

Chapter 1

GASPAR ANTONIO CHI

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Bridging the Conquest of Yucatán

Long after the Spanish conquest of the Yucatán Peninsula, many crucial aspects of Maya civilization endured. It took three invasions, spanning a period of twenty years, before conquistadors led by the Franciscos de Montejo (father, son, and nephew) were able to settle a colony. The third campaign was successful largely because the Spaniards brought tens of thousands of native warriors from central and southern Mexico to fight the Maya. Even then, the new colony only comprised the peninsula's northwest regions.

There the Montejos founded the colonial capital of Mérida on the Maya city of Tihó, divided the surrounding Maya towns and villages into grants of encomienda, and established Franciscan missions. The Maya responded with a complex mixture of cooperation and resistance, as they attempted to control these changes and incorporate them into their own social, cultural, and religious framework. Maya society continued to revolve around two central institutions: the cah (plural cahob), a community with a defined geographical territory; and the chibal (plural chibalob), a patrilineal descent group identified by a common surname. Class divisions also endured within the cahob, as some chibalob maintained prominent political and social roles from the pre-Conquest era onward. On the other hand, political battles revolved around local municipal councils imposed by the Spaniards. Over time, various Maya elite factions continued to vie for control of important municipal offices that regulated local affairs within the cah as well as relations with outsiders, especially the Spaniards and their African slaves.

Preexisting political divisions often set the context for Maya accommodation or resistance to the Spaniards. Thus some prominent chibalob, hoping to retain status during and after the Conquest wars, all at the expense of their rivals, made common cause with the invaders. The Xiu (pronounced SHOE), for example, eventually came to adopt such a position. As a result, the lives of many important sixteenth-century Xiu noblemen, such as Gaspar Antonio Chi (pronounced CHEE), were closely intertwined with those of the European invaders. After the assassination of his father by the rival Cocom chibal, the family of Gaspar Antonio Chi wanted to have him schooled in the ways of the Europeans and put the young nobleman under the care of the Franciscans. The friars were a powerful political and religious force in the early years of Spanish rule, and they taught the young Maya lord Latin and Castilian and saw to his instruction in Roman Catholicism. For their part, the Spanish political and religious leaders in Yucatán enthusiastically embraced young, well-connected Maya boys such as Chi, who could help to forge alliances with

influential chibalob. Such connections would promote the spread of Roman Catholicism among the Maya and consolidate Spanish power in Yucatán. The first generation of Spanish rule in any region of the empire usually involved such strategic alliances.

This selection on Gaspar Antonio Chi begins with his birth in 1530, moving through the stages of his life—and Yucatán's turbulent history—until the eve of the venerable nobleman's death in 1610. Chi was not just a witness to the foreign invasions and the transformation of his homeland into a province of the Spanish Empire; he experienced those changes from the inside, participating in them as a translator and a notary for the leading Spanish bishops and administrators in the Yucatán Peninsula. Chi even served the two powerful rivals for leadership among the Franciscans in the sixteenth century, fray Francisco Toral and firebrand fray Diego de Landa. When these two men vied for control over the evangelization process, Chi wisely withdrew from the whirlwind of Spanish politics to serve as a local leader of the Tizimin cah, far from the capital at Mérida. Later he moved closer to the center of Spanish power while still remaining largely in the Maya world, taking up the post of notary and community leader (governor, or batab) in his hometown of Mani. Throughout his adulthood, Chi used his position between the Spaniards and the Maya to advance his own career and the interests of his chibal, the Xiu. The life of Chi literally spanned two ages, linking what he described as an era of prosperity and abundance before the Spanish invasion with the years of disease, tumult, and religious discord that followed it. Although Chi became closely associated with the Spanish legal system and Christian evangelization, he remained deeply rooted in his heritage as both a Xiu and a nobleman of the old Maya order.

Gaspar Antonio Chi was a Maya nobleman whose eighty-year life spanned the most turbulent and remarkable decades in the history of the Yucatán Peninsula (in what is today southwest Mexico). Chi was born before the Spanish invasion of Yucatán and died early in the seventeenth century when a Spanish colony had been firmly established, one that had employed Chi himself for much of his life. His longevity and career give us invaluable insights into the ways in which the Conquest affected native noblemen in the Americas and, equally important, the ways in which the native elite contributed to the course of the Conquest and the construction of the colony. In this chapter I shall trace Chi's life from birth to death, from the precolonial period to the Conquest era and into midcolonial times. Chi's high status and identity in old age is something of a riddle. But by exploring who Chi became and how he got there, we can begin to solve that riddle—and thereby also see what Yucatán became and how it got there.

DAWN (1530–1535)

Chi's dawning years were the twilight of pre-Conquest Yucatán. In 1530, the year of his birth, Yucatán was virtually free of Spaniards. By the time he was five, there was

not a Spaniard for hundreds of miles from his hometown of Mani, where he lived with his father, the priest and nobleman Ah Kulel Chi, and his mother, Ix Kukil Xiu, of the region's ruling dynasty.

Not that the peninsula had avoided all contact with the foreigners. Spaniards were shipwrecked on its coasts in 1511, and perhaps even before then. Expeditions from Cuba in 1517 and 1518 landed at various points on the long Yucatec coast and engaged Maya warriors in brief but bloody battles. In 1519 the soon-to-be-famous Hernán Cortés landed at Cozumel and six years later passed along the peninsula's base. Then, for over two years in the late 1520s a full-scale campaign of conquest was undertaken in Yucatán by the family and allies of Francisco de Montejo. But it failed, as did a second campaign, begun in 1529 and abandoned after five years. In 1535, Chi's father, Ah Kulel, might have reasonably assumed, as he watched his young son playing on the family patio, that the threat of foreign invasion had finally passed. Ah Kulel might have imagined that his boy would grow up in a world much like that of his own youth.

Ah Kulel could not have anticipated his own death just a year later, or the third invasion of Spaniards a few years after that, or their subsequent permanent settlement. He could hardly have foreseen that the priests who would educate his son would not be *ah kinob* like Ah Kulel, but foreigners who would teach him a new faith, foreign tongues, and a strange new way of writing. He could not possibly have imagined all that his son would witness and record on paper. Had Ah Kulel been able to envision how violently the Maya world would be altered as his son grew from childhood to old age, he would have been terrified.

Yet had he been able to witness, seventy-five years later, his great-great-grandson's baptism in Mérida's cathedral, his reaction would have been more positive. For surely, despite the strangeness of that initiation, in a vast and unfamiliar temple, into Yucatán's brave new world, Ah Kulel's heart would have been warmed and his mind reassured by the persistence of family life—the life of *his* family.

YOUTH (1536–1560)

But Ah Kulel Chi lived to see none of this. In 1536, when his son was only six, he was brutally murdered. As a prominent priest, scribe, and government officer in Mani, Ah Kulel was a member (if not the head) of an embassy and pilgrimage from Mani to Chichen Itzá. To reach the sacred site, where rites were to be performed to bring rain to end a drought, the group of Xiu and related lords had to cross the territory of their Cocom enemies. In view of the peaceful nature of their mission, they were granted safe passage by Nachi Cocom. But the Cocom ruler had laid a trap, ordering the pilgrims massacred at the village of Otzmal (figure 1.1). The event would live in infamy; as the annals of one Xiu town, Oxkutzcab, declared, “May it be remembered!”^[1]



The memorial shield of the Otmal massacre.

Source: Drawing by Matthew Restall from the seventeenth-century copy by Diego López de Cogolludo, itself possibly made from an original drawing by Gaspar Antonio Chi.

Chi certainly remembered. Forty-five years after the event, he described it in writing. Chi was asked by several *encomenderos* (conquistadors holding encomienda grants) to help them complete questionnaires on their districts required by the king. In one report, Chi narrated:

The province of Mani was always at war with that of Sotuta—[particularly] with a lord of the ancients of the land named Nachi Cocom—because of an ancient enmity which the said Cocom had against the Xiu. . . . Thus after the initial invasion of the first conquerors, whom the lords of Mani received in peace, without any resistance, giving obedience to His Majesty, the aforementioned Nachi Cocom treacherously killed more than forty lords of the said province of Mani, who were passing through his province on a pilgrimage, unarmed and under safe passage—beheading and putting out the eyes of Ah Kulel Chi, who was the most senior of them.^[2]

Later, describing his father's mutilation in his own petitions to the king, Chi claimed that "they also cut out his tongue."^[3] Indeed, Chi made his father's murder central to his argument that his life from the earliest age had consisted of service and sacrifice for the sake of the king of Spain and his representatives. According to Chi, the motive for the Otmal massacre was the Cocom desire to punish the Xiu for appeasing the Spaniards during the second unsuccessful Montejo invasion of the early 1530s. In support of this view, Chi was able to enlist the testimony of some twenty Spaniards that this was common knowledge.

Chi's childhood and adolescence were therefore lived against the backdrop of civil war, famine and epidemic disease, and a bloody war of invasion and conquest. The Otmal massacre set off a series of hostilities between Xiu and Cocom. The drought that had necessitated the pilgrimage to Chichen Itzá persisted. Disease brought by earlier Spanish expeditions continued to ravage the Maya population. And

then a few years after Ah Kulel Chi's death, the Montejos returned in greater force, with a massive multiracial invasion force of Spaniards, Africans, Nahuas, and other Mesoamericans. There were no battles in the streets of Mani. But Chi would have seen the men of the town leaving to fight the invaders, and he would have heard gruesome tales of war from the few who returned. As Chi entered adolescence, foreigners appeared in town, word came of the new capital city being built to the northeast, and war continued to flare up to the east and south. Throughout these years of Chi's youth, there was no peace in Yucatán.

Then the first Franciscan friars arrived in Mani, and the changes surrounding Chi suddenly impacted him directly and permanently. First, he was baptized and given a new name. The orphaned Maya nobleman, who had spent his youth mourning his father, acquired several new fathers in the faith—the Franciscan *padres*. But he also became explicitly linked to the father figure of civil rule, as his full name became Gaspar Antonio de Herrera Chi, after his godmother doña Beatriz de Herrera, the wife of Yucatán's conquistador and governor, don Francisco de Montejo. At the same time, Montejo became godfather to the lord of Mani, the Xiu ruler, who was baptized don Francisco de Montejo Xiu—a moniker that neatly symbolized the continuities and changes of local politics in the 1540s.

Second, Chi went to college. In 1547—as Chi turned seventeen—the friars began the construction of the convent church in Mani and also set up a small school (figure 1.2). The Xiu lords fully collaborated in the project. In fact, when the Franciscans chose the nearby town of Oxkutzcab as the site for the new convent and school, irate Maya nobles were stopped from burning it down only because a local boy told the friars of the plot (the boy was not Chi, but his first months of instruction by the Franciscans probably took place in Oxkutzcab). Those nobles—twenty-six in total, many related to Chi—were condemned as conspirators and in turn saved from being burned at the stake in Mérida only by the pleas of Luis de Villalpando, the head Franciscan in Mani. The alleged plotters were pardoned, the baptisms proceeded, and the convent and school moved to Mani.



The sixteenth-century monastic church complex at Mani, Yucatán.

Source: Photograph by Amara Solari.

Based on a model established in Mérida a few years earlier (and in Mexico City

a couple of decades before that), the school's purpose was for Franciscans to educate the sons of local nobles, native boys who would go on to be assistants, interpreters, and agents for the friars. As Diego de Landa later put it, "These children, once they had been instructed, took care to inform the friars of any idolatries and drunkenness and to destroy any idols, even if they belonged to their parents." Landa claimed that parents soon got over their initial opposition to Franciscan schools such as the one in Mani, and they began sending their boys to live and study there while continuing to visit them and "bring them food." In turn, the friars "learned to read and write in the language of the Indians, which was so reduced to an art [that is, a grammar book] that it could be studied like Latin."^[4]

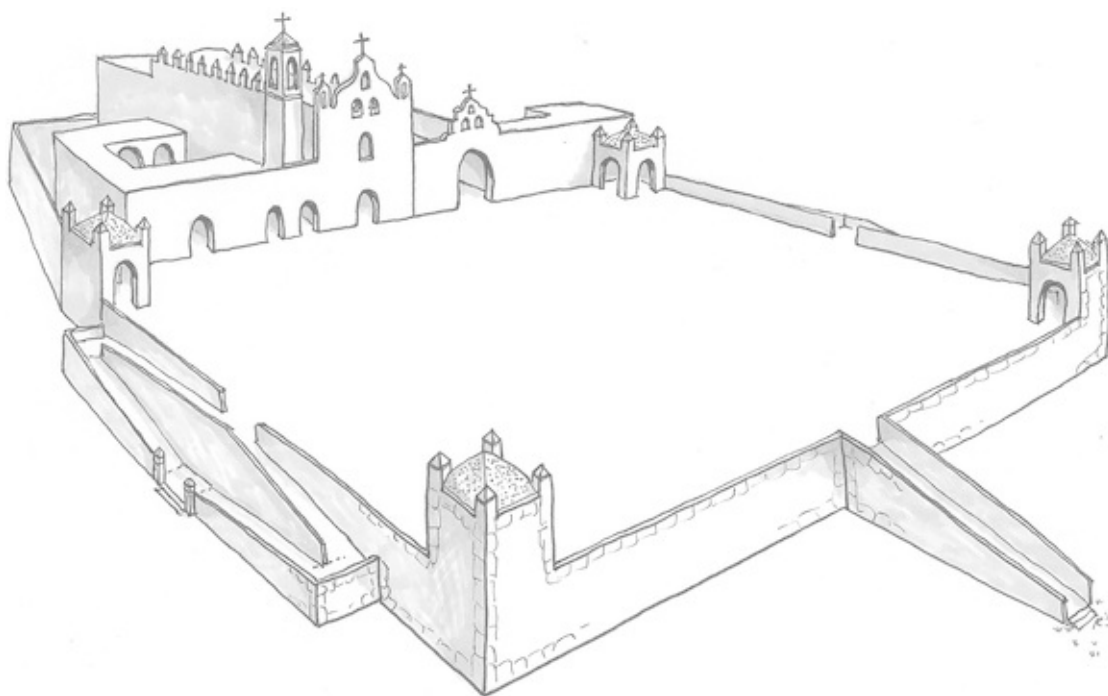
Latin, in fact, was one of the languages that the young Chi soon learned in Mani, along with Spanish and Nahuatl. The Franciscan chronicler Diego López de Cogolludo, writing forty years after Chi's death, stated that "he knew Latin grammar very well."^[5] Sánchez de Aguilar, who in the seventeenth century became dean of Mérida cathedral and a chronicler of the spiritual conquest of Yucatán, spent part of his childhood in Tizimin, where his elder brother was encomendero. There he got to know Chi—"everybody in that era knew him," the Spaniard later wrote—as he was the town's schoolmaster and choirmaster in the 1570s. Chi "knew grammar reasonably well," reminisced Sánchez de Aguilar, "and in my childhood it was he who placed its art in my hands. . . . He was as *ladino* as any Spaniard, sang plainsong [*canto llano*] and sang to the organ with great skill, and could play the keyboards. I knew him as organist of this holy church and later as Interpreter General to the governor."^[6] According to Chi, in his own words:

I was the first native to learn the Castilian and Latin languages; and being of great ability and understanding, performed great services for God and Your Majesty in order to bring about the conversion of the natives of this province, which is of much concern to Your Majesty; and, as requested by the said friars [*religiosos*], translated and wrote sermons in the Indians' language in order to preach to them . . . the word of God and the Christian doctrine . . . and was always at the service of the friars, teaching them the language and interpreting for them.^[7]

Chi must certainly have been a star pupil in the small school in Mani, where he studied, began writing, and remained based for most of the 1550s. He almost immediately would have learned of the energetic and already somewhat controversial Diego de Landa; and, as a shining example of the efficacy of Franciscan policies, Chi would also have come to Landa's attention. We don't know exactly when the two men met, but it must have been early; and while Landa was only seven years older, he was to become something of a mentor and patron to the bright Maya nobleman. Chi does not seem to have worked full-time with Landa until 1561, but their paths crossed repeatedly in the 1550s. Spanish colonists later saw the two as having been so closely associated that Dr. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar could claim with exaggeration

that Chi “was raised from childhood by the lord bishop don Diego de Landa.”^[8]

During Chi’s twenties, Landa was based in Izamal, where from 1553 to 1561 an impressive convent was constructed on the base of one vast Maya pyramid, adjacent to a sibling pyramid (figure 1.3). The church was a monument to Landa’s ambitions (and later denounced as such by his rival, Toral)—ambitions that frequently took him to Mérida and other parts of the colony. Similarly, Chi’s budding career as a notary of rare skill and learning often took him out of Mani. In 1557 he served as interpreter and chief notary to the Spanish judge commissioned to ratify the Xiu land boundaries, both within the Xiu domain centered on Mani and between it and the Cocom region of Sotuta. Chi participated in the summit at the spectacular ancient site of Uxmal, in the great border walk that followed the summit, and in the writing of the treaty. Spanish officials intended the event as an imposition of the *pax colonial* on the feuding Xiu and Cocom chibalob; for their part, the two dynasties saw it as a way to consolidate their respective territorial and political authority. That clash and collusion of interests was precisely how colonial Yucatán was forged.



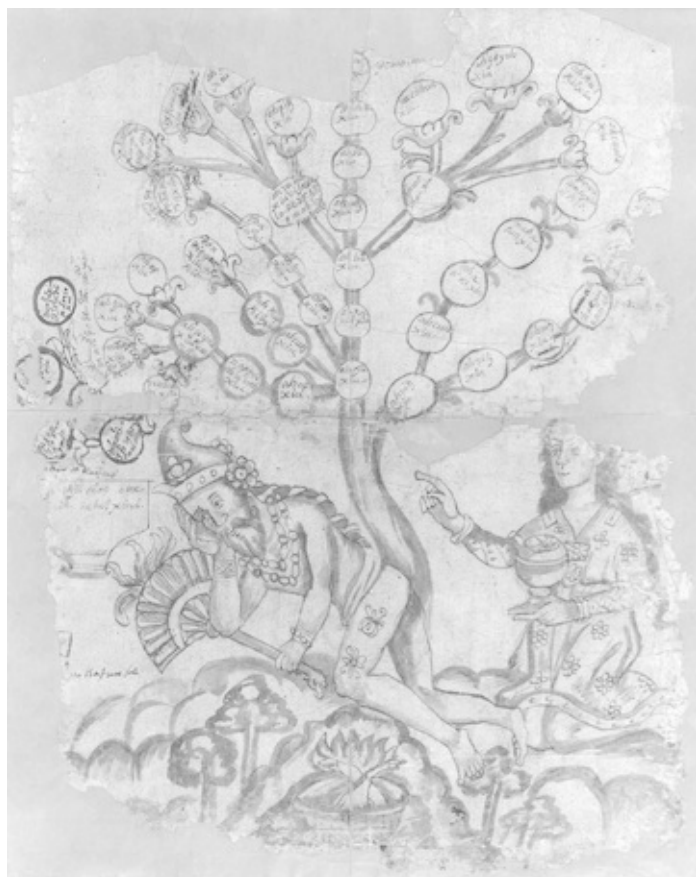
The sixteenth-century monastic church complex, built on top of an ancient Maya pyramidal platform, at Izamal, Yucatán.

Source: Drawing by Matthew Restall.

The 1557 treaty contains the first example of Chi’s signature. The treaty is also the earliest surviving example of the Maya language written alphabetically. It is thus a landmark, as it were, in both Chi’s professional life and the early development of the colony, the two being as intertwined as the Spanish and Maya cultures represented in the treaty and its written records. This was not the first time, of course, that Chi had written his name or that Maya had been written alphabetically. Indeed, it is Chi’s fully developed professional skills as well as the full-fledged nature of alphabetic Maya in these documents that indicate the effectiveness of Maya-Franciscan educational

collaboration in the decade before 1557.

That the collaboration served Maya purposes as much as Franciscan ones is illustrated by Chi and other native notaries using literacy in contexts such as the 1557 treaty; as Sánchez de Aguilar would later write, Chi “defended the Indians in their lawsuits and presented or composed their petitions for them.”^[9] It was also about this time that Chi probably created an extraordinary drawing known to us as the Xiu family tree (figure 1.4). It depicts members of the Xiu lineage descended from a pre-Conquest dynastic founder and includes Chi himself and his mother, Ix Kukil Xiu. Its iconography mixes Christian, Maya, and native central Mexican elements in a way that reflects the unique Franciscan-Maya context of Chi’s education. Yet the tree was not drawn for Franciscans. It was created, rather, for Chi’s Xiu relatives and descendants, who jealously guarded it for centuries.



The Xiu family tree, possibly drawn by Gaspar Antonio Chi (with family members added on the left, in the seventeenth century, by don Juan Xiu).

Source: Reproduced courtesy of the Tozzer Library, Harvard University.

MATURITY (1561–1578)

One of the conquistadors whom Chi had helped in 1581 with his royal questionnaire, Pedro de Santillana, gratefully acknowledged Chi’s role in a succinct hagiography:

Usually called Gaspar Antonio among the Spaniards, his age is fifty years, a little more or less, and he is a man of many abilities, a scholar, a *ladino* [Hispanized,

cultured] well versed in the Castilian language, the Mexican [Nahuatl] and Maya language [*mayathan*], which is his mother tongue. And he is a person who knows well all the local peculiarities . . . as he was born in this country and was taken as companion of the bishops here, which were fray Francisco Toral, glory be to his memory, and fray Diego de Landa, glory be to his memory, as they thought him a truthful man. And through him they learned about the peculiarities and customs that the natives used to have, and still have at present. And as a man of character these bishops relied upon the things that were investigated and understood, in the language of this country, by this Gaspar Antonio.^[10]

The conquistador's ready association of Chi with the colony's first two bishops, Toral and Landa, evokes the significant roles that these two Franciscans played in Chi's life in his twenties, thirties, and forties. But it barely begins to convey the complexity of the relationships between the three of them, particularly the bitter rivalry between the obsessively driven and often irascible Landa and the mild-mannered Toral. Both men may have trusted Chi as "a man of character" and "a truthful man." But because they did not view each other in this light, Chi found himself caught between them, an uncomfortable position from which he sought escape. For over a decade, from the mid-1560s to the late 1570s, Chi pursued a career outside of Mérida and the immediate circle of the Franciscans. Although Toral was bishop until his death in 1571 and Landa, appointed as his replacement, returned from Spain in 1573, Chi worked for neither of them during these years.

Instead, around 1565, he took up a post as choirmaster and schoolteacher in a Maya community, a role that was in a sense as close as a colonial Maya man could legally get to the position of a traditional Maya priest—the *ah kin* that Chi's father had been. The community was Tizimin, a cah with few Spanish residents far from Mérida and on the northeast margins of the colony. One imagines that here Chi found refuge from the Spanish world in which he had spent almost two decades of his young adulthood.

In 1572 he moved back into the center of things, but still very much within the Maya world, taking up the post of *batab* of his hometown; Mani's continued importance as a regional capital made its governorship one of the highest-ranking Maya offices in colonial Yucatán. Although he was only *batab* for a year or two, he had succeeded in taking up the political legacy of his maternal ancestry, and it was in Mani that he remained for most of the 1570s, enjoying his status as a former *batab* and a high-ranking notary. When he moved to Mérida in the late 1570s as interpreter general, he did not go to work directly for the bishop. Moreover, Landa was ailing; not long (possibly months) after Chi's return in 1578, the bishop was dead.

Why, if Chi was so close to the bishops, did he escape their employ and pursue a career in Maya politics? Part of the answer no doubt lies in the understandable (and, arguably, universal) desires to pursue a career in one's father's footsteps and to regain contact with one's native roots and family. But part of the answer surely also lies in Chi's experience of the turbulent early 1560s. In 1561, Chi had recently turned

thirty, had married not long before, and by now was probably a father. He and his new family were living in Mérida, where Landa, already famous throughout the colony as a Franciscan firebrand, moved that year to take up his new appointment as *provincial*, or head of this religious order in the province. Chi seems to have begun working for the provincial as notary, interpreter, and assistant almost immediately. His tasks were relatively routine, but that would all change the following spring. In retrospect, Chi's first year as Landa's assistant in Mérida must have seemed mercifully mundane.

In May 1562, Pedro de Ciudad Rodrigo, the Franciscan friar in charge of the monastery in Chi's hometown of Mani, received reports of the practice of "idolatry" in a sacred cave on the edge of town. Finding "idols" or non-Christian religious images in the cave, Ciudad Rodrigo initiated a sequence of events that would be repeated many times in this and other colonies of Spanish America: prominent locals were interrogated, some were tortured, confessions were made, and the transgressors were lectured, fined, and ritually humiliated in the town plaza. However, what made these events unique in Yucatán, and to some extent in Spanish America, was that in this case they were merely the beginning. Having read a full report of the matter, Landa decided to travel to Mani and investigate further. He took Chi with him.

Landa's investigation immediately took the form of a large-scale version of Ciudad Rodrigo's, with not dozens but hundreds, and then thousands, of Mayas arrested, jailed, and systematically tortured. Landa started in Mani and then moved north to Sotuta. He targeted women as well as men. Many were permanently maimed, some committed suicide, and some 5 percent of the 4,500 victims died under torture. Even for the sixteenth century, this extraordinary campaign of extirpation was an excessively violent expression of colonialist frustration.

It culminated in the Mani plaza on July 12, 1562, at the ritual of public punishment and humiliation called an *auto-da-fé*. The Franciscans sentenced the condemned to having their heads shaved or to wearing the yellow red-crossed robes of shame called *sanbenitos*. Others were made to pay heavy fines, or to serve a Spaniard for up to ten years, or to suffer further torture (and possibly death) in the form of two hundred lashes. The representative of colonial government, the *alcalde mayor* (mayor) Diego de Quijada, repeated the sentences, which were then read out in Maya by a native interpreter to the gathering of condemned Mayas and their families. The interpreter was Gaspar Antonio Chi.

The assembled Mayas thus learned of their fate from the lips of one of their own—a Chi-Xiu nobleman from Mani, to whom many of them were related. It was surely difficult for Chi to participate in this Conquest ritual in this way—and to witness the brutal floggings and burning of religious images and objects that immediately followed his reading of the sentences. That much is suggested by the fact that when the procedure was repeated in Sotuta the following month, Chi was not present as interpreter. The arrests, tortures, suicides, and killings continued for weeks as the campaign spread through the Sotuta region and into neighboring Hocaba and Homun. But Chi was back in Mérida. He was there in late August when the colony's first

bishop, Francisco Toral, arrived in the city and immediately summoned Landa to account for his actions.

Chi must have been relieved. He had watched his mentor wreak havoc on his hometown and neighboring communities for three months, learned how many of his relatives had been tortured to death, and found himself a party to a horrific ceremony of humiliation. He had also witnessed or learned of Landa's mass burning of "a great number of books in their letters [hieroglyphs],"^[11] an act of vandalism that must have shocked a learned and literate Maya such as Chi. To be sure, he was the product of a Franciscan education, but his father had been one of the priests and scribes who had written and kept hieroglyphic manuscripts. The destruction of pre-Conquest Maya literature underscored the fact that, although Chi in many ways symbolized the continuity into colonial times of the Maya tradition of literacy, he and other native notaries would write only in the alphabet borrowed from the invaders as well as in the genres and formats set by them.

If Chi's absence at the August 1562 auto-da-fé in Sotuta can be taken as a sign of his feelings about Landa's campaign against "idolatry," further indication of his discomfort lies in the fact that shortly after Toral's arrival in Mérida, Chi began working for the new bishop. Toral knew Nahuatl and Popoloca but not Yucatec Maya, so he greatly needed a skilled interpreter such as Chi; for Chi, the job was a prestigious one. But Toral and Landa had almost immediately become bitter enemies, and Chi knew only too well the violent forms that Landa's disappointment and retribution could take.

Despite these risks, Chi accepted the position. Perhaps he viewed his new tasks as some kind of recompense for his work in the summer of 1562, for he now set about drawing up documents for Toral: a summons to Landa to justify certain aspects of his campaign, the translations of new Maya testimony asserting that earlier confessions had been false and forced under threat of torture, and the papers releasing still-imprisoned Mayas—including the lord of Mani, don Francisco de Montejo Xiu, who later wrote a bitter letter about "the great persecution" to the king of Spain.^[12] The ubiquity of Chi's signature^[12] on the records of this power struggle between the two Franciscans reflects his role as an eyewitness to the battle for the soul of the new colony. The conflict was not solely over control but was about competing visions of the nature of native culture and the entire grand scheme of colonization.

If Chi's experience of the summer of 1562 turned him sour on Landa's vision of Yucatán's future, he was not alone. Spanish colonists and Maya leaders alike breathed collective sighs of relief as Toral continued to pursue his investigation into Landa's activities through the autumn of 1562, inexorably tipping the balance of power in the bishop's favor and, in January 1563, prompting Landa's sudden return to Spain. There, Landa spent the next decade defending his record of service in Yucatán. For years he had been assembling his observations and those of Spanish and Maya informants in a great compilation or *Recopilación*, and in the late 1560s parts of it were reworked and presented in his defense. The *Recopilación* is long lost, but

fragments were later copied and survived as the *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, or *Account of the Things of Yucatán*. It is part narrative of Yucatec history and part ethnography of the Maya.

There can be little doubt that Chi contributed to the *Relación*. The two men worked closely together when Landa was making notes on Maya matters, and some passages in the *Relación* are very similar to Chi's own writings. Yet the only Maya informant given credit is the man whom Chi believed responsible for his father's murder, as Landa well knew—Nachi Cocom. Chi is not mentioned at all. In the end, the retribution that one imagines Chi feared from Landa uncharacteristically took the form of silence.^[13]

SENIOR YEARS (1578–1610)

In 1578, the year of Bishop Landa's death, Chi was recently settled in the capital of Mérida. He was now the much-respected, known-to-all, highest-ranking translator in the colony, the interpreter general. He would hold the post for decades, during which his handwriting and signature, the latter an elegant rendering of his Christian names sandwiched between a pair of tightly styled rubrics, are frequently found on the written records of colonial business. We know, therefore, what cases Chi read and contributed to, and we can imagine how he reacted to some of them and how he perceived the colonial Yucatec world.

For example, in 1577, Yucatán received its copies of the above-mentioned set of royal questionnaires sent from Spain as part of an ambitious campaign to gather detailed information on all the colonies of the empire. Every encomendero was to answer all fifty questions; few did so, and in Yucatán at least a dozen sought out Gaspar Antonio Chi for assistance in responding to the two questions on pre-Conquest native religion, politics, and economics. Chi appears to have written replies for these Spaniards in 1579 and 1581 and to have done so with some relish. Rather than translating the words of others, he was here given a chance to express his own views.

Chi wrote wistfully of Yucatán before the Conquest as a land of great prosperity and abundance, governed well and densely populated. He lamented the decline of that population and, rather pointedly, blamed the loss not only on “the war of the conquest with the Spaniards” but also on misguided colonial policies of resettlement and the banning of native drinks (replaced by the pernicious wine of the Spaniards). He wrote, too, of the feud that had so touched his own life and of the death of his father, Ah Kulel Chi, recording for posterity his own understanding of the murder at Otzmal. The Cocom are condemned, the Xiu defended. As in another version of his account of Yucatán's past, written for the king in 1582 at the request of the provincial governor, Chi unabashedly promotes the Xiu dynasty as lords of “this province of Yucatán.”^[14] Thus even though many of his answers to the royal questionnaires were anonymous, his partisanship is clear. Nevertheless, he was surely telling it the way he saw it: the Xiu legacy was a supremely noble one. His father had died for the cause

of the Xiu policy of peace and accommodation toward the Spaniards, a cause to which Chi himself had dedicated his life.

Another example of Chi's work as interpreter general dates from the dawn of the next century but also evokes the troubled years of his childhood. In the summer of 1600, Yucatán's Spanish governor, in response to a minor land dispute among Maya communities to the colony's east, ordered three cahob to submit land titles. Chi wrote a translation of the order into Maya and signed his name to it before it was sent out from Mérida. The following month, he translated into Spanish the splendid record of a territorial treaty made in 1545, one of the first documents written in Maya with an alphabet adapted from Spanish; Chi's 1600 copy (the only to survive) was then confirmed by a half-dozen cahob and dozens of Maya *batabob* (governors) and nobles from the region. As "Interpreter General of the high court of this government for the king our lord,"^[15] Gaspar Antonio was simply doing his job. But in doing so, he was a witness to (and a recorded participant in) the adaptation of the Maya nobility to the demands and opportunities of the new colonial system—its legal culture of writing, its self-interested concern for local political stability, and its willingness to allow (or failure to observe) various forms of continuity.

There was, however, a personal twist to the case for Chi. For the dominant role in the 1545 land treaty had been played by Nachi Cocom. As ruler of the Sotuta region, Cocom had survived the Spanish invasion, was confirmed in office as don Juan Cocom, and won the friendship of Chi's own sometime mentor, Landa—all despite his resistance to Spanish demands into the late 1540s (he is still styled as Nachi Cocom in the 1545 treaty), a resistance motivated in part by the early Xiu collaboration with the invaders. The Cocom chibal suffered Landa's violent investigation as much as did the Xiu in the summer of 1562 (Nachi Cocom himself was condemned posthumously as an idolater). But that may have been of little comfort to Chi. The resurfacing of Cocom's name in 1600 must have brought back painful memories.

A third example of Chi's work dates from the start of this long final phase of his career. In 1578 he translated into Spanish the testimony of a Maya woman claiming to have been sexually abused by a Spanish priest named Andrés Mexia. In this instance, Chi sat with the woman and the priest and orally translated her replies to his questions; a Spanish notary wrote down Chi's translations, to which Chi signed his name. As Church officials under Bishop Landa built a case against Mexia during 1578, Chi translated other testimony, both oral and written, including shocking and well-substantiated accusations of rape.^[16] Unfortunately, while the case records the voices of Maya parishioners, the outraged responses of the bishop and other Spaniards, and Mexia's own protestations, we can only imagine Chi's reactions. What appalled him more: Mexia's cynical exploitation of his priestly position to abuse and violate his parishioners, or the fact that he got away with it for so long? On the other hand, perhaps Chi's reaction was tempered by the fact that he had seen worse manifestations of the dark side of colonial relations; he had even witnessed them firsthand.

Arguably, Chi was a key contributor to the development and maintenance of the colony and its legal system in Yucatán. He may even have viewed himself in that light. Certainly he claimed as much in a brief autobiography that formed part of a petition to the king of Spain sent in 1580 and again, in revised form, in 1593. This petition was drawn up in a genre of letter that Spaniards called a *probanza de mérito*, or proof of merit, one that conventionally accompanied requests for royal rewards and pensions.

The king recognized the cogency of Chi's claims, albeit belatedly and not in the form of the coveted annual pension. Instead, he granted him lump-sum payments of 200 pesos in 1593 and 1599 (the latter probably in response to a third petition). These grants were a recognition, at long last, of "the many merits and services performed, for which," as Chi wrote in 1580, "he had received neither remuneration nor help nor support, despite being poor and in need and weighed down by debt and the costs of keeping his wife and children and family, and being a noble and virtuous person, a good Christian of good repute." By 1593, Chi had served the colony still further, and his burdens had increased, too, for now he wrote, "An ulcer on his leg caused him much pain and necessitated him going about on horseback."^[17]

TWILIGHT (1610)

At the ripe old age of eighty, Chi completed what may have been his last professional deed: he acted as interpreter and notary during the trial of the so-called rebels of Tekax—the Maya men accused of inciting a riot and leading a revolt in that town during the February carnival of 1610. The intended target of the rioters had been the town's *batab*, don Pedro Xiu—a kinsman of Chi's. It must have been with a certain partisan satisfaction that Chi recorded on paper the damning testimony about—and official condemnation of—don Pedro's rival, don Fernando Uz, and his allies.^[18]

Yet it was not the Xiu dynasty that Chi represented, but rather the Spanish provincial authorities—colonists who had sought to manipulate political factionalism among the noble families of Tekax in the years before 1610 and then condemned its riotous expression as "rebellious." As Chi well knew, in the years after the final Spanish invasion, the Maya elite received confirmation of social status and local political office; men like Chi were allowed to serve as *batabob* of the *cahob*—governors of their own towns. But as the century drew to a close, the growing Spanish community increasingly asserted its claim to monopolies on regional authority and political (and religious) violence, including the right to interfere with politics in the *cahob* should it serve Spanish interests. Chi was intimately acquainted with this pattern of colonial assertion; indeed, he had worked for its architects on and off for half a century. His identity as an important instrument of the colonial Spanish legal system was thus as deeply rooted as his identity as a Xiu and a Maya nobleman.

Chi participated in another event in 1610 that also can be seen as symbolic of the changes that had accompanied his life's passage as well as of the hybrid nature of his own identity. In the spring of that year, he stood by the baptismal font in the cathedral of Mérida to witness the christening of his great-grandson. Perhaps he

sensed, as the baby was given Chi's own name of Gaspar Antonio, that the baptism would presage his own death before the baby would take his first steps and with that passing would die the last member of his family to remember the age before the Conquest—the violent years when Spaniards first marched along the forested trails of Chi's Maya ancestors.

The Yucatán into which Gaspar Antonio Chi was laid to rest was a very different world from the one into which he had been born eighty years earlier, or even the one in which he had striven with considerable success to build a career. His great-grandson's baptism was a symbol of such change. In addition to Chi's Christian names, the boy was also given the surname of his Spanish father, del Castillo. Thus the permanence of the Spanish presence in Yucatán was reflected not only in the baptismal ceremony and the building and city in which it took place, but also in the very blood of Chi's descendants.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Chi's life and career help explain how the Spanish Conquest was possible, and how does it illustrate the mechanisms whereby Spaniards established colonies in the Americas?
2. Could Spaniards have established colonies in places such as Yucatán without native interpreters?
3. Could one argue that Chi betrayed his own people? If not, why not, and how might one take issue with the terminology of the question?
4. Despite the dramatic changes in Yucatán between 1530 and 1610, were there also continuities? In what ways was Chi's adult life similar to the life he might have led had the Spaniards not invaded the peninsula in the sixteenth century?
5. What roles did the Franciscans and other religious officials play in the Spanish Conquest and colonization in the Americas, and how are such roles illustrated and reflected in Chi's biography?

NOTES

SUGGESTED READINGS

In addition to the primary sources cited in the notes, two previous Chi biographies contributed much to this chapter—a brief summary in my *Maya Conquistador* (Boston, 1998) that focuses on Chi's *relaciones* contributions, and a far more substantial and pioneering scholarly account by Frances Karttunen in *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick, 1994), which also places Chi in the context of other native interpreters, most notably La Malinche and Guaman Poma.

For more on the conquest of Yucatán and on Diego de Landa, see *Maya*

Conquistador and Inga Clendinnen's *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatán, 1517–1570* (Cambridge, 1987). John F. Chuchiak has also published over a dozen articles on Conquest-era Yucatan, including “Forgotten Allies: The Origins and Role of Native Mesoamerican Auxiliaries and Indios Conquistadores in the Conquest of Yucatán, 1526–1550,” in *Indian Conquistadors: Native Militaries in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, edited by Michel Oudijk and Laura Matthew, 122–97 (Norman, 2007), and “In Servitio Dei: Fray Diego de Landa, the Franciscan Order, and the Return of the Extirpation of Idolatry in the Colonial Diocese of Yucatán, 1573–1579,” in *The Americas* 61, no. 4 (April 2005): 611–45. Also of interest is Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, of which the Alfred Tozzer edition is the most useful (Cambridge, 1941), although one by William Gates (New York, 1978) is the easiest to find. On the Mexia case, see my “The Telling of Tales: Six Yucatec Maya Communities and Their Spanish Priest,” in *Colonial Lives: Documents on Latin American History, 1550–1850*, edited by Geoffrey Spurling and Richard Boyer (New York, 2000). On the Mayas after the Conquest, see my *The Maya World: Yucatec Culture and Society, 1550–1850* (Stanford, 1997) and William F. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (Berkeley, 2010). On other aspects of colonial Yucatec history, see the books and articles of Grant D. Jones and Robert W. Patch.

1. Taken from my translation of the annals in Restall, *Maya Conquistador* (Boston, 1998), 81.
2. Translation from Restall, *Maya Conquistador*, 149.
3. Archivo General de las Indias, Seville (hereafter AGI), *México* 105, 4b, f.2.
4. My translation from Diego de Landa, *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* [1566] (Mexico City, 1959), 31–32.
5. Fray Diego López de Cogolludo, *Historia de la provincia de Yucathan* [1654] (Madrid, 1688), 238 (Book 4, Chapter IV).
6. Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar, *Informe contra Idolorum Cultores del Obispado de Yucatán* [1639] (Madrid, 1892), reprinted in *El Alma Encantada: Anales del Museo Nacional de México* (Mexico City, 1987); quote my translation from p. 96.
7. AGI, *México* 105, 4a, f.3 et al.
8. Sánchez de Aguilar, *Informe*, 96.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Relaciones de Yucatán*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1898; Mexico City, 1983), 1:251.
11. Quote by Landa himself, who adds that the book burning “greatly amazed them [the Mayas] and caused them much pain”; my translation from Landa, *Relación*, 105.
12. From my translation of the whole letter in *Maya Conquistador*, 165–68.
13. There is an element of speculation here simply because—as described above—the *Relación* as we know it was not written as a book by Landa; it is thus possible that passages in his lost *Recopilación* mentioned Chi but were not copied into what became the *Relación*. See Matthew Restall and John F. Chuchiak, “A Reevaluation of the Authenticity of Fray Diego de Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*,” *Ethnohistory* 49, no. 1 (2001).
14. Chi's original 1582 *relación* went to Spain, was preserved in the AGI, and is reproduced in Alfred Tozzer, *Landa's Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (Cambridge, 1941), Appendix C; a copy stayed in Mérida and was acquired by López de Cogolludo, who worked it into his *Historia* of 1654 (Book 4, Chapters 3–4), 233–38.
15. Ralph L. Roys, *The Titles of Ebtun* (Washington, DC, 1933), 432; the Appendix contains the entire treaty record.
16. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, *Inquisición* 69, 5.
17. AGI, *México* 105, 4a/b (quotes my translations from 4a, f.3 and 4b, f.5).
18. AGI, *Escribanía* 305a.