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Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuantzin Munon, Domingo Francisco de San Anton. *Codex Chimalpahin, Vol. 2: Society and Politics in Mexico Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, Texcoco, Culhuacan, and Other Nahuatl Altepetl in Central Mexico: The Nahuatl and Spanish Annals and Accounts.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. vii + 248 pp. $48.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8061-2950-1.

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The Discovery, Translation, and Significance of a New Codex

In this assessment, I shall examine initially the context and background of an important Mexican codex found in 1983; comment on the translators, editors, and author; and summarize briefly the contents of this outstanding translation and annotation of an immensely significant new corpus.

These compelling, highly-recommended volumes provide a wealth of valuable and new materials on the politics and government, foreign relations, social life and customs, genealogies, calendics, and sixteenth-century prehispanic history of the Nahua–popularly known as the "Aztecs"–of central Mexico. "Aztec" is a general term used to connote the dominant late postclassic peoples of central Mexico. Non-Mesoamerican specialists and members of the general public sometimes use the terms Aztec, Nahua, Mexica, Mexica Azteca, or Culhua Mexica interchangeably–and often incorrectly. The archaeological term "late postclassic" correlates roughly with Aztec hegemony and the late prehispanic/prehistoric era.

Preceding the arrival of Cortes in 1519 C.E., the Nahua had already been the significant polity in central Mexico for several centuries, established a pan-Mesoamerican empire, and fostered major commercial linkages throughout the region under their political and religious control which they maintained by alliance and ritualized warfare. Their "Triple Alliance" was political-military confederation composed of three ethnic groups (and their cities) clustered in the Basin of Mexico in Lake Texcoco and on its shores. The groups included the dominant Mexica (at the city of Tenochtitlan), the Acolhuaca (at Texcoco), and the Tepaneca (at Tlacopan). For additional details on the Aztecs, consult Clendinnen's[1] or Coe's books,[2] and for the colonial period Nahua, see Lockhart.[3]

Nahuatl was the predominant language of central Mexico in late prehispanic times. Although there was no prehispanic written language that employed an alphabet, the peoples of central Mexico, among others in Mesoamerica, kept historic and legal records, and genealogies, and produced cartographic documents by creating codices. Codices were manuscripts composed by scribes who employed non-alphabetic glyphs (pictographic, ideographic, or phonetic) as mnemonic devices. Four pre-contact and more than thirty-five codices are known to have survived. These codices and other prehispanic and post-contact resources are detailed in the standard reference work essential to scholars of prehispanic and contemporary peoples in Mesoamerica, *The Handbook of Middle American Indians, Vols. 12-15: Guide to Ethnohistorical Sources.*[4] However, Codex Chimalpahin is–for good reason–not among the resources documented in this compendium.

In 1983, a cache of original Nahuatl- and Spanish-language documents composed by the seventeenth-century Nahua historian Don Domingo de San Anton Munon Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin (b. 1579 - d. 1660) was located in the archive of the Bible Society that was being rehoused in Cambridge University Library. These important documents, acquired in 1827 as a part of a corpus of indigenous-language materials obtained by the London-based British and Foreign Bible Society, were forgotten until they were moved to Cambridge and

catalogued in 1982.[5] Three large volumes of original accounts about native life in Prehispanic and sixteenth century New Spain might have been lost to Mexican historiography except for the efforts of Wayne Ruiwet (College Library, University of California, Los Angeles). He apprised the senior translator of these works and served as the project's manuscript editor.

The senior translator and editor of the Chimalpahin Codex is Arthur J. O. Anderson who was for many years associated with the School of American Research in Santa Fe, and was internationally reknown for his skilled and perceptive translation and for his insightful scholarship on Nahuatl-language texts written by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun (b. 1499 - d. 1590). Anderson and his long-time colleague, the late Charles E. Dibble (University of Utah), had painstakingly prepared, translated, and provided annotations to a monumental 13-volume *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain.*[6] *The Florentine Codex*, the standard appellation for the Sahagun texts, had originally been composed and translated into written Nahuatl during the period 1547-1569. With their parallel Nahuatl text and English translation, Dibble and Anderson created one of the most significant codices in Mesoamerican studies.

Anderson, not content with this achievement also undertook the translation and analysis of Chimalpahin's histories as well. *The Florentine Codex* set the stage and provided a model for the translation and annotation of the Chimalpahin Codex. Unfortunately, as the work neared completion, Anderson died on June the third 1996, and Susan Schroeder, who also served as general editor, undertook the task of publishing the transcription and translation of the Chimalpahin Codex.

Chimalpahin was born to a family of apparently modest means in year 1579 in the town of Chalco located in southern portion of the Basin of Mexico. Little is known of his early personal life, but he was not from the Nahua nobility and, therefore, his works offer an insightful contrast to the documents written by several other Aztecs who were members of high status positions. Chimalpahin provided both transcriptions and translations of documents and was also a participant in or witness to many events in Colonial Mexico. He was at the same time an historian, a copyist, a genealogist, and a chronicler who wrote for his fellow Nahua rather than for a Spanish audience. In addition, he was a contemporary of two Nahua nobles Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Don Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, and the Jesuit priest Juan de Tovar. Chimalpahin knew the priest and, possibly both of the former, but definitely used passages from Ixtlilxochitl and Tezozomoc's works,[7] as well as from other prehispanic and colonial Nahuatl documents, in preparing his sociopolitical histories of the major polities of Mexico Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, Texcoco, and Culhuacan. In general, Chimalphin begins with the most ancient accounts and brings them forward to his own time. Durand-Forest (1987)[8] provides a full account of Chimalpahin's life and his other writings.

The Nahuatl-language Chimalphin Codex and its parallel English translation are rendered and annotated in the initial book and 129 pages of the second volume. This history of Nahua Mexico spans the period 670-1631 C.E. and begins with a summary (actually a lengthy abstract) in Spanish. The author furnishes the names of consultants, authors or owners of manuscripts and their locations, and emends texts with genealogical and historical materials. The narrative also cites the works of Tezozomoc and Chimalphin's own compilations which focus upon dynastic and Altepetl histories. "Altepetl" has no direct translation into English but denotes kingdom or ethnic state. The primary text in the Chimalpahin Codex is in the form of an annal, spanning the years 670-1569 C.E., but with particular detail after the beginning of the Mexica empire in 1427. Some of his sources were fragmentary, some overlap chronologically, and his more recent annals sometimes correct errors that he made in earlier treatments.

Wayne Ruiwet provides a very informative essay entitled "Physical Description of the Manuscripts" (Vol. 1, pp. 17-24), which precedes Chimalphin's Spanish-language summary and an English translation, "Mexican History or Chronicle" (Vol. 1., pp. 26-59). Chimalphin's Nahuatl text and the English-language translation, "Society and Politics in Mexico Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, Texcoco, Culhuacan, and Other Nahua Altepetl in Central Mexico" (Vol. 1, pp. 61-238; Vol. 2, pp. 18-128), were reorganized chronologically and edited by Anderson and Schroeder. Mexican history is traced from the earliest times through migrations, initial settlement, and the deaths of native rulers, and includes significant information on Nahua calendrics, and year counts from the annals of Ayala dating 1243-1562. The second volume begins with the arrival of the Mexica in the Basin of Mexico, traces the establishment of Tenochtitlan, and relates the conquest of Tlatelolco Culhuacan and other polities. It also provides detailed genealogies of the kings and lords of the members of the Triple Alliance, characterizes other lineage groups and inter-dynastic marriages, and ends with supplementary accounts of the Mexica month count, native and Christian calendars, and the Zodiac.

The second document, *Exercicio quotidano*, dates to 1547 and consists of 43 folios (Vol. 2, pp. 129-183) and was edited and translated solely by Anderson. The original is currently located in the Newberry Library, Chicago (Ayer Special Collection MS 1484). This work was a part of a Nahuatl "doctrinal encyclopedia" composed by Sahagun and copied by Chimalpahin and will be of paramount interest to students of church and ecclesiastical history in the colonial era of New Spain. The diverse collection of episodic, serial Nahuatl texts composing the third part of the second volume date to the years just prior to the conquest through the middle of the sixteenth century and concern the royal house of Necahualcoyotl and changes that took place in Texcoco during the colonial period, and includes commentaries on Hernando Cortes (Vol. 2, pp. 184-238). The Texcoca accounts of the conquest are especially valuable as is a letter from Juan de San Antonio.

Significant to scholars are that each volume has three detailed, comprehensive indices, one each for Individuals, Place Names, and Subjects. These are important finding aids should a researcher wish to consider individuals such as Axayacatl or Gabriel de Ayala, or locations such as Culhuacan, Teotihuacan, and Tlacopan, or subjects as diverse as foods, diseases, obsidian, sea shells (spondylus), adultery, sweat baths, or wet nursing.

The Chimalphin Codex ranks with various editions of the Codex Mendoza, a pictorial manuscript composed ca. 1541-1542, as a document providing a glimpse at the functioning of the former Aztec empire now under Spanish hegemony. See, for example, Berdan and Anawalt (1997). [9] Likewise, Chimalphin's writings are helpful in elucidating and clarifying the colonial era works of primary authors including Ixtlilxochitl (1975), Tezozomoc (1975), and Torquemada (1975).[10] The *Cronica Mexicayotl*, a major document credited to Alvarado Tezozomoc (1975), may now be credited to Chimalpahin based upon an analysis of handwriting and style (Anderson and Schroeder 1997[1]:8, 10). Therefore, because of his role both as an historian and copyist, the entire corpus of late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Nahuatl historical literature should be reassessed.

The Chimalphin Codex joins other distinguished codices–Borgia, Florentine, Magliabechiano, Mendoza, and Nuttall, among others–in providing us with better insight to the central Mexican Nahua and their contemporaries. One would only wish that Anderson was alive to savor the fruits of his distinguished scholarship.

Notes:

[1]. Clendinnen, Inga. *The Aztecs*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

[2]. Coe, Michael D. *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*, 4th ed. rev. New York: Thames and Hudson.

[3]. Lockhart, James. *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

[4]. Cline, Howard F., vol. ed. *The Handbook of Middle American Indians*, Robert Wauchope (gen.ed.), Vols. 12-15, *Guide to Ethnohistorical Sources*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972-1975.

[5]. Jesson, Alan F., ed. *Historical Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Bible House Library*, MSS 374, 3 vols. London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1982.

[6]. Anderson, Arthur J. O. and Charles E. Dibble, trans. and eds. *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 13 vols. Santa Fe and Salt Lake City: School of American Research and University of Utah, 1950-1982.

[7]. Ixtlilxochitl, Fernando de Alva (Edmundo O'Gorman, ed). *Obras historicas*, 2 vols. Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1975; and Tezozomoc, Fernando Alvarado (Adrian Leon, trans. and ed.). *Cronica mexicayotl*. Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1975.

[8]. Durand-Forest, Jacqueline de. *L'histoire de la Vallee de Mexico selon Chimalpahim Quauhtlehuanitzin (du XIe au XVe siecle*, Vol. 1. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1987.

[9]. Berdan, Frances F. and Patricia Reiff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

[10]. See Torquemada, Juan de. *Monarchia indiana*, 3 vols. Mexico, D.F: Editorial Porrua, 1975

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