

CHAPTER NINE

The Gods Return: Conquest and Conquest Society (1502–1610)

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The first Mexican empire of the sixteenth century (the reign of Moctezuma II, 1502–20)

As the sun set on the Basin of Mexico, a procession of priests moved out of the ceremonial center of Tenochtitlán towards the city's eastern causeway. Once on the bank of Lake Texcoco, they walked up the Huixachtlán mountain to the temple at its summit, where they were visible from almost anywhere in the Basin. All fires in the Aztec Empire had been extinguished. As the Fire Drill constellation (Orion's Belt) became visible in the evening sky, priests removed the heart of a specially selected sacrificial victim and placed a fire drill in his chest cavity. First sparks, then a small flame, became the first fire of the new 52-year calendar round. A great bonfire was created, turning bundles of sticks into torches that were taken down into the city to light fires in the temples—beginning with the two great temples to the deities of war and rain, then to lesser temples, to private homes, and out to the temples, towns, and villages of the empire.

The New Fire Ceremony was performed, in one form or another, for at least a thousand years. The one described above took place in 1507, and would prove to be the last. It exemplified how the Mexica appropriated old traditions in the valley for the religious and political purposes of perpetuating their economic control over some 60 city-states across half a million square kilometers in central and southern Mexico—the entity we call the Aztec Empire. It also promoted the authority and legitimacy of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin (or Moctezuma II), who became emperor in his mid-thirties, in 1502. History has been unkind to Moctezuma, who was portrayed after his death as ineffective, hesitant, and cowardly when faced with the Spanish invasion. In fact, he was one of the empire's most dynamic and effective leaders, waging a series of successful campaigns to expand the empire south into what are now Oaxaca, Chiapas, and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Likely, were it not for the arrival of Europeans, Moctezuma would have initiated the Aztec penetration of the Maya kingdoms—and a 1559 New Fire Ceremony might have symbolized Aztec control over most of what is today Mexico and Guatemala.¹

The 1559 ceremony was never held. Moctezuma's life and reign were cut short in 1520,

when he was murdered by Spaniards in the heart of Tenochtitlán in the middle of the bloody two-year war of the Spanish invasion; as a final indignity, and symbol of the distortion of his memory that would last centuries, the Spaniards claimed that he was stoned to death by his own people.

The second Mexican empire of the sixteenth century (the Spanish invasion, 1517–42)

The first Spanish–Aztec contact took place in April 1519, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Envoys sent by Moctezuma exchanged gifts with the leaders of a Spanish expedition from Cuba, led by Hernando Cortés. The roots of the Spanish arrival in Moctezuma’s domain lie in 1492 (the first trans-Atlantic voyage of Christopher Columbus, marking the European discovery of the Americas), in 1496–1515 (the decades of the Spanish conquest of the main islands of the Caribbean), and in 1517–18 (when two Spanish expeditions explored the coasts of Yucatán and Mexico, prompting Cuba’s governor to authorize the Cortés expedition).

The invasion proper began in 1519. By September, the Spaniards had fought the city-state of Tlaxcala to a stalemate and forged an alliance against the Mexica (long-time enemies of the Tlaxcalans). In October, Cortés led the Spaniards into the first atrocity of the war, the massacre of the population of the city of Cholula (subject to the Aztecs); in November the Spaniards entered Tenochtitlán, in a diplomatic encounter later spun by Cortés as Moctezuma’s formal surrender, although the Spaniards were virtually prisoners of the emperor in his capital city. Spanish–Mexica relations gradually deteriorated over the months that followed—with Cortés temporarily leaving the city to face a rival expedition from Cuba, a massacre of Mexica celebrants during a festival in the city center, and Moctezuma’s violent death. In July 1520 the Spanish–Tlaxcalan force fought their way out of the city at night, a bloody retreat that cost most of the invaders their lives; the survivors took refuge in Tlaxcala, and then slowly built an anti-Mexica alliance among the city-states of central Mexico, culminating in the siege of Tenochtitlán, laid at the end of 1520. With tens of thousands of warriors on both sides, the long siege reduced the capital city to rubble, and the last emperor, Cuauhtémoc, surrendered to Cortés in August 1521.²

The sweep of epidemic disease, especially contagious such as smallpox, and the effects of more than two years of warfare, caused massive mortality across central Mexico. The decapitated empire of the Aztecs collapsed in 1521. But although the Spanish Conquest is traditionally dated to that year, Spanish control over the region was minimal. The captured prize of Tenochtitlán—which in 1519 was possibly the largest city in the world outside China, and certainly one of the most spectacular—was a disease-ridden ruin. Most of Mesoamerica’s city-states remained intact, and some, such as Tlaxcala, were victorious. The long-term business of conquest, therefore, was just beginning in 1521; over the next two decades, it took three forms.

The first was to maintain the momentum of military expeditions. This was partially an

extension of the momentum that had driven the Spaniards across the Caribbean and into Mexico, and partially an appropriation of the Aztecs own methods of expansion. Just as successive Aztec emperors had consolidated their rule and expanded their empires with campaigns along trade routes to major city-states, so did Spanish conquest expeditions do the same in the 1520s and 1530s—using Mexica and other Mesoamerican warriors, sometimes the same men that had fought to expand the empire under Moctezuma. Even the Aztec invasion of Maya lands, only a possibility on the horizon in Moctezuma’s day, became a reality in the 1520s; warriors from various central cities invaded highland Guatemala in campaigns led by the Alvarado brothers, and fought in Yucatán in campaigns led by the Montejos (the latter a protracted war of conquest that led to the founding of a small colony in 1542 and did not end until 1547). After 1542, most military activity took place in the north, but pockets of independent native polities were left in the south for centuries, especially in the Maya area.

Those who accompanied Cortés in 1519, as well as those who came to join subsequent conquest campaigns in the 1520s and 1530s, were overwhelmingly middle-ranking men, from occupations and backgrounds below the high nobility but above the commoner masses. Conquistadors were typically not career soldiers but rather professionals drawn from an array of trades, including tailors, farriers (horse-shoers), carpenters, trumpeters, coopers, stonemasons, barbers, merchants, and physicians. In some cases, the artisans and professionals invested in the company were confident enough of its outcome to bring their wives; Isabel Rodríguez, the wife of Sebastian Rodríguez, reportedly helped to treat the wounded while traveling with Cortés and his men in central Mexico. But in most cases, Spanish women remained with the merchants in the Caribbean—or even back in Spain.

Creating New Spain (1524–72)

The second and third forms of conquest consolidation were primarily peaceful and featured a greater variety of Spanish settlers, including women, friars and clergy, and administrators with little or no conquest experience. These were: the forging of the colonial regime (an administrative apparatus stretching from the viceroy in Mexico City down to the native councils that governed the towns and villages of New Spain); and the spiritual conquest (the varied and protracted efforts to convert the native population to Christianity and reduce them to obedient subjects of the Church and Crown).³

Following typical patterns of Spanish expansion, the leadership of the conquistador company became that of the newly conquered region. Cortés became governor and captain general of New Spain. For over six years, Cortés’s position placed him at the apex of the nascent state; for four of those years Cuauhtémoc continued to rule the Mexica as a puppet-leader (until being accused of treason and hanged by Cortés while on campaign in Maya territory), but the Spaniards gradually took over the administration of the former empire of the Aztecs. In his capacity as governor, Cortés managed the distribution of native communities under the institution of *encomienda*—grants to Spanish conquistador-settlers of the labor and tribute from specific native towns.

Outside of Cortés's political authority was the municipal council—the *cabildo*—of Mexico City. Founded in 1524, the *cabildo* served as the only other major institution of Spanish government in New Spain. Following Iberian tradition, *cabildo* officers had wide latitude in managing the affairs of the city, including the distribution of house plots to individuals, arranging for the defense and security, and managing many aspects of the local economy. In the 1520s, the rubble of the former capital of Tenochtitlán was removed and used to build a small Spanish enclave in the center of the Basin of Mexico. The new city was built directly on top of the former palaces and temples of the Mexica. A small church was built facing the ruins of the pyramid-temples of the Mexica deities and government buildings were placed on top of the ruins of Moctezuma's palace. New house sites were laid out in a grid radiating from that central area and the conquistadors lived within several central blocks. Causeways and aqueducts were repaired to provide access and water to the new Spanish city.

Within several years, Charles V decided to increase royal control over the region. Formally recognized as the Kingdom of New Spain, he extended the traditional bureaucratic institutions of Spanish government to the region in an attempt to curb the immense power of Cortés and the *cabildo* of Mexico City. In 1527, the king created the *audiencia* of Mexico; in the Spanish political system, the *audiencia* served as a high court of justice with legislative power in its jurisdiction. The two judges, or *oidores*, of the first *audiencia* arrived in 1528 (four were appointed but two died before taking their posts); they were ordered to curb abuses against the indigenous population as well as to oversee more closely the existing leadership of the city and kingdom. This resulted in Cortés being ordered to return to Spain, and an investigation, or *visita*, was conducted into his tenure as governor by the *audiencia*. The first *audiencia* was not particularly successful in remedying the problems of native abuse or imposing strong royal control over the conquistador-led society developing in Mexico City. In particular, the president of the court and new head of the royal government, Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán, used his post to engage in new conquests to the north rather than oversee royal affairs in Mexico City.

Following the failures of the first *audiencia*, in 1530 Charles V appointed a new president and *oidores*. Unlike the initial court, all members of the second *audiencia* had trained in law and had experience as magistrates before their appointment in New Spain. For five years, the second *audiencia* worked more effectively to prevent the abuse of native communities as well as to impose greater oversight onto the new society. They restricted the authority of encomienda holders (*encomenderos*) and appointed royal magistrates—*corregidores* and *alcaldes mayores*—to oversee the administration of local justice. The infrastructure of the colony was improved through the creation of a royal road (albeit unpaved and dangerous) between Mexico City and Veracruz, and the foundation of a new Spanish city, Puebla de los Angeles. Far more than their predecessors, the second *audiencia* members worked to transform the colony from a frontier conquest zone into a full-fledged kingdom of the Spanish monarchy.

In 1535, Charles V fully realized the creation of the kingdom's secular government with the appointment of a viceroy, who served as the king's direct representative in the colony and had

sole executive authority over the kingdom's government. Ideally, the viceroy and the *audiencia* worked side-by-side, one as the judiciary, the other as executive. Nevertheless, both had some measure of legislative authority within their jurisdictions and could at times come into conflict over issues of governance. This system of checks and balances was imperfect, but it helped to reduce abuses of power by either the viceroy or the *oidores* of the high court. The first viceroy of Mexico, don Antonio de Mendoza, proved to be an excellent administrator and served for over fifteen years, the longest tenure ever of a Mexican viceroy. In conjunction with the high court, Mendoza imposed greater restrictions on conquest activities and the power of *encomenderos*. He also oversaw the foundation of the University of Mexico (the first in the Americas) and the creation of schools for elite indigenous children and *mestizos* (mixed-race offspring of Spaniards and Mesoamericans).

In his greatest accomplishment, he effectively implemented the New Laws during the 1540s. This series of royal orders sought to reduce the perpetuity of encomienda grants, extend royal control over native communities, and limit the enslavement and abuse of native groups. The expansive restrictions imposed by the legislation enflamed *encomenderos* and conquistadors. Mendoza recognized the danger of the New Laws and worked to impose them gradually. In particular, he adopted the legal practice of *obedezco pero no lo cumplo* (I obey but do not comply). In this way, he recognized the validity and merit of the royal mandate, but noted that he could not implement the order fully. For example, he imposed limits on the inheritance of encomiendas, but frequently granted exceptions to appease powerful elite. On the other hand, when encomienda grants lapsed he did not renew them but worked to incorporate them under royal control. Finally, he severely regulated new conquests and insured the proper administration of justice among the crown's indigenous subjects. The pragmatism shown by Mendoza helped set a standard among viceroys; the best of his successors benefited from his ability to negotiate effectively between royal authority and the powerful colonial elite generated by the conquest.

The creation of a Spanish administrative pyramid would not have been possible without the preservation of indigenous self-rule at the municipal level. The base of that pyramid consisted of the community elders—overwhelmingly men—who had governed Mesoamerican towns and villages for many centuries. Such officials became members of the new native cabildos, some with Spanish titles such as *alcalde* and *regidor*, some retaining native titles of office. From the Spanish viewpoint, these were Spanish-style cabildos administering *pueblos de indios* or *repúblicas de indígenas*. From the native viewpoint, these were representatives of the same families that had for centuries governed the local community—the *altepetl* of the Nahuas, the *ñuu* of the Mixtecs, and the *cah* of the Yucatec Maya.⁴

Above the cabildo were two offices crucial both to local government and to the peaceful functioning of New Spain. These were the governor and the notary. Mesoamerican governors were sometimes called *gobernador* or *cacique* (an Arawak term the Spaniards had appropriated in the Caribbean), sometimes they retained native titles (such as *tlatoani* or *batab*); on occasion they were appointed by Spanish officials or elected by their peers, but often held the position for life. The notary—a relatively minor post in Spanish bureaucracy—

was an important and prestigious position in Mesoamerican society. Alongside the cacique the local notary was the most important individual in most pueblos. They preserved last wills and testaments, recorded land sales, and wrote letters for the community. Together native governors and notaries were crucial actors in the administrative chain of the new kingdom; together they navigated their way through the dangerous political waters between their own native subjects and Spanish officials and settlers.

The structure of Spanish political control from the viceroy to the caciques fell into place relatively quickly as many indigenous groups recognized the strong continuities between the Spanish system and pre-Columbian traditions. In fact, within a surprisingly quick period of time, native communities began to celebrate their place within the new political order. In 1539, the viceroy and *audiencia* of Mexico City held a massive festival to honor Charles V's state visit to France. More than just a public display of royal grandeur, this pageant brought together Spaniards, Native Americans, and Africans in a massively symbolic portrayal of the colonial order. On the first day of pageantry, the main plaza of Mexico City was transformed into a forest and indigenous hunters dressed in traditional garb stalked and captured a multitude of local wildlife. Later in the day, a procession of over fifty Africans, probably both slave and free, dressed in fine bejeweled clothing, processed across the plaza led by their king and queen. After their entrance, the Africans skirmished with the Native Americans and joined the hunt. The next day saw an even grander display as the plaza was transformed into the island of Rhodes and Hernando Cortés himself took center-stage battling against the tireless assault of an Ottoman army. Spaniards and Native Americans both played parts in the epic battle between Christians and their Turkish foes. Although contemporary observers might not have seen beyond the pageantry and opulence of the festival, the events unfolding in the plaza both recreated and reaffirmed the new colonial order. While the performance emphasized Christians over Turks, the pageantry and its use of Spanish, African, and Native American performers reinforced the history of reconquest and conquest which had given birth to New Spain.

The first several decades of Spanish rule also saw the creation of religious institutions. Many conquest expeditions contained clerics working to spread the Catholic faith among native groups. Nevertheless, no formal missionary activity began in the kingdom until 1524, when the Franciscan order sent twelve friars to begin preaching among the native population. These friars were quickly followed by missionaries from other mendicant orders, especially the Dominicans and the Augustinians. Just as the king sought to impose a hierarchy of political power, as patron of the Catholic Church in his dominions, Charles V quickly moved to appoint ecclesiastical ministers to the kingdom and, in 1528, named Juan de Zumarraga, a Franciscan friar, Bishop of Mexico and the head of the secular church in the kingdom. During the sixteenth century, mendicant orders dominated the early conversion and ministration of indigenous communities. Following the establishment of a diocese (later raised to the level of archdiocese), Zumarraga and his successors began to appoint secular priests to administer parishes in New Spain.

The bishop of Mexico had sole authority to investigate and prosecute religious crimes of any Christian subject of the kingdom during the first half century of the kingdom. This included both

Spaniards and converted natives. Many clerics felt that the process of conversion among indigenous groups was occurring rapidly. Despite this optimism, the realities of conversion were not so clear. In June of 1539, Don Carlos Ometochtzin, a former student of the Franciscan *Colegio de Santa Cruz*, was accused of practicing idolatry, living as a bigamist, defaming the Christian faith, and plotting sedition against the Spanish government. Don Carlos' education with the Franciscans and his position as *tlatoani* of Texcoco made his apparent apostasy all the more shocking to Mexican cleric. Although his denunciation most likely came as a result of political rivalries among his fellow native nobles, Bishop Zumarraga's lengthy investigation uncovered indications that Don Carlos may have been continuing native traditions of plural marriage, keeping pre-Christian religious artifacts, and publically defaming new Spanish institutions of secular and religious authority. In late November, the inquisitors found Don Carlos guilty and handed him over to the viceroy to be executed. His death signaled major changes in the colony. For missionaries and clerics, it demonstrated how much more work was necessary in predicating the new faith; for Spanish authorities, it reminded them of the tenuous hold they held over native leaders; and, finally, for the natives of central Mexico, Don Carlos' execution reiterated the supremacy of the new Spanish king and the much diminished power of indigenous *tlatoani*.

The failures of conversion highlighted by the trial of Don Carlos led to a greater emphasis on understanding indigenous culture and religion. In particular, mendicant friars led by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún began to investigate indigenous beliefs in order to better predicate the new faith. A former teacher of Don Carlos, Sahagún began to collect and codify information concerning native religion to convert more accurately the native population. His efforts, along with those of other mendicants, helped the clergy to understand better native languages and culture in their efforts to destroy the old religion and spread the new faith.

Sahagún's approach, however, lost traction among policymakers. His masterwork, known to us as *The Florentine Codex*, was sent to back to Spain. Philip II would eventually send the document to Florence as wedding gift for Francesco de Medici and Joanna of Austria, a cousin of the Spanish monarch. Meanwhile, another violent incident in the spiritual conquest further fired debate over conversion methods. A small group of Franciscans, eventually led by Diego de Landa, had worked during the 1550s to spread the new faith among the Maya of Yucatán; their methods had emphasized education and preaching over violence. But in 1562, Landa, disheartened by evidence of recidivism among the local elite, implemented an anti-idolatry campaign in which thousands of native men and women were arrested and tortured (several hundred died).

Landa was removed and sent to Spain to explain his actions. But although the concentrated religious violence of 1562 would not be repeated again in the colonial period, Landa was exonerated, promoted, and returned to Yucatán as bishop. The destruction of Maya religious statues and hieroglyphic books continued. The Franciscans could no longer wield the power of the Spanish Inquisition against native peoples, but two new arms of the Holy Office were created. The Mexican Inquisition was founded in 1572 as the primary body charged with the investigation and persecution of religious crimes throughout New Spain. Inquisitors could not

investigate orthodoxy among native persons—reflecting lasting concerns that after half a century of spiritual conquest Christianity was still poorly understood by indigenous subjects—but bishops were still able to exercise inquisitorial authority over native communities. A separate body, the *Provisorato de Indios*, consisted of officials appointed by bishops to oversee indigenous predication and religious enforcement, and effectively functioned as an “Indian Inquisition.”

The long conquest of the north (1540–1606)

Just as the Aztecs had failed to extend their empire into the north of Mexico, so did Spaniards have little success in the decades following the fall of Tenochtitlán. With the assistance of Otomí warriors, some near-north settlements were founded in the 1530s. But most northern native groups—whom the Spaniards, like the Aztecs before them, lumped together as barbarians called “Chichimecas”—were uncooperative. The Chichimecas were highly heterogeneous, independent, and semi-sedentary; they lived as much from hunting and gathering as from agriculture, and were not accustomed to the structured, sedentary lifestyle of Spaniards, Nahuas, Maya groups, and other Mesoamericans.

In 1540 an alliance of some Chichimecas fortified Mixtón and other mountain towns in the north. Although their “revolt” was crushed by Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza in the Mixtón War of 1541–42, native resistance to Spanish incursion in the north only intensified in subsequent decades. The Chichimeca War of 1550–1606 cost tens of thousands of lives. It was prompted by the Spanish discovery of silver—and the subsequent founding of mining settlements and then colonial towns—in the Zacatecas region in 1546. Further silver lodes were discovered in the 1550s and 1560s, and by the time San Luís Potosí was established in 1590, the north was the most lucrative region in New Spain.

After 1590 colonial officials and friars adopted a new policy, based on peace and trade, in a successful effort to reduce hostilities. This peace-by-purchase plan gradually brought the long-drawn conquest of the north into the phase of peaceful colonial consolidation. With the 1595 invasion and subsequent founding of a troubled colony in New Mexico, the conquest frontier would shift into the far north.⁵

The colonial crucible (1519–1610)

From the outset, New Spain was a pluralistic society. In 1521, the vast bulk of the population was indigenous, divided among various ethnic and linguistic groups. Native Mesoamericans remained the majority through the sixteenth century (indeed, into the modern period), and the imposition of Spanish colonial rule was a protracted, incomplete process in much of New Spain. Yet the Spanish presence was permanent, and the steady social and economic integration of Spaniards and Mesoamericans meant that by the end of the century a return to the pre-Columbian past was impossible. At the same time, New Spain was not Spain; in social

terms, it was new, unique, complex, multifaceted, and continually evolving.

This was partly because New Spain was forged not simply through the encounter of Spaniards and Mesoamericans; the third factor, too often ignored in the telling of Mexican history, consisted of a sizeable number of Africans—overwhelmingly black West Africans, both slave and free, who began arriving as early as 1519. In general, Spaniards and their African auxiliaries lived apart from native society. Nevertheless, from the conquest onward interethnic unions produced individuals of mixed ancestry typically labeled *mestizos* or *mulatos*: those born of Spaniards and native persons were termed ‘mestizos’, while individuals of African-European and African-indigenous unions were both categorized as ‘mulatos’; both terms were used with increasing flexibility and according to regional variations. Towards the end of the century, a third term, *castizo*, developed in order to describe individuals born of unions between Spaniards and mestizos. Contemporary observers referred to the categories of difference, *español*, *indio*, *negro*, *mestizo*, and *mulato*, as *géneros de gente* (‘types of people’). Later in the colonial period, the word *casta* (caste) was appropriated from the Portuguese experience in India as a term to describe the Spanish American categories of difference.⁶

The legal separation of communities in New Spain into *repúblicas* of natives and Spaniards, each with their own *cabildos*, did not include political space for Afro-Mexicans. But during the sixteenth century most communities in the kingdom, including *pueblos de indios*, came to have residents drawn from many of the *géneros* of colonial society. In particular, unions between elite indigenous families and conquistador-settlers led to the rise of mestizos as important figures in indigenous politics. The use of African slaves as intermediaries between *encomenderos* and indigenous communities facilitated the rapid growth of Afro-indigenous *mulatos* in many parts of New Spain. Urban areas were likewise highly pluralistic. Although most Spanish settlements were built around a Spanish-dominated center, Africans and native persons lived in many Spanish households as servants and slaves. Most labor, both urban and rural, was done by Africans, Afro-Mexicans, or native persons. This residential and occupational overlap facilitated continued interethnic mixing, through formal marriages between *género* groups as well as informal unions.

Throughout the century, royal law sought to more fully separate the *géneros de gente* by privileging Spaniards and imposing restrictions on non-Spanish persons. Both natives and individuals of African descent were required to pay tribute to the Spanish crown, and neither group was allowed to carry weapons, ride on horseback, or wear sumptuous clothing—including silk or precious jewelry. Mestizos saw some limitations as well. They were not allowed to become *encomenderos* unless they were legitimate children of Spaniards nor were they allowed to hold many bureaucratic offices or become priests. Mestizos and *indios principales* (indigenous elites) were allowed to dress more sumptuously than other groups and could be given licenses to carry swords and ride on horseback. Moreover, all non-indigenous persons, including Spaniards, were barred from living in *pueblos de indios*. Although these restrictions were seen as a means of separating the diverse *géneros de gente* from each other, the legal restrictions were rarely enforceable. Patterns of settlement, employment, and

individual mobility insured the persistence of interethnic unions that helped continue the growth of a heterogeneous society throughout the colonial period.

This chapter has an end date of 1610 not because the processes described above ended then; they were all ongoing—invasion and protracted conquest, gradual institutionalization of colonial rule, new Catholicisms forged by campaigns of religious conversion, social pluralism, and increased socio-racial complexity. We chose 1610 in order to use that year in the life of a Maya man in Spanish Yucatán as a symbol of the changes that had occurred during his lifetime.

Gaspar Antonio Chi was a Maya nobleman, born around 1530 in pre-colonial Yucatán. As a boy he witnessed the Spanish invasions, and was converted and educated by the first Franciscans in the peninsula. He later recalled nostalgically how prosperous and peaceful life had been before the invasions, and how years of war brought disease and discord; he saw much of it with his own eyes, including the violence of the summer of 1562, when he served as a translator and notary for the Franciscans. Such was his role for most of his adult life, working for the early bishops (such as Diego de Landa), acting as Interpreter General for the colonial administration, or serving as notary or as governor of a Maya town.

His last year was probably 1610. That spring, he stood by the font in the cathedral of the provincial capital to witness the christening of his great-grandson. The baby was given the name Gaspar Antonio, just as Chi had been given it as a young man, but his patronym was del Castillo; the baby's father was a Spaniard, and he was thus a mestizo of mixed conquistador and Maya noble ancestry. That same spring, Chi acted as interpreter and notary during the trial of a group of Maya men who had tried to depose and replace their town governor. This governor, a Maya noble and distant relative of Chi's, had been elected by the elders of the town but also had the support of the Spanish authorities; the coup attempt, carried out with violence, was deemed a rebellion and its leaders were executed.⁷

The long life of Gaspar Antonio Chi—like the trial of native elders that he helped record, and the christening of his mestizo great-grandson, both in his final spring—are full of the threads of change and continuity, syncretism and parallelism, that characterize greater Mexico's dramatic sixteenth-century history.

Notes

¹ The scholarship on pre-conquest Mesoamerican history is drawn from a variety of primary sources, pre-colonial and colonial. Studies of such sources—both indigenous documents and Spanish documents based on indigenous informants—include Walden Browne's *Sahagún and the Transition to Modernity*, Carrasco and Sessions' *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest: An Interpretive Journey through the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*, Lori Diel's *The Tira de Tepechpan: Negotiating Place under Aztec and Spanish Rule*, James Lockhart's *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, Matthew Restall's *Maya Conquistador*, and Susan Schroeder's *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco*.

² This description is based on both Spanish and indigenous descriptions of the conquest

process. For works which explore the complexity of the conquest period see: Florine Asselbergs' *Conquered Conquistadors: The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan: A Nahua Vision of the Conquest of Guatemala*, Serge Gruzinski's *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16th-18th Centuries*, Robert Haskett's *Visions of Paradise: Primordial Titles and Mesoamerican History in Cuernavaca*, Matthew and Oudjik's edited volume *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, Restall's *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, Camilla Townsend's *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico*, and Stephanie Wood's *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico*. For further historiographical discussion, see Restall's essay on "The New Conquest History" in the online journal, *History Compass*.

3 For scholarship on the political and religious development of the nascent kingdom, see: Pilar Arregui Zamorano's *La Audiencia de México Según los Visitadores (Siglos XVI y XVII)*, Louis Burkhart's *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*, Bernardo García Martínez's *El Marquesado del Valle: Tres Siglos de Régimen Señorial en Nueva España*, Susan Kellogg's *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500–1700*, Michael Riley's *Fernando Cortes and the Marquesado in Morelos, 1522–1547: A Case Study in the Socioeconomic Development of Sixteenth-Century Mexico*, Ethelia Ruiz Medrano's *Reshaping New Spain: Government and Private Interests in the Colonial Bureaucracy, 1531–1550*, and John F. Schwaller's *Origins of Church Wealth in Mexico: Ecclesiastical Revenues and Church Finances, 1523–1600*.

4 Much of the scholarship on indigenous local government comes from native language documentation produced by native communities themselves. For scholarship on indigenous community during the colonial period, see: Sarah Cline's *Colonial Culhuacan, 1580–1600: A Social History of an Aztec Town*, Haskett's *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca*, Rebecca Horn's *Postconquest Coyoacan: Nahua-Spanish Relations in Central Mexico, 1519–1650*, Lockhart's *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries*, Michel Oudijk's *Historiography of the Bènzàa: The Postclassic and Early Colonial Periods (1000–1600 A.D.)*, Restall's *The Maya World: Yucatec Culture and Society, 1550–1850*, and Kevin Terraciano's *The Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca: Ñudzahui History, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries*. These studies are all part of a larger school of scholarship that is usually called "The New Philology"; its Wikipedia article cites relevant essays by Lockhart and Restall.

5 The items in our bibliography that bear on the Spanish conquests in the north are Marc Simmons' *The Last Conquistador* and Susan Deeds' *Defiance and Deference*, as well as the essays by Ida Altman and Bret Blosser in Matthew and Oudijk's *Indian Conquistadors* volume.

6 For works that explore the complexity of colonial racial categories, see: Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán's *La Población Negra de México: Estudio Etnohistórico*, Herman Bennett's *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness*,

1570–1640, Patrick Carroll’s *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development*, John Chance’s *Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca*, Laura Lewis’ *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico*, María Elena Martínez’s *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*, Frank T. Proctor’s “*Damned Notions of Liberty*”: *Slavery, Culture, and Power in Colonial Mexico*, Restall’s *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatán*, Robert C. Schwaller’s “Defining Difference in Early New Spain,” Ben Vinson’s *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico*, and Nicole Von Germeten’s *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans*. For a bibliographic essay on the topic, see Ben Vinson’s contribution to *Oxford Bibliographies Online*.

[Z](#) Chi’s life is explored in Inga Clendinnen’s *Ambivalent Conquests*, Frances Karttunen’s *Between Worlds*, and Matthew Restall’s *Maya Conquistador*.

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