmitted historical information. Each will be discussed in turn.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDS

The first category excludes the artifactual and architectural data, the “witnesses in spite of themselves”, as Bloch termed them, which constitute the “normal” evidence sought and utilized by the New World field archaeologist to reconstruct the past. Here our only concern is with surviving records which were consciously intended to commemorate actual events in some fashion for posterity and which

1920; Caribay 1945 (1964), 1953-1954, I: caps. v, ix, 1963: 71-90, 117-138; León Portilla 1956 (1959, 1966): 258-264 (1963: 154-166), 1961: 48-75, 1964: 129-146 (1969: 116-131); Robertson 1959: *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Caso (1960) has contributed a very useful general discussion of pre-Hispanic pictorial historiography in the Mixteca.

thus constitute, in a broad definition, a kind of very abbreviated "written" history.

This category is, unfortunately, not a large one. It is most prominently represented by various carvings and paintings featuring dates in the native calendar which appear to have historical rather than ritual referents —and sometimes associated scenes and/or symbols. These may go back to at least as early as the Early Classic (Caso 1967: 143-163; 1968), during the height of Teotihuacan civilization. However, even if some of the tiny handful of dates painted and carved on Teotihuacan objects and structures have historical referents, the significant historical information they convey is about nil. In the Late Classic and during the transition to the Postclassic more materials become available, which would include, possibly, the Tenango del Valle stela (Romero Quiroz 1963: 101-132; Caso 1967: 161-162; possibly Early Classic) and cliff carvings (Romero Quiroz 1963: 75-100; Nicholson 1966: Fig. 7), the Xico stela (Peñafiel 1890, Plates, vol. II: Lam. 293), the Maltrata boulder carvings (Medellín Zenil 1962), and, above all, the extensive carvings on the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent, Xochicalco, plus a few other isolated carvings from that site.

The Xochicalco Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent reliefs, with many dates (Peñafiel 1890, Plates, vol. II: Lams. 170-211; Seler 1902-1923, II: 128-167), probably represent the best pre-Aztec representational historical record. A plausible interpretation is that they commemorate an important event, a meeting or "congress" of priests (and rulers?) from different communities —with calendric problems or "reform" perhaps an important item on the agenda.<sup>4</sup> A number of the sacerdotal figures represented on the various friezes are identified by what are almost certainly place and/or name glyphs (one of which [Cook de Leonard 1959: 132, Fig. 9] may well designate a town which still exists: Orizaba [Ahuilizapan]). Although some of the dates are certainly year dates, none can be correlated with the Christian calendar because of the familiar 52 year cycle repetition problem. Most important among the lesser carved Xochicalco monuments which may contain some historical referents are the "Piedra Seler" (Peñafiel 1890, Plates, vol. II: Lam. 204), the "Piedra del Palacio" (Caso 1967: 166), and, possibly, the 3 recently discovered stela (Sáenz 1961; Caso 1967: 166-186). The "Piedra del Palacio" is particularly important for it resembles a page from a pictorial manuscript and thus may, in fact, provide some notion of the appearance of a Xochicalco historical record on paper and/or skin.

<sup>4</sup> For recent expressions of this view see Cook de Leonard 1959: 132; Jiménez Moreno 1959 (1966): 1072.

Although some of the most important structures in the ceremonial heart of the site have been excavated, substantially fewer carvings with possible historical referents of the kind just discussed have so far been discovered at Tula, the Toltec capital and the type site for the archaeology of the Central Mexican Early Postclassic. Dates (Acosta 1956-1957: Fig. 22)<sup>5</sup> are particularly scarce and none are certainly of years rather than days or of certain historical rather than ritual reference. Perhaps the best candidates for Tula carvings with some genuine historical reference are the warrior figures, with name-glyphs (and/or titles), carved on the sectioned square pillars of Structure B (Acosta 1956-1957: Fig. 24), which probably represent historical personages in power at the time of the dedication of this important structure. Similar pillar figures are common at Chichén Itzá, northern Yucatán, where Toltecs from Tula apparently set themselves up as a ruling elite over the native Maya, and where various wall paintings, relief carvings, and embossed sheet gold pectorals almost certainly depict actual historical events, either in an essentially realistic or symbolic way (Tozzer 1952, Text: 98, and *passim*).

The largest number of monuments bearing representations with possible, probable, or virtually certain historical referents belong to the Late Postclassic or Aztec period. Most of them display dates. Lehmann (1909: 14-17) reviewed some of these, and a few years ago I prepared a preliminary list, with concise discussion of each, of all known Aztec period objects bearing dates with possible historical reference (Nicholson 1955a) —and I have since located many additional examples. Many of the monuments consist solely of dates; some of these, if not the majority, were probably commemorative stones associated with structures. Even if certain of these dates can be tentatively correlated with those in the Christian calendar, separated now from the structures they once dated, they convey no significant historical information.

A few monuments, however, in addition to their dates, feature representational scenes and/or symbolic motifs and thus constitute an historically somewhat more informative category. To illustrate, one of the most important of these is the Dedication Stone of the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan (e.g., Caso 1967: 60)<sup>6</sup> which displays one very large date in a square cartouche and above it a much smaller date, without a cartouche, associated with a stylized scene of 2 figures

<sup>5</sup> 3-5, 3 dates from the Cerro de la Malinche cliff reliefs, however, must be eliminated as Toltec period dates for they are clearly post-Toltec in age (see Nicholson 1955a: 17-19).

<sup>6</sup> This important monument was first published (drawing) and interpreted (with essential correctness) by Ramírez (1845). Unfortunately, he provided no data on the precise circumstances, time, and place of its discovery.

in priestly attire standing on either side of a *zacatapayolli* (grass ball for the insertion of blood smeared maguey spines) and drawing blood from their ear lobes. They are identified as the 7th and 8th rulers of Tenochtitlan, Tizoc (1481-1486) and Ahuitzotl (1486-1502), by their name-glyphs. Although there is no direct reference to the Templo Mayor, the large date, 8 Acatl, must be 1487, the well documented date for the dedication of this structure. The referent for the small date, 7 Acatl, is ambiguous, but it can perhaps be most congenitly interpreted as that of a day within the 8 Acatl year, 1487 (in the Caso correlation the 20th day of Panquetzaliztli, perhaps the most appropriate day for the dedication of the principal temple to Huitzilopochtli; see Nicholson 1955a: 3-4; Caso 1967: 64-67). Thus, although this famous stone cannot be fully interpreted without the aid of the Tenochtitlan histories, it provides an indisputable confirmation—and may add the precise day—of what may have been the bloodiest dedication of a sacred structure in the history of the world.

Interestingly, the Aztec carving which provides the greatest amount of significant historical information, the *cuauhxicalli* of Tizoc, bears no date. However, since one of the 15 triumphant figures of Huitzilopochtli, patron deity of Tenochtitlan, bears the name glyph of Tizoc (i.e., represents him in the guise of the god), who enjoyed the shortest reign of all the Tenochca rulers, it can undoubtedly be dated to the period 1481-1486 or very shortly thereafter (in case it might have been posthumously commemorative). The great historical value of this monument lies in the fact that it constitutes the only record of a series of Tenochca conquests outside the pictorial and textual histories—apart from its considerable value to the student of the writing system in providing the targets group of place-glyphs of indubitable pre-Hispanic date.<sup>7</sup>

After the Tizoc stone, perhaps the Chapultepec cliff sculpture of Motecuhzoma II (Nicholson 1961a) provides the most historical information; probably: the year of Motecuhzoma's birth (1 Acatl, 1947), the day of his coronation (1 Cipactli, in the year, apparently undesignated, 10 Tochtli, 1502), the year of the last pre-Conquest New Fire ceremony (2 Acatl, 1507), and, possibly, the place-glyph of one of Motecuhzoma's conquests or a commemoration of the remarkable temporary alliance with an old hereditary enemy, Huexotzinco, which occurred late in his reign. Again, these interpretations are largely dependent on the recordation of these events in the pictorial and textual Tenochtitlan histories, but this monument, in turn,

<sup>7</sup> No really satisfactory thorough study of this famous monument has ever been published, nor has it ever been adequately illustrated. The classic studies are: León Gama 1832, Pt. 2: 46-73; Orozco y Berra 1877; Chavero 1887: 774-779; Selser 1902-1923, II: 801-810; Peñafiel 1910: 27-33; Saville 1928: 44-50.

confirms them and further reveals what events in the native view were considered to be most significant in the life of their supreme ruler —thus constituting a significant historical record in its own right.

Most of the other Aztec period archaeological pieces which may have been intended to commemorate actual past events convey only a bare minimum of historical information.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, future discoveries, such as the recovery of the “*pedra pintada*” (apparently a twin to the Tizoc *cuauhxicalli*) in the Zócalo (Caso 1969), might well substantially increase the historical data provided by items assigned to this archaeological category.

#### “WRITTEN” RECORDS

This second category is much more important. Before proceeding, however, some very brief clarification of the “writing” system involved is in order. From at least Late Classic times —and probably considerably before, perhaps from the beginnings of Teotihuacan or even earlier— historical records in Central Mexico were apparently “written” in the form of pictorial narrations on screenfolds of bark paper or animal skin or, often superimposed on cartographic layouts, on large sheets of cotton cloth, bark paper, or skin (singly or as a collection of sequent “pages”).<sup>9</sup> Apparently no indubitably pre-Hispanic specimens of these pictorial histories have survived, although thousands must have been in existence at the advent of Cortés. However, a few pre-Hispanic pieces were copied in early post-Conquest times and others were composed on the pre-Hispanic model, so a fair number are available for study —and most of the major examples have been published and studied to a greater or lesser extent.

This corpus has provided the essential basis for modern understanding of the principles of the writing system (e.g., Dibble 1940, 1966; Barlow and McAfee 1949; Nowotny 1959). The system is basically pictographic but symbolic or ideographic elements are also of

<sup>8</sup>Typical examples are the “Chimalli Stone of Cuernavaca” (e.g., Seler 1902-1923, II: 165), which may commemorate the accession of Axayacatl in 3 Calli, 1469, and/or a military campaign early in his reign, and the stone “year bundle stones”, or *xihmolpilli*, which commemorate the 2 Acatl “New Fire” years at the end of one 52 year cycle and the commencement of another — some of which at least were “interred” in ritual “tombs” (Caso 1967: 129-140). See discussion in Nicholson 1955a: 4-5, 7-10.

<sup>9</sup>Jiménez Moreno (1966 [1959]: 44) has suggested that “. . . a true historiography arose only with the conditions of anguish and chaos that seem to have prevailed in Central Mexico from the end of the great Teotihuacan epoch in about A.D. 650, i.e. only when the Classic world was beginning to disintegrate”.

great importance, and in some of the place and name-glyphs (which are naturally especially common in the historical records) a phonetic principle is operative utilizing homophones ("rebus principle"). By "pictographic" is meant that most of the historical information is conveyed by small stylized pictorial representations of events and persons and objects in a fashion generally somewhat similar to the techniques of some modern cartoons or "comic strips". In spite of the obvious limitations of such a system, by the exercise of considerable imagination and ingenuity a surprisingly detailed narration of events could at times be achieved. On the other hand, the majority of the surviving pictorial histories are, in fact, quite limited and stylized in the kinds of historical information they convey. The development of this system of picto-ideographic writing provided the essential mechanism which permitted record keeping of a decidedly more permanent and tangible kind than would have been possible on the basis of purely oral transmission.

No annalistic system can be very effective without some method of reasonably accurate chronologic control, and the other basic tool which made possible the compilation of detailed historical records in our area was a typical version of the advanced Mesoamerican calendric system. In spite of some problems which require further clarification, the fundamental principles of this system are well understood and well-known (e.g., Caso 1967). A cycle of 20 day signs was combined with a cycle of 13 numbers ("numerical coefficients") to form a permutating cycle of 260 days, the *tonalpohualli*. This very ancient cycle was employed largely for divinatory purposes, but the *tonalpohualli* days were also used for secular record keeping ends. The 365 days vague year, which regulated the agricultural cycle and the major public rituals, for structural mathematical reasons could only begin or end (i.e., the 360th day; the last 5 days were in theory supernumerary) on 4 of the 20 *tonalpohualli* days, which, at least since Xochicalco times in Central Mexico, were Calli, Tochtli, Acatl, and Tecpatl. These *tonalpohualli* days, with their "numerical coefficients" 1-13 (succeeding each other in the order: 1 Tochtli, 2 Acatl, 3 Tecpatl, 4 Calli, 5 Tochtli, etc.), served as designations for the years, forming a re-entering cycle of 52 years. Most of the surviving annals are content to specify the year of the occurrence of an event, but occasionally the day (and sometimes the veintena) is indicated as well (rarely, the day without the year). Apparently no "long count" system (counting consecutively from a fixed "zero point") was used, as far as is known, and this 52 year repetition problem can be a serious one for the modern student. Another serious problem—concerning which more below—is that different year counts appear to have been in use at different times and in different places, although

for at least the last century or so before the Conquest the calendars of most Central Mexican communities seem to have been standardized (1 Acatl = 1519 [January 26, 1519-January 24, 1520, in the Caso correlation]).

The presence, then, in pre-Hispanic Central Mexican culture of 2 key devices, a relatively sophisticated type of picto-ideographic writing and an unusually advanced calendric system, greatly facilitated accurate historical record keeping. We now turn to the records themselves.

A number of distinct types of pictorial histories were employed. Probably most are represented in the surviving corpus. Various Nahuatl terms were applied to them. No one, to my knowledge, has attempted to work out a thorough typology of extant Central Mexican native pictorial histories or compile a reasonably complete list of the relevant Nahuatl terminology.<sup>10</sup> A somewhat simplified, preliminary breakdown might appear something like this (with citation of typical specimens and the apparent most appropriate Nahuatl designations, derived largely from Molina (1944) and the various Nahuatl histories themselves):

1) *Continuous year count annals* ([*ce*]xiuhamatl, "year-paper or book"; [*ce*]xiuhtlapohualamatl, "year count-paper or book"; [*ce*]xiuhtlacuilolli, "year-paintings"; [*ce*]xiuhtlapohualtlacuilolli, "year count-paintings"; *xiuhtonalamatl*, "year sign-book"). This important type is distinguished by the recordation of a continuously sequent record of years with picto-ideographic notations of events usually assigned to particular years.

The best known (citing only those with a substantial pre-Hispanic portion) are members of a famous group from Mexico Tenochtitlan or communities in its direct orbit: *Códices Boturini* (probably 1116-1303 [unfinished]), *Aubin* (probably 1116-1608, with 1 cycle omitted), *Mendoza* (1324-1521), *Telleriano-Remensis/Vaticanus A* (1195-1562), *Mexicanus* (1168-1590), *Azcatitlan* (ostensibly 1168-1382, probably 1116-1330), "*Histoire Mexicaine depuis 1221 jusqu'en 1591*" (*Aubin-Goupil* # 40) (probably 1116-1573, with gaps), and "*Fragment de l'Histoire des Anciens Mexicains*" (*Aubin-Goupil* # 85) (1196-1405). The Acolhuaque area yields only 2: *Tira (Mapa) de Tepechpan* (1298-1596) and *Códice en Cruz* (1402-1559). Two hail from communities north of the Basin of Mexico: *Códice de Huichapan* (1403-1528,

<sup>10</sup> Although Aubin (1885 [1849]: 50) drew up a small list, Simeon (1889: Introduction) was the first to compile a fairly extended vocabulary of the commonest Nahuatl terms relating to history and historians, with French translations of their meanings, which Radin (1920: 7) summarized, with English translations of Simeon's French versions. Garibay (1953-1954, 1: *passim*) also mentioned most of the commonest terms.



with gaps) and *Anales de Tula* (1402-1521), and one from just south of it, *Códices de Tlaquiltenango* (precise years uncertain). Only one derives from the Basin of Puebla, *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (1116-1544). One is of uncertain—but certainly Central Mexican—provenience, “*Codex Saville*” (1407-1535). Although from a Guerrero coastal community technically located outside the Central Mexican area, the *Códices de Azoyu* 1 (1299-1565?) and 2 (obverse: 1428-1564?; reverse-*Humboldt Fragment* 1: 1487-1522, with gap?) deserve mention here because stylistically and iconographically they are so similar (in spite of a variant calendric notation) to the Central Mexican examples.<sup>11</sup>

It is perhaps worth noting that, with the one exception noted, all surviving Mesoamerican continuous year count pictorial analns stem from Central Mexico. All seem to be post-Conquest; most, however, are at least in part copies or versions of pre-Hispanic specimens. Only 5 (*Aubin*, *Aubin-Goupil* # 40 and # 85, *Huichapan*, and *Tula*) were annotated with fairly extensive explanatory texts in native languages (all Náhuatl but *Huichapan*, which is Otomí)—the pictorial parts of *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* are more in the nature of illustrations to the very extensive Nahuatl text. Some of the others bear very brief Nahuatl annotations. *Telleriano-Remensis* and *Mendoza* are fairly extensively annotated in Spanish. None of them, if the most probable correlations of their year sequences with the Christian calendar be accepted, goes back earlier than 1116, or a little over 4 centuries before Cortés. All of those which begin their year counts this early or from some other point in the 12th century, however, commence with migratory sequences which, at best, are obviously highly

<sup>11</sup> I do not include the inadequately studied “*Códice Moctezuma*” in this list (which is not intended to be exhaustive), attributed to Morelos, and which has a sequence of year dates the beginning of which is difficult to discern but which, in its later portion, runs at least from 1493 to 1523. This piece is a tira, annotated in Nahuatl, with the stream of year signs running up the left hand margin and the picto-ideographic historical data occupying the remainder of the strip, in large compartments. There are some apparent anomalous stylistic features in this piece, which deserves further analysis (an unpublished study, incomplete, by R. Barlow and S. Mateos Higuera, is in the library of the University of the Americas). To avoid tedious over-citation, it will suffice to indicate here that all of the primary native historical sources mentioned from this point on, generally under their most commonly accepted titles, can be located by consulting, particularly: Boban 1891, Lejeal 1902, Kubler and Gibson 1951, García Granados 1952-1953, León-Portilla and Mateos Higuera 1957, Alcina Franch 1955-1956, Robertson 1959, Bernal 1962, Carrera Stampa 1962-1963, Glass 1964, and, above all, the comprehensive “censuses” of both textual and pictorial native sources in the forthcoming vol. 13 of the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (preliminary versions, with limited distribution: Gibson 1964-1967; Glass 1966-1967; Nicholson 1960, 1961b; for Tlaxcalan and Pueblan native tradition pictorials see also Nicholson 1967, 1968).

patterned and stereotyped; the more genuinely historical sections do not usually begin until well into the 14th century.<sup>12</sup>

Various formats were employed, although this is complicated by obvious rearrangement and modification in some of the post-Conquest copies and versions (e.g., Robertson 1959: 109-110). The simplest (represented by the *Códices Mexicanus* and *Huichapan*, the *Tira de Tepechpan*, and the *Anales de Tula*) was a continuous stream of sequent year dates, with one exception (*Tepechpan*: round) in square cartouches, painted on long strips ("tira") or on individual pages, with the picto-ideographic notations of the historical events drawn adjacent to the years when they occurred —and often connected to them by lines. A special peculiarity of *Tepechpan* is that it is a bi-community history, *Tepechpan* above the row of year signs, Tenochtitlan below (probably reflecting the part-Tenochca origin of the ruling dynasty of this community otherwise in the Acolhuaque political sphere).

An interesting "abbreviation" of this format is provided by the "*Codex Saville*", where the notation of the years is reduced to a continuous stream of blue circles (= turquoise disks, *xihuitl* = year), each standing for a year (with some of the years also indicated by the normal picto-ideogram with its "numerical coefficient"). Some of the *Tlaquiltenango* (Morelos) fragments display what appear to be similar records, in this case with the blue circles filled with the standard cross-hatching (to indicate mosaic).

What amount to variations on this format are the meander arrangements of the year cartouches of *Boturini* (and one section of *Vaticanus A*), the "page frame" arrangements of the year rows of *Mendoza*, *Telleriano-Remensis/Vaticanus A*, and *Azoyu 1* and *2*, where the rows edge the sides of the pages (in the first 2 mentioned perhaps an adaptation to the European page format by the copyist), and the "block" formats of *Aubin*, *Azcatitlan*, and *Aubin-Goupil # 40* and *# 85*, where the rows of cartouches are often grouped into (frequently irregular) blocks. The most unique format is the "cross" layout of the *Códice en Cruz* —each year assigned a long narrow strip with year sign at one end and picto-ideographic information in the remainder of the compartment. Some of these pictorial histories utilize different formats in different sections; again, at least in some cases this may be the result of their post-Conquest copy status rather than reflecting

<sup>12</sup> Continuous year count pictorial histories with much longer temporal coverages almost certainly existed, as evidenced, among other things, by some Spanish accounts directly derived from lost native pictorials, to be described below. If Torquemada (1943, II: 310) can be believed ("...se podía tener noticia de sus cosas, y referir con puntualidad lo sucedido de mil Años atrás, como lo hazen"), some of them extended back to ca. A. D. 500 — cf. Motolinia 1903: 349, who speaks of continuous year count annals commencing A.D. 694.

authentic pre-Hispanic practice, although the latter is certainly not unlikely.

These continuous year count histories obviously constitute the most systematic annalistic Central Mexican treatments of history. Although the historical information they convey is often rather sketchy, their precise dating and strictly sequential ordering lend them special value to the modern student.

Some of the most important textual histories, both Spanish and Nahuatl, obviously derive more or less directly from these continuous year pictorial annals. A particularly clear example is the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* (1891), compiled by an anonymous (Fray Andrés de Olmos?) Franciscan in Spanish, which amounts to an invaluable Mexica "world history" from the creation of the universe (which can be calculated at about A.D. 986) to ca. 1532-33. The important *Juan Cano Relaciones*,<sup>13</sup> also compiled at about the same date (1532) by another anonymous Franciscan and, according to explicit statements in them, based on detailed Mexica and Colhuaque pictorial histories, present continuous sequences, mostly in reign lengths, from ca. 770 to 1532—but no native years are explicitly named. The "migrational portion" of Muñoz Camargo's history of Tlaxcala (1948: chaps. 1-4) seems to have derived from a continuous year count record, as did at least some of Torquemada's material on Mexica history (1943, I: book II). Certainly Alva Ixtlilxochitl (1952) must have had some access to this type of chronicle, although, if so, his utilization of them was obviously not very systematic.

Turning to the Nahuatl sources, much of that extraordinarily meaty compilation of many independent histories, the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, is obviously ultimately derived from various continuous year pictorial histories from different communities,<sup>14</sup> as is much of Chimalpahin's *Relaciones* (see discussion of his sources in Zimmermann 1960). In the case of both these sources many independent chronicles were fitted—obviously often quite artificially—into single continuous master year count schemes which ostensibly cover the longest periods of any native

<sup>13</sup> I employ this name for convenience instead of their cumbersome and somewhat misleading separate titles: *Relación de la genealogía y linaje de los Señores que han señorido esta tierra de la Nueva España, después que se acuerdan haber gentes en estas partes . . .* and *Origen de los Mexicanos*. Although García Icazbalceta, who first published them (1886-1892, III: 263-308), practically implied that the latter was a copy of the former, it is obvious that both must derive, with significant variations, from a lost common prototype.

<sup>14</sup> Barlow (1947) published a fairly detailed outline of this complex composite source. His breakdown, however, suffers from lack of an attempt at specification of the many histories from different communities. Garibay (1953-1954, I: 36-38, 69-70, 454-456) discussed these in a general, preliminary fashion. A thorough analysis of this key source and breakdown into its constituent parts is still very much a high priority desideratum in Mesoamerican studies.

Central Mexican histories (*Cuauhtitlan*: 635-1519; Chimalpahin, total coverage of all *Relaciones*: 670-1612).<sup>15</sup>

The most important continuous year count chronicle from a single community is *Anales de Tlatelolco*, doc. v (1155-1522). Also deserving of mention in this regard are Zapata's *Historia Cronología de la N. C. de Tlaxcala en Mexicano* (begins 1168?; truly continuous 1477-1692), the early portions of the *Anales de Tecamachalco* (1398-1590), *Anales de Tlaxcala # 1* (1453-1603), *Anales Mexicanos # 2* (1168-1546), and "Fragment d'une Histoire de Mexique en Langue Nahuatl" (Aubin-Goupil #217) (1398-1595) —the last 2 quite closely related to the *Codex Aubin*.

2) *Sporadically dated, or undated, annals* (Nahuatl terminology uncertain, perhaps *nemilizamatl*, *nemiliztlacuillo*, "life-paper or book", "life-paintings"). How important this category was in pre-Hispanic times is difficult to estimate. A typical example seems to be the second section of the *Códice Azcatitlan*, which chronicles in order, but without dates, the reigns of the rulers of Tenochtitlan, their conquests, and other major events, including the Conquest. Another lost pictorial Tenochca "world history", of which the unfortunately truncated "*Leyenda de los Soles*" is a Nahuatl commentary of 1558, might also have been of this "sporadically" dated type. At least the crude sketch (p. 78) of one scene would suggest this, as well as the scattered dates provided by the text itself. The pictorial aspect of the hypothetical "*Crónica X*" (Barlow 1945) might also have qualified for this category —as well as some of the original pictorials on which the colonial "composite histories" were ultimately based. Various items in the next category might be considered to belong here as well, but they will be treated separately below.

3) *Cartographic layouts combined with historical, dynastic, and/or genealogical depictions* (Nahuatl terminology uncertain; *altepetlacuillo*?, "community-paintings"). This is one of the most original and interesting categories of Mesoamerican pictorial histories, one which is by no means confined to Central Mexico (it is perhaps even more characteristic of Oaxaca and the Gulf Coast). It constitutes an unusual kind of history in which there is more focus upon the spatial co-ordinates of the events depicted than the temporal co-ordinates. Outstanding in this category are 3 well-known Acolhuaque pictorial histories: *Códice Xolotl*, and *Mapas Quinatzin* and *Tlotzin*. The first named is especially important; it consists of a series of 9 maps —surprisingly accurate in general layout— of the Basin of Mexico and immediately surrounding

<sup>15</sup> On the chronologic artificiality of one of Chimalpahin's *Relaciones* ("*Memo- rial Breve acerca de la Ciudad de Culhuacán*"), see Kirchhoff 1961a (1964).

territory with detailed depictions of historical events and genealogies of ruling dynasties of major communities superimposed on this cartographic layout. Each map belongs to a different period, in sequence, but specific dates are scarce and —because they are not part of a continuous series— sometimes of uncertain correlation with the Christian calendar (see discussions in Dibble 1951; Nicholson in press).

Another well-known group is Pueblan, the *Mapas de Cuauhtinchan* 1-4, plus some similar layouts in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*; again, with the partial exception of the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan* 2, dates are very scarce or absent. Only one example appears to be almost certainly from Tenochtitlan itself or its immediate orbit, the famous *Mapa de Sigüenza*, whose cartographic aspect is the most highly schematized of all known examples of this class and which is temporally confined to the migratory period up to the founding of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco. Dates are lacking; only groups of little circles to indicate the number of years spent by the migrators at the various stops and an unusual version of the *xiuhmolpilli*, “tying of the years” symbol, are employed. Other significant and typical examples of this category are: *Mapa de Popotla* and “*pièce d'un Procès*” (Aubin-Goupil # 392), from the Basin of Mexico; *Lienzo of the Heye Foundation*, of uncertain provenience but undoubtedly Central Mexico; *Lienzo de Tetlama*, *Mapa de Coatlan del Rio*, and “*Plan Topographique de Hueyapan*”, from Morelos; *Lienzo de Cuauhquechollan*, *Circular Map of Cuauhquechollan*, *Mapa de Ehecatepec y Huitziltepec*, *Codice de la Cueva* and *Map and Dynasty of Tecamachalco* (*Lienzo Vischer* 1), from central Puebla; and *Map of Metlatoyuca* and *Lienzo de Oyamatepec y Huitzilatl*, from northern Puebla. Typically, few contain more than a handful of dates; the emphasis is on events and their geographical loci rather than temporal aspects. The categories of historical information most commonly depicted on these maps are migrations and conquests and, especially, genealogical layouts and dynastic sequences.

To what extent some of the textual chronicles might have in part derived from these “cartographized histories” is difficult to judge. Alva Ixtlilxochitl's close dependence on the *Código Xolotl* for a major part of his history is undoubtedly the clearest example. Whenever community and/or provincial *mojoneras* are listed in detail some cartographic pictorial was probably the ultimate source, as in the known case of the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*. However, oral traditions might also have occasionally included fairly extensive lists of this type.

4) *Genealogies* (*tlacamecayoamatl*, “genealogy-paper or book”, *huehuetlatocatlacamecayotlacuilolli*, “ancient rulers-genealogy-paintings”). This category comprises those pictorials which are virtually exclusively

devoted to conveying genealogical information; many, of course, include genealogical along with other historical data. These were certainly common in pre-Hispanic times; it is likely that every important noble family possessed them. Many have survived, some introduced as exhibits in post-Conquest litigations. Although all those extant appear to be colonial in date, most probably reproduce authentic native formats. Interestingly, these genealogies are very rarely dated. The most common additional information they contain is related to land ownership; the relevant properties are often depicted adjacent to the genealogical layout itself.

A fair number of Central Mexican genealogies are extant, particularly from Tlaxcala and neighboring provinces.<sup>16</sup> Space limitations preclude their detailed itemization, but some typical examples are: *Circular Genealogy of the Descendants of Nezahualcoyotl*, *Genealogía de los Príncipes Mexicanos* (Aubin-Goupil # 72), *Colhuacan: Proceso de Marta Petronila y Agustín de la Luna contra Juan Francisco, María y Juana* (Aubin-Goupil # 110), and *Xochimilco: Juliana Tlaco contra Petronila Francisca*, from the Basin of Mexico; *Tlacotepec: Piece du Proces de Pablo Ocelotl et Ses Fils contre Alonzo Gonzales* (Aubin-Goupil # 32), from the Basin of Toluca; *Genealogía de Tetlamaca y Tlametzin*, of unknown provenience but undoubtedly from Central Mexico; *Lienzo Chalchihuitzin Vázquez, Genealogía de una Familia de Tepeticpac, Genealogy and Properties of Descendants of Ocelotzin, "Genealogie von 33 Personen", Lienzo de Don Juan Chichimecatecuhli, Genealogía de Zolin, and Genealogía des Tlatzcantzin*, from Tlaxcala; *Genealogía de Cuauhquechollan-Macuixochitepec*, from central Puebla; and *"Papers of Itzcuintepeç"*, from northern Puebla.

The most common format is the depiction of the founding ancestor at the top of the layout, sometimes in a house (especially common in Tlaxcalan genealogies; see Nicholson 1967), with his descendants linked to him with lines or cords; marital partners are sometimes linked with dotted lines. Usually, but not invariably, the name-glyph of each person depicted is included. The detail and complexity of these genealogies is often remarkable; some represent well over 50 individuals.

Various textual histories, both in Náhuatl and Spanish, obviously contain significant information derived from pictorial genealogies. Good examples are the detailed genealogies contained in the Náhuatl *Crónica Mexicayotl*, plus many briefer ones in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, Chimalpahin's *Relaciones*, etc., and, in Spanish, in the histories of Muñoz Camargo and Alva Ixtlilxochitl. A major textual genealogical source is the Latin letter of Pablo Nazareo, 16th century cacique of the province of Xaltocan and husband of Motecuh-

<sup>16</sup> The lists in Nicholson 1967 and 1968 include over 25 genealogies.

zoma II's niece (Paso y Troncoso 1940, x: 89-129); his data must have derived ultimately from pictorial genealogies (see chart in Jiménez Moreno 1950).

5) *Dynastic lists* (Nahuatl terminology uncertain; e.g., *tecuhamatl?*, "lords-paper or book"). A category closely related to that just discussed consists of pictorial dynastic sequences —without the specification of genealogical connections. These dynastic lists usually involve just the depiction of each ruler in sequence (top to bottom or left to right are the most common formats), with his name-glyph, commonly seated on a throne. Often, but not invariably, their reigns are dated or at least the total number of years they ruled is recorded. Good examples of these "straight" pictorial dynastic lists are: one section of the *Codex Cozcatzin*; *Codex Aubin*, second section; and Sahagún's "*Primeros Memoriales*" (Tetzaco, Tenochtitlan, and Huexotlan dynasties) and "*Florentine Codex*" (Tlatelolco dynasty).

Textual lists which consist just of the enumeration of rulers by name and the years and/or lengths of their reigns, and which might thus be derived from pictorial dynastic lists of this type, are rare. A few examples, however, can be cited, e.g.: the one page "*Relación de los Señores que Fueron de Méjico*" (Tudela de la Orden 1954: 388); Torquemada's (1943, I: book III, chap. VI) Azcapotzalco ruler list, and Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Xochimilco dynastic sequence in his "*Relación del Origen de los Xuchimilcas*" (1952, I: 455-456).

Probably the great majority of surviving Central Mexican native histories can be assigned to one or more of the categories just discussed. However, the existence of other types, not clearly represented by any extant items, can be deduced from the available Nahuatl terminology (mostly from Molina 1944). A remarkably detailed type of history apparently existed: *cecemilhuitlacuilolli*, *cecemilhuíamoxtli*, "ystoria de día en día", unless these terms were concocted after the Conquest for the European type of diary. Closely related must have been the "ystoria de lo presente", *quinaxcannemilizamatl*. A form of biography seems to be indicated by the verb *nemilizpoa*, "narrar o relatar historia, o vida de otro", and the substantive *nemiliztlacuillo*, "chronica, historia, o leyenda" (cf. *nemiliztlacuiloani*, "cronista o historiador") probably included biographical narrations—but probably also connoted a broader type of historical recounting as well. For the generic term "ystoria" Molina gives as one term *nemilizamatl*, "life-paper or book".

#### ORALLY TRANSMITTED HISTORY

The final major category, orally transmitted historical information, was tremendously important. It is, however, the most difficult to analy-

ze and to understand. At the outset, a basic division can probably be made: the "attached" oral narrations which served as direct annotatory accompaniments to the pictorial histories, on the one hand, and, on the other, the oral narrations which had an "independent" existence --although certainly no very sharp line can be drawn between them and there must have been much overlap. The former will be first considered since it relates so closely to the major category just discussed.

The surviving native language texts which directly annotate the pictorial histories (see above, p. 46), or are obviously directly derived from those which did, evidence a considerable formularization of these oral accompaniments. It is possible that a standardized "explanatory" verbal narration, memorized virtually word-perfect, accompanied every pictorial history. However, the precise nature of the relationship between them and their oral accompaniments is not very clear, and the relevant statements of the primary chroniclers are too general to be of much aid. The extant texts range from the most laconic, minimal conveyances of the picto-ideographic information to very long narrations, some seemingly in verse, for which the pictorial data obviously only served as a kind of mnemonic stimulus. As Garibay (especially, 1953-1954, I: 319) has particularly discerned, these "over the minimum" verbal passages appear to include, inter alia, whole or portions of poetic "epics", long "prose" historical and biographical narratives, essentially "novelistic romances" (even if based on actual historical figures and events), and poetic songs or chants (apparently sometimes prosified).

Whether these longer narrations were normally "inserted" at key points as the pictorial was "read" is difficult to judge. It seems likely, but it must be recognized that the surviving textual histories were compiled in post-Hispanic times for somewhat different ends and their organization and contents may not reflect altogether faithfully the manner in which the pre-Hispanic "reader" orally conveyed the contents of a pictorial history. I suspect, however, that, in general, they do, at least the ones which most clearly annotate a single pictorial history (e.g., *Leyenda de los Soles*, and sections of the *Anales de Tlatelolco*, *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, and Chimalpahin's *Relaciones*). In addition to these more formal, carefully memorized oral accompaniments, it does not seem unlikely that more informal, extemporaneous verbal explanations of the pictorial scenes must also have been made to interested parties in pre-Hispanic times --almost certainly, if nowhere else, in a pedagogical context-- by the composers and custodians of these histories.

The phrasing and style of those which only have textual explanations in Spanish are much more informal than their Náhuatl-Ótomí counterparts, but in these cases probably no real attempt was made literally to "translate" the standardized native language accompani-



ments. These Spanish annotations, rather, probably resulted from repeated questioning of supposedly knowledgeable informants concerning the meaning of the picto-ideographic scenes.<sup>17</sup>

We are dealing, then, with a kind of "dual media history", or "bi-graphic", as Simeon (1889: ix) suggested it be called, involving 2 simultaneous and complementary methods of transmission, picto-ideographic and oral. The former provided a "stability factor" and a useful mnemonic function, the latter added richness of color and detail as well as psychological nuances which could be conveyed in no other way. In some cases the surviving specimens provide us with both halves of this equation, in other cases, either one or the other. But no history of this type can be considered truly complete unless both the picto-ideographic and oral segments are extant.

Turning to the "independent" oral category, it is now clear, particularly after the devoted studies over the past few decades of, above all, Garibay and his followers and fellow students, that an oral literature of considerable richness and sophistication was an outstanding feature of late pre-Hispanic Central Mexican culture.<sup>18</sup> This extensive corpus can be classified into a number of different genres, and there have been various attempts to do so. The leading modern student (Garibay 1953-1954; 1963) suggested this scheme, on the broadest level: 1) poetry: lyric, epic, and dramatic; 2) prose: historical, didactic, and imaginative. In all of these categories, except perhaps didactic prose, historical information could be, and was, conveyed.

The most important was "historical prose", oral narratives —by definition, for the purposes of the present category, not directly tied to pictorial histories— which were intended to convey information concerning human past events which were believed to have actually occurred.

<sup>17</sup> Judging from the frequency of obvious errors in these accounts (especially serious in the case of the *Telleriano-Remensis*), the informants were seemingly not always so knowledgeable or perhaps at times deliberately misled their Spanish interrogators; on the other hand, simple failures of communication resulting from the language barrier and possibly other factors might have been responsible.

<sup>18</sup> Garibay's contributions were voluminous and scattered, but his most fundamental study was his *Historia de la Literatura Nahuatl* (1953-1954); see also Garibay 1937, 1940a (1952, 1962), 1940b, 1942, 1945 (1964), 1958, 1963, 1964a, 1964b, 1965, 1968. León-Portilla (e.g. 1961, 1964 [1969], 1967) has been his most important disciple; see also Irene Nicholson 1959a, 1959b, and Taggart 1957. Citations and brief appraisals of most of the works of his predecessors were included in his magnum opus by Garibay. There has been, in the writer's opinion, a tendency on the part of his followers to accept some of Garibay's hypotheses too uncritically — and a thorough appraisal and critique of his landmark contribution is an obvious need. Significant recent independent studies and publications of the Nahuatl literary corpus, especially the poetry, would include: Nowotny 1956, Van Zantwijk 1957, Kutscher 1958, Mendoza 1958, 1959, Lambert 1958, 1961, Horcasitas 1959, Simmons 1960, and, especially, Schultze Jena 1957.

Garibay (1953-1954, I: 478) estimated that this category composed one-half to two-thirds of the oral literature with historical content. Some of these appear to contain traces of metered versification or at least regularly patterned rhythms—which would have greatly facilitated their memorization. However, it is precisely the lack of clear-cut versification that most obviously justifies categorizing these narrations as “prose” (Garibay 1963: 112).

It is possible that every important community had individuals who had committed to memory most or all of its oral historical corpus and who might have been called upon to recite appropriate segments of it on appropriate occasions. This corpus also probably constituted an “official”, virtually canonized oral version of each community’s history, which was progressively added to, probably frequently modified in response to local political-dynastic vicissitudes, and carefully transmitted to younger successors to these community “oral historians”. It is likely that these latter probably also utilized the pictorial annals in close conjunction with the verbal narratives.

These historical oral prose accounts obviously provide much of the information, over and above the standardized explanatory oral accompaniments to the pictorials, contained in the more important textual histories. Most of the primary Nahuatl histories (*Anales de Tlaltelolco*, *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, *Leyenda de los Soles*, *Codex Aubin*, *Crónica Mexicayotl*, Chimalpahin’s *Relaciones*, Cristóbal del Castillo, Zapata, Aubin-Goupil # 40, etc.) appear to contain many examples of authentic pre-Hispanic historical prose narrations recorded virtually verbatim in the Roman alphabet.<sup>19</sup> It is also likely that much of the content of the native histories in Spanish is derived, directly or indirectly, from these Nahuatl prose narratives; some of them may be fairly close translations of these originals. Perhaps the prime example would be the Tezozomoc and Durán histories of Tenochtitlan probably derived from cognate (but not identical) versions of a lost Nahuatl chronicle which Barlow (1945) dubbed the “*Crónica X*”. Many sections in the histories of Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Muñoz Camargo, Torquemada and other Spanish language native histories undoubtedly ultimately stem from these Nahuatl prose oral historical narrations, as do some portions of the *Histoire du Mexique* (1905), preserved only in a 16th century French translation from a lost Spanish original.

The “epic poems” or “sagas” as Garibay (1940a; 1945; 1953-1954, I: chap. v; 1963; chap. 3) and others have defined them, represent much more consciously esthetic productions, with more formal rhythms and

<sup>19</sup> Garibay (1953-1954, I: caps. v and ix) identified and translated many of the most striking examples.

metered versifications. They range, in Garibay's definition, from the completely mythological to those closely based on genuine historical persons and events. Although technically belonging more to the realm of art than of history, if handled with critical caution these "epics" can provide a wealth of priceless historical data, even those with an obvious heavy infusion of legendary, romantic, and folkloristic elements. Particularly well-known examples are the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tollan Tale (Nicholson 1957), another cycle including the rather enigmatic "Copil Tale", revolving around the foundation of Tenochtitlan, and a cycle concerned with the Mexica "Babylonian captivity" in Colhuacan. Garibay (especially 1945, 1953-1954, I: chap. v) believed that most of the preserved native histories were studded with these metered epic poems, usually in fragmentary form—and he identified and translated quite a number of them. He recognized, however, the difficulty of clearly separating them from the prose accounts and the novelistic romances and, in fact, often assigned them to more than one category. This genre may have had the great importance which he suggested (cf. Horcasitas 1959: 200-203); in any case, further study and analysis is certainly indicated.

What might be called "hero tales" could be assigned to either this category, when essentially versified, or to the prose narration category, discussed above. A good example is the tragi-romantic story of the champion Otomi warrior from Tlaxcala, Tlalhuicole, unfortunately known only in 2 late Spanish versions (Muñoz Camargo 1948: 138-140; Durán 1967, II: 455-457; Tezozomoc 1944: 475-477—the last 2 cognate versions ultimately from a single original). Some of the recountings of Nezahualcoyotl's adventures fall into this category, particularly as chronicled by Alva Ixtlilxochitl and one section of the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, as does the "Crónica X" story of the Tenochca prince, the Ezhuahuacatl Tlakahuepan, and his heroic self-sacrifice while in the power of the Chalcans (Durán 1967, II: 145-147; Tezozomoc 1944: 88-90). Even the exploits of Tlacaellé, half brother of Motecuhzoma I, so obviously over-glorified in the "Crónica X" and other sources derived from it, might be included here. In spite of their folkloristic and even novelistic overtones, these heroic narratives undoubtedly contain a certain core of genuine historicity. Their appeal as romantic stories would, as in all times and places, favor their indefinite preservation in the oral literary corpus and, as a consequence, whatever actual historical data they contain.

Garibay's "dramatic poems" or "poemas mímicos" (1953-1954, I: cap. vi; 1963: 90-107; 1968) are also essentially esthetic productions, but often their themes were taken directly from significant historical events. Consequently, they, too, if handled critically, can provide some useful historical data. The best known of these is the first "*teponaz-*

*cuicatl*" of the *Cantares Mexicanos* (fols. 26v-27v), the "Toltec Elegy" of Lehmann (1922 [1941]; cf. Garibay 1968, No. 1), which laments the flight from Tollan of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl and which provides, inter alia, priceless historical allusions to personages and places prominent during the Toltec period. The *Cantares Mexicanos* contains a few other specimens of this genre which also provide some significant historical allusions; e.g., the "*Tlapapal cuextecayotl*", "*Matlatzinca-yotl*", and "*Huehucuatl*" (respectively, fols. 36r-v, 53v, and 73v-74v; Garibay 1968, Nos. 12, 19, and 21).

The "lyric poems" (Garibay 1937; 1940b (1952, 1962); 1953-1954, I: cap. III; 1964b; 1965), as would be expected because of their nature, in general contain fewer significant historical allusions than the categories just discussed. However, Garibay recognized various subclasses within this broad grouping, and poems within one, which might be labeled "the exaltation of war and in praise of military heroes" (*cuauh-cuicatl*, *yaocuatl*, *tecuhcuatl*), and within another, the elegiac poems (*icnocuatl*), often contain allusions to battles, persons, and places of considerable historical value. One prime example is "The Usurpation of Tezozomoc" (*Cantares Mexicanos*, fol. 7v-9r; Garibay 1965: 90-93; cxv-cxvii), which Radin even included (in Brinton's inaccurate translation) among his selections of primary historical sources. Some of these might have been composed as funeral dirges, "cantatas funerales", as Garibay (1953-1954, I: 203) called them. Because of the importance of the deceased or the particular beauty of the song, they might have been preserved for many generations; if so, they would, in effect, have constituted a kind of "contemporary" record, however poeticized, of actual events in the life of an historically prominent individual.

Even the "pure" lyric poems (*xochicuicatl*, *xopanacuicatl*) occasionally contain historical tidbits of value. One *Cantares Mexicanos* poem (fol. 60v-r), in fact, labeled a *xopanacuicatl*, is entirely devoted to a remembrance of the "Chapultepec Defeat", when the Mexica were conquered and dispersed by a coalition of neighboring communities, and contains many valuable historical references (Garibay 1942 (1940): 47-48; 1953-1954, I: 92-93, 474-475). Like the so-called epic and dramatic poems, lyric poems or fragments of them were apparently often inserted into the historical chronicles; certainly many of the post-Conquest histories appear to contain them. The most famous of these is the "Song of the Chapultepec Defeat", which is found, whole or in part, in different sources (*Anales de Tlatelolco*, doc. 5; *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, "*Cédula de Cuauhtémoc*"; Garibay 1953-1954, I: 93-94, 221-222, 475-476). The "Moquihnix Cuclaxtlan Victory Song" of the *Anales de Tlatelolco*, doc. 5 (Barlow 1948: 133, 144; Garibay 1953-1954, I: 225-226, 476), is another well-known example. Even the religious poetic songs or chants, represented particularly by the 20 ex-

amples collected by Sahagún in Tepepulco (Brinton 1887; Seler 1902-1923, II: 959-1107; Garibay 1953-1954, I: cap. II, 1958; Sahagún 1950-1963, Pt. III: 207-214), contain a few allusions, especially to places, that conceivably have some historical value.

Statements are occasionally found in some primary sources (e.g., Sahagún 1950-1963, Pt. IV: 55; Tovar in García Icazbalceta 1947, IV: 92) that songs, both religious and secular, and the "parlamentos que hacían los oradores" were "written" in books ("los figuraban con sus caracteres"). Nothing like these, to my knowledge, have survived, and I share Garibay's (1953-1954, I: 289; 1968: xxxviii) perplexity as to just how such "written" versions of the songs and oral narrations would have appeared. It is true that imaginative utilization of series of pictograms and ideograms could well have served a very useful mnemonic function for the oral productions, and "songbooks" of this type might have been employed. If so, this would provide another significant link between the pictorial and oral techniques of transmission.

A considerable Nahuatl terminology appears to have developed for the different types of oral transmissions with historical content. Concentrating just on the substantives, the most generic terms were those like *tlatolli*, "palabra, plática o habla . . . cuento", *huehue tlatolli* and *huecauh tlatolli*, "ystoria de los tiempos antiguos", *quinaxcantlatolli*, "ystoria de lo presente", *tlatolotl*, "historia", *nemiliztlatolotl*, "chronica, historia, o leyenda", *nemilizcotl*, "ystoria", *tenonotztli* (*tenonotzaliztli*), "historia que se cuenta o relación que se haze de alguna cosa", *nenonotzalli* (*huehuenotzal*), "(ancient) tradition", *itoloca*, "that which is said of someone" (see León-Portilla 1956: 261), and *icacoca*, which Garibay (1953-1954, I: 55) suggests might be best translated as "historieta". Many of these terms contain stems of the verbs *itoca*, *tlatoca*, *notza*, *nonotza*, *nonetza*, to speak, to tell, to relate, emphasizing the spoken word aspect (cf. English tale, German saga, Spanish cuento, etc.). The well-known generic for the poem-songs is *cuicatli*.

Space limitations prevent a truly adequate analysis and discussion of this rich, complex oral literature with historical content. In spite of the extremely valuable landmark contributions of Garibay and his followers, more critical studies by other scholars equipped with a thorough mastery of Classical Nahuatl are certainly indicated. Garibay, although interested in the historical aspect, consciously concentrated more or less exclusively on the strictly literary aspect. The student interested in this extensive corpus primarily for its possible historical value is faced with some formidable problems of analysis and evaluation before he can utilize with any confidence these data for his historical reconstructions. The poetic compositions, particularly, so inextricably combine history, legend, folklore, romance, and myth that the task

of culling out of them the genuine historical nuggets is a task not to be undertaken lightly —but often the effort pays off.

#### THE HISTORIANS

The different types of history transmission techniques in pre-Hispanic Central México have been concisely reviewed. Some consideration of the transmitters themselves, the compilers and composers of these histories, is now in order. The basic question, of course, is *who*? Who were the historians in the pre-Hispanic Central Mexican communities? Were there specialists, trained by older specialists, who played this role, or was historical record keeping essentially a "sideline", a task performed by individuals who were more concerned with other matters in their societies? I do not believe that simple, definitive answers to these questions can be advanced at this time. Certainly some rather generalized statements in various primary and secondary sources appear to indicate that there were more or less professional annalists and genealogists.<sup>20</sup> Molina provides some terms for "coronista": *altepetlacuilo* ("community-painter"), *xiuhtlacuilo* ("year-painter"), and *tenemilizicuiloani* ("painter of someone's life"), which certainly refer to the composers of the picto-ideographic histories. The "painter" in general, as is well-known, was called *tlacuilo*; he was the specialist in the picto-ideographic writing system who produced the screenfold books and other "written" records needed in his society. His was clearly a recognized full-time profession. However, the typical *tlacuilo* seems to have been essentially a scribe, working under the supervision of others (priests, government officials, etc.). Perhaps the implication of Molina's definitions is that there were professional annalists, "coronistas", who also could do the "writing" as well as the composing of history. This seems entirely possible, but the point is not very clear. Certainly there are positive statements relating to some Mesoamerican areas that professional priests also painted sacred books (e.g., Las Casas 1958, II: 422; Totonacapan; Landa 1941: 27; Yucatán). If some at least of the priests could be trained as *tlacuiloque*, there would seem to be no good reason for not training historical record keepers in the same skill. Certainly, from the standpoint of practical economy of labor this would have been the most efficient system.

Molina also defines what may have been another type of historian, the "contador de historia", *tenemilizpoa*, *tenemilizpoani*; these cate-

<sup>20</sup> Among the best descriptions in the primary sources of the kinds of historians and the kinds of records they kept are: Motolinia 1903: 3, 8-9, 150, 349; Durán 1967, I: 222-223, 226; Pomar 1964: 175, 186, 190; Tovar (letter of 1587 to Acosta; e.g., García Icazbalceta 1947, IV: 91-93; English translation: Kubler and Gibson 1951: 77-78); Torquemada 1943, II: 301, 544; Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1952, II: 17-18.

gories may have referred to those who concentrated particularly on memorizing the oral narrations. He also includes the “relator”, *teno-netzani*, *tlanonotzani*. For “ystoriador” Molina gives *tlatolicuiloani* and *nemiliztlatolicuiloani* (these terms, however, possibly reflect some Spanish influence, as Molina gives the meaning of the first as “historiador, o cronista, o el que escriue las palabras que otros dizen”).

Some native historians appear to have been officials supported by the state (Torquemada 1943, II: 544), although this pattern was probably confined to the largest and most important cabeceras such as Mexico Tenochtitlan and Tetzaco. As indicated above, it seems likely that every community, even the smaller ones, had at least one “official local historian”. They must have stemmed largely from the ranks of the nobility; in any case, the histories they compiled, pictorial and/or oral, certainly strongly reflected the attitudes and interests of the upper class. They may have assisted in the formal educational institutions, the *calmecac* and the *tehpochcalli*. They surely trained others to succeed them in their duties and responsibilities as compilers and transmitters of the community’s history.

Some historians are even named in different sources. Durán (1967, II: 216), for example, speaks of a “historiador real . . . viejo de muchos años”, Cuauhcoatl, who flourished during the reign of Motecuhzoma II. Alva Ixtlilxochitl, (1952, II: 21), commencing his *Historia Chichimeca*, cites: “Los más graves autores y históricos que hubo en la antigüedad de estos naturales, se halla haber sido Quetzalcoatl el primero; y de los modernos Nezahualcoyotzin rey de Tetzaco, y los dos infantes de Mexico, Itzcoatzin y Xiuhcozcatzin, hijos del rey Huitzilihuitzin, sin otros muchos que hubo . . .” He also attributes the *Códice Xolotl* to 2 individuals whom he names (1952, II: 144) “Cemilhuitzin y el otro Quauhquechol” —but this, as Dibble (1965) has shown, is based on a misinterpretation of certain scenes in the lower right hand corner of Sheet 10. The clear existence of professionalism in historical record keeping is fully congruent with the overall level of cultural complexity of these societies. It also assures that the historical data available for these societies are bound to be much more numerous and sophisticated than one usually encounters in so-called “primitive” societies, to which category some earlier students unjustifiably assigned the cultures of late pre-Hispanic Central Mexico.

The fact must be faced that our knowledge of the activities of these ancient Central Mexican compilers of history is quite inadequate. Concentrating on the pictorial historians, various key questions can be posed, to which answers are not easily forthcoming. How, for example, did the native chroniclers actually go about gathering historical information for and composing their annals? What were their sources? What exactly were in those mysterious “archives”? How were the

individual histories stored and "catalogued"? How old were the oldest extant at Contact? Just how were "new editions" prepared? What was the precise nature of the relationship between the *altepetlacuilo* and the local rulers and priests who obviously were very much interested in protecting and perpetuating a "correct" image of their community's past? Were new histories subjected to some kind of scrutiny—"censorship", if you will—and, if so, by whom? How did the chronicler, if he were utilizing data contained in different older records reconcile discrepancies, which he must frequently have encountered? What was the rate of loss of pictorial histories? The Tlaxcalteca, according to Alva Ixtlilxochitl (1952, I: 414; II: 362), apparently deliberately burned the great Tetzcooco archive; was this standard practice in the wake of successful military assaults on leading communities?<sup>21</sup> Certainly the chief temple was burned, as a symbolic gesture of triumph over the community's patron deity and to rub in the humiliation of defeat; was it also normal practice to include the local archives? What occurred in Tollan at its fall . . . and Azcapotzalco? Is this one reason for the rather skimpy and generalized—and often contradictory—available histories of these centers?<sup>22</sup> Or did their successors in power simply choose to downplay the histories of their predecessors and to focus essentially on the histories of their own communities and provinces?

This interrogation could be greatly extended. Hopefully, some of these questions might receive at least partial answers as our knowledge increases and new discoveries are made. In any case, usually before questions can be satisfactorily answered they have to be asked, and keeping queries such as these constantly in mind might help us eventually to ascertain some of the answers.

#### TYPES OF HISTORICAL INFORMATION CONVEYED

We turn now to the fundamental question of what kinds of historical information were conveyed by the different techniques and media discussed above. Or, to put it another way, what types of events were considered worthy of permanent recordation?

In the archaeological category, the information transmitted was obviously quite limited. It consists mainly of dates, usually dedicatory,

<sup>21</sup> Alva Ixtlilxochitl (1952, I: 362), apropos of the destruction of the Tetzcooco "archivos reales", labeled the Tlaxcalteca "los primeros destruidores de las historias de esta tierra" — but this seems to be stated in the context of the later post-Conquest destructions of native records under Spanish missionary auspices.

<sup>22</sup> However, the "*Anónimo Mexicano*" (Barlow 1948: xxii-xxiii), which provides an important ruler list for Azcapotzalco, attributes the lack of more detailed historical information for this center to the loss of the records at the time of the Spanish Conquest.



“portraits” of historical individuals, and, in the case of one monument (Tizoc *cuauhxicalli*), a few conquests. More detailed and explicit historical information, e.g., representational scenes involving major events such as battles and construction projects, of the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian type, have not yet been discovered in pre-Hispanic Central Mexico —although their occasional presence in Toltec Chichén Itzá suggests that some may eventually turn up, particularly at Tula.

In the pictorials, various classes of information received major attention: dynastic succession (births, accessions, and deaths of rulers, etc.); conquests and battles; migrational sequences; erections and dedications of structures (principally temples but occasionally other construction projects [aqueducts, canals, etc.]); genealogies; various natural phenomena (solar eclipses, earthquakes, locust plagues, storms, floods, comets and unusual celestial occurrences, etc.); important religious ceremonies, particularly sacrifices; foundings of communities and community subdivisions and establishments of boundaries (especially important from the standpoint of the “legal charter” use of these histories); and a large miscellaneous category much too numerous for detailed itemization.

Included in this last category would be one of the most interesting types, which might be called “anecdotal” or “personal pictorial narrative”, in which sequences of actions of an individual or a group are portrayed in a series of quite graphic pictographic scenes. Here obviously the ingenuity and imagination of the *tlacuilo* or his “supervisor” must have played a considerable role, although traditional, stereotyped formats probably were followed as much as possible. The best examples are found in the *Códice Xolotl*, particularly its sequences (Sheets 9-10) depicting the adventures of Nezahualcoyotl; no other Central Mexican pictorial, in fact, provides nearly as much material of this type. Also unique to the *Códice Xolotl* is what might be called the “ideogram stream”, a series of compact ideographic representations in a line issuing, like a kind of elaborate speech scroll, from the mouth of an individual and denoting the key ideas in an oral report or command (see Dibble 1940: 110-112). Whether this interesting technique is truly pre-Conquest, however, is questionable.

Clearly, political, dynastic, and genealogical information dominated native Central Mexican pictorial historiography, as it has tended to dominate the historiography of nearly all early civilizations. It is remarkable, however, that so much additional information was recorded, some of it of considerable value to the modern culture historian.

That part of the oral history category which consists of the standardized verbal accompaniments to the pictorial records more or less directly reflects, of course, the types of information conveyed by the latter. The “independent” oral narratives, on the other hand, conveyed about

all that the pictorial records could convey and much more —and therein, as indicated above, lies their great importance. Above all, they provide much more of what has been called the “fill” of history, the *innumerable details of incident and color* which were quite beyond the transmitting power of the most skilled and imaginative *tlacuilo*. They also frequently “explain” the events, providing motives and rationales, in a way not possible or extremely difficult utilizing only the picto-ideographic writing system. Although there are perhaps no major categories of historical information exclusively confined to the oral division, in every case they can and usually do provide much more context and detail than the same categories in the pictorial records.

Another positive advantage of the oral narratives —one which has probably not received sufficient stress— is that they provide a more explicit and unambiguous account of events. Although the composers and interpreters of the pictorial records probably were quite skilled in “reading” those produced by others, particularly as time passed the problems of correct interpretation must have greatly increased. If any original *Toltec period pictorial histories* were extant at Contact, for example, would all of the expert historians of, say, Tenochtitlan, Tetz-coco, Cholollan, and/or Tlaxcallan have agreed in their “readings” of these records painted centuries before their time? We know that the same place and name-glyphs were occasionally interpreted differently by native informants in the colonial period,<sup>23</sup> and it seems likely that this must also have occurred in the pre-Hispanic period, particularly when very old records were involved. Copyists’ mistakes and misunderstandings (as older, delapidated pictorial histories were copied to create “new editions” and updated) also must have contributed sometimes to errors and inadvertent changes of meaning. The oral narratives, on the other hand, might be memorized incorrectly and/or portions might be lost through time, but at least most of what was extant was explicit and unambiguous. The personal and place-names included, for example, were not the result of interpretations of picto-ideograms but were transmitted verbatim.

In spite of the obvious capacity of the oral narratives to provide much more detailed historical information than the pictorials, they were *not completely open-ended* and flexible in their conveyance of information but rather display definite format stereotypings which limit and channel their data in recognizable ways. This is particularly obvious, of course, in the case of the versified poetic compositions which by their very nature exert a strongly selective influence on the historical information they can transmit —entirely apart from the necessary re-

<sup>23</sup> The occasional variants in the place names of the “official” lists of Tenochca conquests can most readily be explained in this way (Barlow 1946, 1949).

shaping and simplifying of the infinite complexity of actual events inherent in all historiography. In the case of the prose historical narrations, this process of patterning and stereotyping also strongly determined the final form of the conveyance of the historical data. A kind of "pattern history" emerged, then, particularly for the earlier periods when cosmological and cosmogonical preconceptions obviously exerted a profound influence. Even for the recording of the very recent past certain stylistic characteristics of these oral narratives exerted great influence on the manner in which historical events were conceived to have occurred. The "strings of concrete images" technique of conveying ideas and events, the frequent repetitions and parallelisms, the rich use of metaphor and poetic imagery, the stereotyped speeches and conversations, the strong influence of sacred numbers, and the many other stylistic and phraseological peculiarities of all Nahuatl prose combined to produce a very characteristic and unmistakable type of historical narrative.<sup>24</sup>

#### VALUE AND RELIABILITY OF PRE-HISPANIC CENTRAL MEXICAN HISTORIES

Finally, we come to the basic question of the reliability of the surviving records, archaeological, pictorial, and oral, of past events in pre-Hispanic Central Mexico. While the central focus of this paper is on the *manner* in which history was preserved and conveyed in this area, some examination of the *value* of the available historical information so transmitted also seems appropriate. Many difficult problems face the investigator here. Broad generalizations serve little purpose. Each source, each body of historical data, must be thoroughly analyzed on its own merits, and these analyses must be informed with as complete a knowledge as possible of the culture(s) which generated the putatively historical information under scrutiny.<sup>25</sup>

First of all, it is obvious that some data in these records are so clearly mythological, legendary, novelistic, romantic, and/or folkloristic that their acceptance as accurate accounts of past events, "wie es eigentlich gewesen", in pre-Hispanic Central Mexico would be extremely naive. The mythological type of material, especially, can be rather readily discerned. A more or less accepted canon of about 10 major cosmogonical episodes, in sequence, can be reconstructed for Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco and its orbit, from original genesis to 2 final episodes I (Nicholson 1964: 7-8) have labeled "9) The Institution of Terrestrial

<sup>24</sup> Garibay, in his various publications on Nahuatl literature previously cited, has devoted the most attention to the stylistic aspect (see, especially, Garibay 1953-1954, I: caps. I and VII).

<sup>25</sup> Vansina 1965 has presented the most comprehensive general discussion of the historical value of oral tradition; McCall 1969, although devoted to Africa, is also of considerable general applicability in this regard.

War and Human Sacrifice to Feed the Gods and Sustain the Universe; 10) The Quasi-Historical Legends of the Chichimecs and the Toltecs". Obviously, it is during these episodes —and possibly during a slightly earlier "Tamoanchan era"— that out and out myth begins to fade to be gradually replaced by traditions which have some claim to at least partial historicity. And here, in this penumbra zone between the realm of obvious myth and the "documented" age of more or less continuous chronicle, that very difficult evaluation problems begin to confront us.

That a certain amount of historicity attaches to even the "Mixcoatl-Mimixcoa cycle" and almost certainly to the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tollan cycle has been widely accepted. However, the whole question of the accurate reconstruction of Toltec history —concerning which our knowledge is almost entirely confined to oral narrations, although some of these must be directly derived from (post-Toltec) pictorial histories— is an extremely difficult and embroiled one. This is hardly the place to discuss the "Toltec question", but the problems here well illustrate the methodological issues which must be faced by the would-be reconstructor interested in distinguishing any reasonably reliable traditions from the welter of legendary, novelistic, and folkloristic tales that surround this epoch. The primary accounts often differ considerably, even those ostensibly from the same community, and those from different communities (a.g., Colhuacan vs. Tenochtitlan vs. Tetzcooco) often are at major variance with one another. The widely differing reconstructions of highly respected authorities (e.g., Kirchoff 1955b, 1961a [1964] vs. Jiménez Moreno 1945, 1954-1955, 1966, n.d.) reflect these great divergencies.

One obvious problem is the lack of adequate cross-checks on the oral traditions that purport to provide historical accounts of the Toltec period. This should be most clearly provided by "dirt" archaeological evidence, which is now abundant from Tula itself. However, the methodological problems inherent in the attempt to correlate artifactual-architectural sequences with native historical traditions, previously discussed by the writer (Nicholson 1955b, 1959), continue to inhibit very successful correlations of these very dissimilar sets of data. Some very generalized ones can perhaps be suggested, but so far the available archaeological data has not appreciably helped to establish the "correct" Toltec dynastic sequence, much less to confirm or deny the details of Toltec history (most apparently near its end) contained in the different basic accounts.

As we move forward from the Toltec era, the amount of "hard" history in our sources obviously increases but seemingly only rather slowly at first. The politically disruptive conditions of the "chichimec interregnum" which followed Tollan's downfall would, by their very nature, hardly be conducive to detailed, accurate record keeping —apart

from the supposed cultural backwardness of many of the newcomer groups who were surging to power in Central Mexico. A number of detailed migration accounts apparently refer to this period or just before or not long after. By far the best documented, both pictorially and orally, is that of the ancestors of the founders of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco, the Azteca-Mexitin or Mexica. The problems and controversies surrounding the "Aztec migration problem" also well illustrate the difficulties inherent in attempting to cull out authentic history from these types of sources. Again, the 2 leading students (Kirchhoff 1961b vs. Jiménez Moreno 1966, unpublished lectures given in 1968) differ widely in their reconstructions. My own attitude is somewhat more skeptical of the historicity of these migration accounts. The concept of "pattern history" seems particularly applicable to these migration "histories". Religious and cosmological influences were obviously strongly at work here, while legendary, novelistic, and folkloristic elements are clearly legion. While the fundamental fact of migration of at least some of the ancestors of the later inhabitants of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco from an area north-west of the Basin of Mexico near the end of, at, or not long after the break-up of the Toltec imperium can probably be accepted, the details of itinerary, sojourn durations, and chronology provided by the many primary accounts—which differ widely among themselves—can hardly be accepted as reliable history except in very broad outline.<sup>26</sup>

A new era obviously dawns about the middle of the 14th century, at least for the Basin of Mexico and immediately surrounding territory. With the rise of Tezozomoc of Azcapotzalco to paramount power in this region and the steady build-up of the Tepanec Empire during the final decades of that century, there appears to be little doubt that the major events can be reconstructed with considerable accuracy from the many extant pictorial and oral-textual sources. And the amount of usable history steadily increases until, in the third and fourth decades of the following century, a quantum leap occurs at about the time of the fall of Azcapotzalco and the creation of the "Triple Alliance" of Tenochtitlan-Tetzaco-Tlacopan—which established the essential political order which flourished from this time until the Conquest. For this last period of pre-Hispanic Central Mexican history of little less than a century's duration we possess a truly extraordinary amount of historical data, the bulk of which, after thorough critical evaluation, can certainly be generally accepted.

Although there are many puzzling discrepancies even for very late events, careful analysis of all relevant sources can usually establish

<sup>26</sup> No thorough study of the "Aztec migration problem" has been published. Acosta Saignes 1946, however brief and incomplete, is useful and has been much cited.

the most likely overall sequence of events with some confidence. Local "propagandistic bias" is ubiquitous (merely expressing the intense political localism which was one of the leading cultural diagnostics of Mesoamerica), but it often is so obvious that it can be rather readily recognized.<sup>27</sup> Even the chronologic discrepancies, such a challenging problem for the earlier epochs, now considerably lessen and events can sometimes be dated accurately to the very day. Novelistic and folkloristic accounts still abound, but, with the "control" now available of the mass of obviously reliable history, their detection is much easier than for the earlier periods.

The spatial coverage is somewhat uneven. For some communities (above all, Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco; "core Acolhuacan" [especially Tepetlaoztoc, Tepechpan, Chiauhltan, Tetzoco, Huexotlan, Coatlinchan, Coatepec, and Chimalhuacan]; Tepanecapan [Azcapotzalco, Tlacopan, Tenanyocan, Coyoacan, etc.]; the "Nauhtecuhtli" [Colhuacan, Huitzilopocho, Mexicaltzinco, Itztapalapan]; Cuauhtitlan; Xaltocan; Xochimilco; Cuitlahuac; Chalco [Chalco Atenco, Talmanalco, Amaquemecan, Tenanco, Chimalhuacan Chalco, etc.]; "Tochimilco"; Cuauhnahuac; Cuauhquechollan; Totomihuacan; Cuauhtinchan; Tecamachalco-Quecholac; Tepcyacac; Zacatlan; Tlaxcallan; Tollan; Hui-chapan) abundant or sizable data are available—fairly full dynastic records, if nothing else. For others, even leading communities, it is quite scanty: the whole Toluca Basin; most of the Sierra de Puebla communities (except as they relate to the history of Acolhuacan); parts of the Basin of Puebla (including, surprisingly, the great centers of Huexotzinco and Cholollan, except as they relate to the histories of their neighbors); and Morelos and northern Guerrero (apart from Cuauhnahuac and its immediate sphere—which is not too well covered). By far the most details are available, of course, for the great twin city, Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco, and the history of this community will always be the touchstone for all pre-Hispanic Central Mexican history. Tetzoco is not too far behind, while in the *Relaciones* of Chimalpahin much detail is recorded for the Chalco province cabeceras and the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* provides a particularly rich coverage of the history of the important community which gives its name to this composite source.

Most of the extant native histories, both pictorial and oral, are local histories, or at least concentrate largely on one major community and/or province. The histories of other communities are usually inclu-

<sup>27</sup> An excellent example is the famous post-Tepanec War "guerra fingida" or "pretended conquest of Tetzoco" ("*Cronica X*" through Tezozomoc 1944: caps. xix-xx and Duran 1967, II: cap. xv) vs. "the symbolic conquest of Tenochtitlan (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1952, II: cap. xxxiv).

ded only wen they impinge directly on that of the local community. Prominent partial exceptions are the *Tira de Tepechpan*, with its dual history of Tepechpan and Tenochtitlan, and, particularly, the *Códice Yolotl*, which is unusually panoramic in its coverage of at least the dynastic histories of the major communities of the Basin of Mexico and immediately surrounding territory —although the viewpoint is always clearly that of “core Acolhuacan”.

The highly composite history, incorporating and trying to fit into a single overall chronologic scheme many independent histories, such as, in Nahuatl, the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* and the *Relaciones* of Chimalpahin, and, to some extent, the histories, in Spanish, of Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, Torquemada, and Muñoz Camargo were probably unknown in pre-Hispanic times. However, some systematic compilation of the histories of other communities and provinces, particularly those with whom the home communities possessed dynastic and/or politic-military alliances —and even some attempt to meld them into a fairly consistent overall pattern— might well have been undertaken, particularly in the imperial seats. Certainly the *Codice Xolotl* goes a long step in this direction, and many other pictorial and verbal chronicles note, to some extent, dynastic successions and other events in other communities —particularly in Tenochtitlan because of its preeminent military-political position during the last few decades before the Conquest.

As it did for the early colonial compilers, the strongly localistic orientation of most of these native histories creates serious problems for the modern student attempting to reconstruct a more panoramic, integrated history for the area. Attempts to reconcile divergent accounts have often been extremely forced. The problem of deciding which of 2 accounts is correct when they are diametrically opposed on some specific point is admittedly a challenging one. In modern syntheses, the criteria of choice are often not made sufficiently explicit. On the other hand, a positive advantage of this multiplicity of local histories is that we are often provided with accounts of major events seen from different, localistically-conditioned angles —and this can actually result in a more objective perspective concerning these events on the part of the student. For example, one can easily imagine the distortion in our understanding of Triple Alliance politics and imperialism if we only possessed either the Tenochca or the Tetzococan account but not the other. In fact, we have probably gained a very distorted view of the events surrounding the Tepanec War because the victors, as always, wrote the histories (poor Richard III!).

The problem of the “objectivity” of these Central Mexican native histories can only be dealt with briefly. Certainly, these histories to some extent served as a kind of propaganda vehicle for the community,

particularly its ruling lineage of the moment, in addition to other related functions, such as that of a "community charter", a vindication of its rights and privileges and integrity as an independent entity (even if politically subservient at any given period to another community or federation of communities). Bias in recounting its past there certainly was; its triumphs are typically extolled and recorded in detail, its defeats often omitted or glossed over. Certainly rewriting was going on all the time, especially whenever basic dynastic and/or political changes occurred. That there was even some deliberate "book-burning" we know from the celebrated incident attributed by Sahagun's Tlatelolco informants (Sahagún 1950-1963, Pt. XI: 191) to Itzcoatl of Tenochtitlan (1428-1440). However, the real motivation of this cursorily reported act is still quite obscure despite the usual assumption of his desire to "erase" the lowly past political position of the Mexica. Careful scrutiny, on the other hand, reveals that defeats were not by any means always concealed. The semi-legendary "Chapultepec Defeat" was even commemorated in a famous song, and the greatest of all Triple Alliance military defeats, against the Tarascans on their one great expedition of conquest into eastern Michoacan during the reign of Axayacatl (1469-1481), was recounted in detail in the "*Crónica X*" (Tezozomoc, 1944: caps. LII-LIII; Durán 1967, II: caps. XXXVII-XXXVIII), a chronicle otherwise devoted to exalting Tenochca glory and power. Also, in the recording of basic facts, such as successions of rulers, major military and political events, and the occurrences of various natural phenomena, the pre-Hispanic Central Mexican annalists seem to have exhibited an unusual degree of objectivity—and the basic reliability of these narrations must, I think, be assumed.

A special word, however brief, is in order concerning a particular problem in using the data of these native Central Mexican histories. Technically it is strictly a chronologic one, but it has broader implications. This is the problem of correlating years in the native calendar with those in the Christian calendar. First of all, there is the familiar 52 year cycle repetition problem. For events close to the Conquest this is no particular problem; for more remote events it can be quite serious. Much more serious, however, is the possibility that different year counts were used in Central Mexico, at least in pre-Tepanec Empire times, and that the native annalists often recorded events as if they were in the standard 1 Acatl = 1519 count when they were in fact in other counts, which in some cases would make considerable difference in years. Particularly for the period between the fall of Tollan and the rise of Azcapotzalco, the "Chichimec interregnum", the existence of different year counts could pose quite a problem in correlating and integrating historical information from different centers.



At Contact a different years count (13 Acatl = 1519) was certainly employed in western Oaxaca and southern Puebla by the Mixtec and Popoloca-speaking communities of this region (Jiménez Moreno 1940). A different year count (3 In thihui [Acatl] = 1519) also seems to have been in use among at least some of the Matlatzinca-speaking communities of the Toluca Basin (Caso 1967: 226-240). However, whether the different Nahuatl-speaking communities of the Basin of Mexico and surrounding territory had differing year counts, up to a possible "unification" in the 14th or early 15th century, is a much murkier question. Kirchhoff (1950, 1955a) believes he is able to identify quite a number (including different *tonalpohualli* counts), Jiménez Moreno (1961, n.d.) nearly as many. However, they have yet to present their evidence in full. Although there is undoubtedly some evidence in favor of their views, so many obscurities still surround this complex topic that the prudent course would seem to be that of analyzing each chronologic problem on its own merits, hypothesizing different year counts only when this is the most satisfactory and economical explanation of all the facts.

Whatever the reliability of these pre-Hispanic Central Mexican records from the standpoint of the genuine historicity of the events recounted, one great value is undeniable: the information they provide on cultural values, preoccupations, themes, patterns, etc. In other words, entirely apart from the question of their value as histories, their ethnographic value is immense. Anthropologists, particularly, should appreciate this —and, more importantly, should take fuller advantage of it than they have so far done. As Tylor (1958 [1871]: 416) long ago pointed out, with reference to "poetic legend":

... unconsciously, and as it were in spite of themselves, the shapers and transmitters of poetic legend have preserved for us masses of sound historical evidence. They moulded into mythic lives of gods and heroes their own ancestral heirlooms of thought and word, they displayed in the structure of their legends the operations of their own minds, they placed on record the arts and manners, the philosophy and religion of their own times, times of which formal history has often lost the very memory.

The records we have been discussing certainly are far more than "poetic legends", but Tylor's remarks would still seem quite pertinent, particularly for those which hark back to "Chichimec interregnum" and Toltec times.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are many other aspects of pre-Hispanic Central Mexican his-

torigraphy, particularly various important sociocultural correlates, which very much deserve discussion. These aspects, however, must be reserved for another occasion —along with further examination of native concepts of history. If nothing else, it is hoped that this brief summary of a complex topic has pointed up the wealth of material available to the Mesoamericanist interested in historical reconstruction in the Central Mexican area. There is obvious need for more critical and through analyses of the extant sources, archaeological, pictorial, and oral, to clarify their interrelationships, to distinguish what is reliable history in them, and then, with this indispensable evaluatory task completed, to go on to create new historical syntheses. In spite of the existence of an extensive and often quite valuable literature in this area, I am convinced that the greatest achievements lie ahead. If this little paper helps point the way toward improved knowledge and understanding of an extremely important aspect of pre-Hispanic Central Mexican civilization, it will have more than served its purpose.

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