

TEXT AND CONTEXT IN THE  
INTERPRETATION OF AZTEC  
CULTURE AND SOCIETY

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- ECONOMIES AND POLITICS IN THE AZTEC REALM.* Edited by Mary G. Hodge and Michael E. Smith. (Albany: Institute of Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York, 1994. Pp. 478. \$32.00 paper.)
- TRES ESTUDIOS SOBRE EL SISTEMA TRIBUTARIO DE LOS MEXICANOS.* By Munehiro Kobayashi, translated by Keiko Yoneda. (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1993. Pp. 171. \$16.00 paper.)
- THEY ARE COMING . . . : THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO.* By José López Portillo y Pacheco, translated by Beatrice Berler. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1992. Pp. 375. \$34.50 cloth.)
- OF THE MANNERS OF SPEAKING THAT THE OLD ONES HAD: THE METAPHORS OF ANDRES DE OLMOS IN THE TULAL MANUSCRIPT.* By Judith M. Maxwell and Craig A. Hanson. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992. Pp. 438. \$40.00 cloth.)
- THE DARKER SIDE OF THE RENAISSANCE: LITERACY, TERRITORIALITY, AND COLONIZATION.* By Walter D. Mignolo. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995. Pp. 426. \$39.50 cloth.)
- MIXTECA-PUEBLA: DISCOVERIES AND RESEARCH IN MESOAMERICAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY.* Edited by H. B. Nicholson and Eloise Quiñones Keber. (Culver City, Calif.: Labyrinthos, 1994. Pp. 248. \$55.00 paper.)
- CODEX TELLERIANO-REMENSIS: RITUAL, DIVINATION, AND HISTORY IN A PICTORIAL AZTEC MANUSCRIPT.* By Eloise Quiñones Keber. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Pp. 365. \$75.00 cloth.)
- ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AT AZTEC-PERIOD RURAL SITES IN MORELOS, MEXICO: VOLUME 1, EXCAVATIONS AND ARCHITECTURE.* By Michael E. Smith. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh, 1992. Pp. 425. \$32.00 paper.)
- LIFE AND LABOR IN ANCIENT MEXICO: THE BRIEF AND SUMMARY RELATION OF THE LORDS OF NEW SPAIN.* By Alonso de Zorita, translated by Benjamin Keen. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. Pp. 328. \$14.95 paper. Cloth edition originally published by Rutgers University Press.)

It was not such a long time ago that the Late Postclassic period in Central Mexican prehistory occupied a backwater in the intellectual currents of Mesoamerican archaeology, even though the cultural markers of the Aztec world had been delineated by Mexico's archaeological pioneers early on. Studies of changing pottery and figurine styles initiated in the 1930s and 1940s by George Vaillant, Eduardo Noguera, José Franco, and others enabled identification of late pre-Hispanic sites in the Basin of Mexico, and the monumental architecture of several peripheral Aztec centers was excavated and restored. But with the ruined capital of Tenochtitlan submerged beneath the nearly five hundred years of accumulating urban sprawl that has become modern Mexico City, most archaeologists were content to derive their information about Aztec society from colonial descriptions provided by Spanish or indigenous chroniclers and historians. Meanwhile, prehistorians fixed their attention on processes of state and empire formation at work in earlier times in Mesoamerica, when the native written record was a less substantial source of data and civilized life's cycles of growth and decline passed uninterrupted by cataclysmic cultural encounters. Yet despite their lack of archaeological attention, Aztec institutions and beliefs have retained a powerful presence in Mesoamerican studies. They have provided cultural models to help fill the uncomfortable gap between excavated material remains and the once-living society in question, even when that society was far removed in time and space from the thirteenth-century Basin of Mexico.

For a small group of archaeologists and ethnohistorians, the idealized but often inconsistent sixteenth-century recollections of protohistoric Mexican society failed to resonate either with the practical issues of social and economic life in this urbanized environment or with its documented social and ethnic diversity. In the 1960s and early 1970s, anthropologists and historians like Edward Calnek, Pedro Carrasco, Charles Gibson, and Frederic Hicks began to study more intently the broad range of postconquest documentary materials, teasing out operational realities and regional variations within the Mexica social, political, and economic systems. Meanwhile, the structural and ideological principles underlying Aztec institutions were being probed more deeply in the works of Alfredo López Austin, Rudolf van Zantwijk, Georges Baudot, and others. At the same time, new archaeological data on Late Postclassic communities in the Basin of Mexico appeared from the comprehensive and diachronic settlement pattern studies initiated by William Sanders. These were extended via long-term investigations by Jeffrey Parsons, Richard Blanton, and Thomas Charlton. The nature of these data, based largely on the location, density, and areal extent of occupational and architectural remains, did not readily translate into the institutional patterns gleaned from documentary sources. They too, however, provided important independent testimony to the diversity of community forms on the eve of the Spanish Conquest.

By the time the discovery and exploration of Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor had made international news in the late 1970s, Aztec studies were already benefiting from a less-public groundswell of research from ethnohistorians and archaeologists. Scholars combed the colonial documentary record, now armed with broader Nahuatl-language skills that led to heightened emphasis on reading indigenous texts. Archaeologists applied the discipline's renewed interest in household and community studies to excavating Aztec-period sites previously located through surface surveys, producing for the first time a substantial material record of proto-historic social and economic life. The resulting flow of publications relating to late Central Mexican culture and political economy has increased steadily over the last fifteen years, and the nine books under review here represent well the range and quality of these investigations.

During this same period, archaeology and historiography have undergone intense disciplinary self-examinations occasioned by a tide of postmodern criticism directed at the positivist foundations of previous research. Without delving into these lengthy theoretical and analytical debates, I would draw attention here to what strike me as two of the most enduring contributions of the current epistemological upheaval to the investigation of the past, particularly the anthropological investigation of past peoples. Historical and literary studies have inspired the application of a hermeneutical approach to the reading of documentary sources. In this approach, texts do not stand on their own as more or less accurate representations of facts but are examined as well in terms of what they may reveal about the author's unique perspective as an individual and a member of a specific social group fixed in a particular historical context. Second, the "postprocessual movement" in archaeology has fueled a new wariness about archaeology's traditionally materialist and evolutionary orientation, especially the plausibility of theoretical models advocated by the so-called New Archaeologists, who dominated the discipline in the 1970s. To replace such models and their postulates of universal behavioral correlates for patterning in the archaeological record, Ian Hodder (among others) has argued that the proper domain of archaeological investigation is the search for the culturally specific meanings that conditioned human behavior and its material products.<sup>1</sup>

In this examination of recent Aztec historiography and archaeology, I will attempt to highlight not only what recent studies have added to scholarly understanding of late pre-Hispanic and contact-period Central Mexico but also how and to what effect this converging focus on the

1. Ian Hodder's theoretical position has been articulated in many recent works. See especially the influential British archaeologist's essay "Postprocessual Archaeology" in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, vol. 8, edited by Michael B. Schiffer (New York: Academic Press, 1985), 1–26; or his book, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

semiotics of historical texts and archaeological contexts has influenced the structure of research on the Aztecs. The disciplinary boundary is especially permeable for this particular grouping of works, which includes edited volumes with contributions from both archaeologists and ethnohistorians (editor Eloise Quiñones Keber has books in both lists). For the purposes of this discussion, I will divide the nine books into textually based and archaeologically based studies. What the prospects may be for bridging these disciplinary boundaries through a common semiotic approach is a question reserved for the conclusion of the essay.

*Recent Textual Studies*

Walter Mignolo's *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* is not concerned solely with elucidating the nature of Aztec thought and culture. It is an appropriate place to begin my survey insofar as the author is a prominent analyst of the intellectual legacies that shaped New World colonial encounters and the written texts they produced.<sup>2</sup> In this new study, Mignolo draws together a number of issues he has been exploring that deal with the meaning of writing in early modern Spain and in Amerindian civilizations. Among the latter, the protohistoric Nahuatl discursive tradition figures prominently in Mignolo's formulation. The central theme of his book is that the asymmetrical power relationships created by the Spanish Conquest and the ensuing dominance of Western literacy and literary genres over indigenous models resulted in what he terms "the colonization of memory." This phenomenon is exemplified by a variety of cultural hybrids ranging from the heavily editorialized Nahuatl descriptions of pre-Hispanic beliefs and practices in Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* to the native historical chronicles produced by indigenous writers like Chimalpahin, Tezómoc, and Ixtlilxóchitl. Mignolo draws other examples of this process from Maya and Quechua sources. His second theme explores somewhat more sketchily how European colonization, coinciding as it did with the development of maps based on geometric projections, resulted in the hybridization of concepts of space, as witnessed in Amerindian maps and *pinturas* (pictorial documents) of the sixteenth century.

As Mignolo points out, while missionary education promoted literacy as a means of Christianizing the native population, Amerindians themselves used the European script "to stabilize their past, to adapt themselves to the present, to transmit their own traditions to future gen-

2. See, for example, such recent works as Mignolo's "Signs and Their Transmission: The Question of the Book in the New World," in *Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*, edited by Elizabeth Boone and Walter Mignolo (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 220–70; and his response in these pages to Patricia Seed's distinction, "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse: Cultural Critique or Academic Colonialism?" *LARR* 28, no. 3 (1993):120–34.

erations and, in summary, to resist the colonization of language" (p. 207). Although these issues of literacy, language, and cultural interaction are hardly new to ethnohistorians of the colonial period,<sup>3</sup> Mignolo adds depth to conventional understandings of European beliefs in the power of the written word by tracing the classical and Renaissance foundations of Spanish literacy philosophy and literary models as they were applied in the New World. With a subtlety and insight that will be appreciated by Aztec specialists, Mignolo illuminates how these models shaped and informed Sahagún's encyclopedia of Nahuatl culture. He notes the paradox that the "*Florentine Codex* helped to save the known in Mexica culture from oblivion at the same time that it repressed (although not suppressed) Mexica ways of knowing" (p. 199). This observation allows Mignolo to rely heavily on Sahagún's texts in illuminating Nahuatl discursive practices, even as they are assumed to embody the domination of Western literacy.

One might wish that these and other "hybrid texts" discussed more briefly in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* had been subjected to a deeper reading as products of constrained cultural exchanges in particular social contexts. But Mignolo states at the outset that he is interested more in "exploring new ways of thinking about what we know" than in "accumulat[ing] new knowledge under old ways of thinking" (p. xv). Although he acknowledges a debt to French ethnohistorian Serge Gruzinski, Mignolo does not cite several other prominent anthropologists and historians whose work is similarly concerned with the dual cultural meanings embedded in colonial-era Nahuatl and Spanish documents, despite the fact that Central Mexican texts constitute his primary frame of reference.<sup>4</sup> These omissions make it more difficult to evaluate exactly how new Mignolo's approach to the literature of colonization really is.

Most Nahuatl specialists are less concerned than Mignolo with the formal paradigms of philology or theories of intercultural symbolic interaction. The programmatic orientation of *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* may indeed frustrate readers unschooled in the jargon of literary criti-

3. Scholars like James Lockhart have for some time embraced the "new philology" in charting the social significance of language change in colonial Nahuatl texts. See especially his recent books, *The Nahuatl after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992); and *Nahuatl and Spaniards: Postconquest Central Mexican History and Philology* (Stanford and Los Angeles: Stanford University Press and UCLA Latin American Center, 1991).

4. In addition to Lockhart, other students of colonial Nahuatl hybrid texts whose works would have provided interesting comparisons are John Bierhorst, *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985); Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); Susan Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexica History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); and Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991).

cism. An introductory chapter distinguishing among new philology, mono-topic and pluritopic hermeneutics, colonial discourse, and colonial semi-osis weighs heavily on the language and tone of the volume as a whole. But for those willing to engage Mignolo's analytical framework, his perspective on the colonial semiotic exchanges that produced the narrative and pictorial records on which Aztec historiography has depended is insightful and rewarding.

The *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* is just such a product of this early colonial Nahua-Spanish semiotic dialogue, one that uniquely preserves an extraordinary layering of individual voices. Apparently produced by Mexica scribes under the supervision of one of its commentators, the Dominican Fray Pedro de los Ríos, this mid-sixteenth-century manuscript combines three indigenous pictorial genres along with Nahuatl and Spanish glosses and lengthier Spanish commentaries. Several flawed reproductions have previously been published. But this beautifully produced facsimile from the University of Texas Press, extensively annotated by Eloise Quiñones Keber, is the definitive edition that will at last make an important work widely available to Mesoamericanists.

The codex consists of three pictorial sections: a calendar of the eighteen twenty-day ceremonies or *veintenas* of the solar year; a *tonalamatl* or divination handbook based on the twenty thirteen-day periods or *trecenas* of the ritual year; and a pictorial chronicle of Aztec history. Taken on their own, they contain much useful information about pre-Columbian ritual and chronology that may be compared with other calendrical and historical sources. What makes this codex such a significant reflection of colonial semiotic exchanges is the document's multivocality. Quiñones Keber highlights this dimension by distinguishing the contributions of two different native artists and six different commentators, two of whom may have been bilingual Indian or mestizo scribes. As she notes in her comprehensive analysis of the manuscript (Part II of the book), the layering of explanatory texts demonstrates how the Spanish annotators "assumed an active interpretive role beyond that of merely transcribing received information" (p. 126). Their comments, particularly in the calendrical ritual and divination sections, reflect their personal understandings of Nahua belief and practice as well as their individual responses to these practices. In the final historical section of the manuscript, the Spanish voices intrude less forcefully. But even without the heavy hand of religious authority resting on their shoulders, the two main bilingual annotators often failed to comprehend fully the pictorial images and glyphs, which had been copied from earlier Nahua prototypes. Providing graphic testimony to the cultural interchange of colonization, the codex's historical chronicle continued to document another three decades beyond the conquest. Its scribe incorporated Spanish religious and secular figures (often identified with hieroglyphic names) into

the established pattern of noting each year's major political events, celestial anomalies, and natural disasters.

Another extraordinary product of the semiotic dialogue of the early contact period is the *Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana* compiled in 1547 by Fray Andrés de Olmos, a sensitive ethnographer less widely appreciated than his fellow Franciscan Sahagún. In this earliest grammar of the Nahuatl language, Olmos included a section on a discourse that he termed "metaphorical speech." He considered it to be a type of courtly speech like the well-known *huehuetlatolli* ("ancient wisdom" or "speech of the elders"). In *Of the Manners of Speaking That the Old Ones Had: The Metaphors of Andrés de Olmos in the TULAL Manuscript*, Judith Maxwell and Craig Hanson offer a detailed transcription, an English translation, a literary interpretation, and a photographic reproduction of the 52 metaphors appearing in one late-sixteenth-century manuscript copy of Olmos's *Arte* (his original paleograph was lost). Maxwell and Hanson's volume is not the first publication of the TULAL manuscript (as the copy housed in the Tulane University Latin American Library is known). In 1985 René Acuña completed a project begun many years earlier by the late Thelma Sullivan by publishing a facsimile of the TULAL, along with his study of the six surviving *Arte* manuscripts and Sullivan's transcription and Spanish translation of the *vocabulario* section. Maxwell and Hanson consulted an earlier and apparently complete copy of the metaphors chapter of the *Arte* found in the Library of Congress, as well as a published transcript of another partial version at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in developing a canonical version of that portion of the Olmos text in the TULAL. It is regrettable that the authors chose not to expand their detailed study of the smaller TULAL text to include a comparison of themes found in the complete sample of 102 metaphorical phrases in the Library of Congress version.

The "metaphors" were placed in the *Arte* to provide Olmos's fellow missionaries with imagery and rhetorical models for communicating Catholic precepts. They consist of a series of Spanish phrases dealing primarily with family and political authority, proper conduct, and proper speech, each followed by related Nahuatl phrases elaborating the theme. Maxwell and Hanson note in their informative introduction that it was not possible to reconstruct the exact process by which the text was created. Thus it is unclear whether these specific Spanish phrases were given to Olmos's informants for elaboration or whether a separate list of themes was translated into Nahuatl imagery, with the preserved Spanish text constituting a simplified gloss of the indigenous metaphors. However they were derived, the Nahuatl texts often display figurative meanings at odds with the Christianizing purposes of the document. Maxwell and Hanson believe that "the Metaphors are an instance of 'missionary Nahuatl,' that although the Metaphors conceivably served to proselytize,

they also served to preserve indigenous cultural patterns" (p. 30). Consequently, Maxwell and Hanson have provided English translations that emphasize the potentially subversive indigenous pattern in the Nahuatl text.

Although ethnohistorians or semioticians might wish for a fuller discussion of the content and imagery of these phrases, Maxwell and Hanson provide the tools for proceeding with further textual analysis. Their literal renderings into English trace a complex four-step process of translation that should be of great interest to linguists and Nahuatl specialists, along with the Nahuatl-English morpheme concordance filling the second half of the book. A separate section of lexical and grammatical annotations deepens the textual readings, and the authors' graceful literary interpretations convey in English a measure of the eloquence of courtly Nahuatl.

Regarding such studies of colonial discourse, Mignolo has argued that what he terms "the locus of enunciation"—the intellectual and cultural position of the author—is an important component of the analysis itself. In the case of *They Are Coming . . . : The Conquest of Mexico* (originally published in Mexico in 1987), it may well be that the personal and political position of author José López Portillo y Pacheco as past president of Mexico will be the most interesting aspect of the book for scholars. Illustrated with his own sketches of historical scenes, this capable translation by Beatrice Berler makes available to an English-speaking general audience López Portillo's dramatic retelling of the Spanish Conquest. But the work's overreliance on invented dialogue and its focus on the figures of Moteczuma, Cortés, Malinche, and Cuauhtemoc as archetypal protagonists makes *They Are Coming* a work of fictionalized history, however closely it may have been based on the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography. In weaving traditional anecdotes into a readable but most conventional chronological tale, the book does not take into consideration recent scholarly judgment that many events recounted in the postconquest chronicles were post hoc rationalizations by defeated Nahuas or self-aggrandizing inventions of Spanish chroniclers.

Moreover, although López Portillo claims to have included the Aztec perspective in his book, it is a viewpoint reduced to a cataclysmic cosmology and cyclical view of time and history. Readers learn little in this account of how Aztec social and political institutions framed interactions among individuals, social groups, and political entities before and during the conquest. These institutions were the focus of Alonso de Zorita's *Breve y sumaria relación de los señores de la Nueva España*, written by the respected former *oidor* of the Audiencia de México sometime in the late 1560s as a belated response to a royal questionnaire concerning Indian tribute and labor practices. A new paperback edition of Benjamin Keen's 1963 translation, entitled *Life and Labor in Ancient Mexico: The Brief and*



*Summary Relation of the Lords of New Spain*, makes Zorita's long-valued work accessible once again to students of Aztec culture. Keen has added to his earlier introduction an informative preface that situates Zorita's *relación* and the conclusions concerning Aztec sociopolitical organization drawn from it in the context of the last thirty years of ethnohistorical research.

With just ten years of residence in Mexico, Zorita derived most of his information about pre-Columbian practices from the writings of his friends in religious orders and from the oral recollections and pictorial histories supplied by Mexican elders. He knew firsthand the circumstances to which the native population had been reduced by the mid-sixteenth century, and his idealization of ancient institutions and customs was informed by the nature of his sources and his intent to prove the unworkability of the existing system of tribute and *encomienda*. Other chroniclers described social classes or the structure of tribute paid to the Aztec Empire, but only Zorita commented in any depth on the Nahua residential landholding units called *calpulli*. For that reason, his account has been a primary reference for attempts at reconstructing Aztec community structure and land tenure. Yet Zorita himself acknowledged that his sources often contradicted one another or information from other towns or provinces because of great variations in social practice among ethnically diverse populations and the difficulty of deriving information from native books.

Keen provides a helpful summary of research conducted since 1963 by Pedro Carrasco, Ursula Dyckerhoff, Hans Prem, Luis Reyes, Rik Hoekstra, and Frederic Hicks on early-colonial Nahua social structure and land tenure. Their cumulative efforts have revealed tremendous variations in the degree to which agricultural land was held collectively by commoner kin groups or farmed by serf-like peasants controlled by noble families. Following Hicks, Keen concludes that this variability reflects actual differences in the historical development of different regions, particularly regarding the degree of social stratification and state power attained by each region prior to the Spanish Conquest. Keen believes that Zorita's primary ethnographic source was based in the less rigidly stratified Puebla-Tlaxcala region. Understanding the more encompassing social context helps readers of this fine translation make better use of Zorita's essential if clearly polemical work.

The last of the textually based accounts to be considered here is *Tres estudios sobre el sistema tributario de los mexicas*, a lucid Spanish translation by Keiko Yoneda of three articles previously published in Japan by accomplished ethnohistorian Munehiro Kobayashi. The author has made no substantive changes in these articles (the most recent of which was published in 1984), but his new introduction to the volume serves as an analytical orientation for the work as a whole. Footnoted comments by

the author and the translator also provide some direct links with more recent scholarship. Removed from the fashions of Western academia, Kobayashi eschews any postmodern preoccupations in considering more straightforwardly what colonial texts may reveal about the economic organization of the Aztec polity. His primary focus is on three well-studied documents: the hybrid pictorial manuscripts known as the *Matrícula de tributos* and the *Codex Mendoza* and the mid-sixteenth-century Spanish document entitled *Información sobre los tributos que los indios pagaban a Moctezuma*. Kobayashi believes that all of them were based at least partly on a hypothesized original tribute list, much like the one described by Hernán Cortés in his second letter to Carlos V. This reconstructed *Padrón de tributos de Moctezuma* (recorded around 1515 according to Kobayashi) included subsequent amendments reflecting political and economic changes until shortly before the conquest. But it was not a complete list of goods received by the last Aztec ruler in that it apparently did not include some regular and special-occasion classes of tribute, such as gifts from diplomatic allies, taxes paid by the residents of Tenochtitlan, and tribute brought in for ceremonial occasions. Kobayashi is nonetheless able to use the reconstructed *Padrón* as his basis for illuminating three fundamental issues surrounding the political economy of the Aztec state. These are the supply of food to Tenochtitlan, the impact of Aztec expansion on the political and territorial organization of the Basin of Mexico, and the role played by tribute cloth and clothing in maintaining Aztec social stratification.

What unites the three studies is Kobayashi's underlying theoretical position. He rejects the culture-ecological orientation long prevailing in the United States, with its emphasis on environmental limitations, agricultural technology, and population pressure, as an inadequate basis for explaining the growth and sustenance of Tenochtitlan. While he focuses on the movement of material goods into the capital, his real interest lies in the political and ideological structures that shaped the late Aztec economy. This interest is manifested more in the substance and methodology of his investigations than in explicit theoretical generalizations. By carefully examining the pictographic record of the documents copied from the reconstructed *Padrón*, along with other codices and sixteenth-century sources, Kobayashi finds patterns of co-occurrence and exclusion that he analyzes systematically to determine their underlying structural principles.

In his study of Tenochtitlan's food supply, Kobayashi recalculates the amount of tribute in maize that actually reached the city, the size of the resident population, and the likely contribution made by alternate supply mechanisms, such as the market distribution of surplus production from the estates of nobles or *calpulli* lands. Differing with Jeffrey Parsons on key demographic and political assumptions, Kobayashi con-

cludes that regional mechanisms for supplying the market were severely inadequate for meeting the needs of the city's burgeoning population. In his view, it was the empire's tributary income that assured the subsistence requirements of the dominant class and its client groups, who made up the majority of urban residents. Kobayashi's second essay disentangles the sequence of administrative and territorial changes occasioned in three provinces in the Basin of Mexico following the rise of Aztec political authority in the fifteenth century. He suggests that Tenochtitlan's suzerainty affected the autonomy of its allies more deeply than has been previously acknowledged. The last of the studies returns to the *Padrón de tributos de Moctezuma* to compare in detail the type and quantity of textiles, warrior costumes, and armaments brought into the capital via tribute with the costume-related goods acquired by the *pochteca* traders. By considering the sumptuary rules governing the social usage of such materials and the diplomatic and ceremonial occasions on which these and other items were redistributed, Kobayashi finds that the ruler both manifested and consolidated the established social hierarchy in bestowing valued symbol-laden garments on members of designated social groups.

### *Archaeological Contexts*

Kobayashi's concern with the role and meaning of material goods in Aztec society makes his work of direct interest to archaeologists, for whom the material remains of community life constitute the primary database. Among Western archaeologists, however, the study of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican political economies has long been rooted in the adaptationist model that Kobayashi rejects. This recent sampling of three archaeological studies, most of them firmly grounded in the processualist school, suggests how far the prevailing paradigm has taken studies of Aztec culture.

Michael Smith's recently published monograph, *Archaeological Research at Aztec-Period Rural Sites in Morelos, Mexico: Volume I, Excavations and Architecture*, exemplifies the kind of detailed attention to the social and economic implications of the archaeological record that has been so productive in prehistoric community studies in recent years. This volume reports on excavations conducted in 1985–1986 at three Late Postclassic sites in western Morelos: Capilco, a simple village without elite or ceremonial architecture; Cuexcomate, a larger town of perhaps two hundred houses by the time of Spanish contact; and Site 3, a small rural farmstead. Although outside the Aztec core in the Basin of Mexico, this Nahuatl-speaking rural area felt the pressures of competing city-state expansion, having been incorporated into the local Cuauhnahuac tributary state less than one hundred years before the latter's absorption into the Aztec Empire in 1438 A.D. Smith's program of mapping and subsurface excava-

tion, facilitated by the broad preservation of foundation walls and other architectural features still visible on the ground surface, was designed to examine the nature of social and economic structures in this rural area and the impact of Aztec imperialism on provincial life.

Smith's detailed report on field operations is the first of two volumes from the Morelos investigations scheduled to appear in the fully bilingual Latin American archaeology series published by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh. Volume one was ably translated into Spanish by Ana María Boza-Arlotti, and the book's accessibility for both Spanish- and English-speaking scholars sets a welcome standard. The second volume will include studies of pottery and other artifacts, inferences from which inform the interpretative sections of this publication. Two appendices, one on the phosphate analysis of household sediments by Scott O'Mack and another on modern adobe house construction by Smith, Osvaldo Sterpone, and Cynthia Heath-Smith, complete the present work.

Despite the somewhat technical nature of a site report like this one, the culture historical issues that Smith addresses and the project's methodological approach will interest many Mesoamericanists. With some fifty residential and nonresidential structures excavated by the Post-classic Morelos Project, Smith has a large and statistically representative sample of household architecture and artifactual residue for characterizing social and economic variability within and between these Late Post-classic communities. Researchers will have to wait for publication of the second volume to have full access to the detailed data from which he infers patterns of change over time. Such inferences require an extremely fine-grained ceramic chronology for assigning each household a phase or phases of occupation based on its associated artifacts. But as Smith notes, the Morelos chronology is handicapped by the paucity of distinctive markers for the critical later period of Aztec rule.

Smith states his preference for examining the archaeological data first in terms of "explicit models and hypotheses . . . derived principally from comparative work on peasant societies and agrarian states in order to stimulate a broader consideration of the data" (p. 5). Yet his most productive explanations of observed archaeological patterning at these Morelos sites seem to come from colonial ethnohistorical sources and investigations. Particularly relevant are Pedro Carrasco's studies of early-sixteenth-century tribute records from Molotla (another Morelos community), already mentioned briefly for their discordance with Zorita's model of the *calpulli*. Like Carrasco, Smith finds that the *calpulli*-sized residential zone at Cuexcomate demonstrates considerable differences in wealth and status among households and even within the small patio clusters that represent joint family residences. Moreover, the prominence of a large, palace-like elite residence dating to the earliest occupation of the

site belies Zorita's model of the egalitarian corporate status of such farming communities and strongly suggests the hand of a state-level authority in colonizing this marginal agricultural land. To test whether or not this archaeological pattern is (as Hicks has deduced for the sixteenth-century documentary record) a product of regional differences in city-state centralization, it would be intriguing to compare architectural and artifactual status markers at Cuexcomate with those from another Aztec-period community, such as the comparably sized Teotihuacan Valley site of Cihuateopan, excavated by Susan Evans.<sup>5</sup>

*Economies and Politics in the Aztec Realm* presents its readers with a wealth of comparative material. Editors Mary Hodge and Michael Smith have assembled a diverse sampling of seventeen contributions from scholars working on the political economy in the Aztec period for this important tome, largely the product of a symposium they organized for the 1991 International Congress of Americanists. Space constraints preclude comprehensive examination of the arguments presented by all contributors, but a brief description of the many interesting articles can suggest the scope and direction of research trends in Late Postclassic archaeology. Hodge and Smith's informative introduction provides a context for the various contributions by summarizing current thinking and recent research on problems of archaeological chronology and the demographic, political, and economic features of Central Mexican city-states.

All but six of the contributions are based mostly on archaeological data, and one of the remaining six is an ethnoarchaeological study by Jeffrey Parsons of a vanishing technique of lakeside salt production. Yet even the contributors most wedded to the study of ceramic remains and other artifactual material incorporate documentary evidence into their analyses with new and often rewarding results. For example, Hodge's 1984 monograph relied heavily on documentary sources in constructing a political history for each city-state in the preconquest Basin of Mexico.<sup>6</sup> In this volume, she addresses more directly the comparability of textually derived data with the archaeological record produced by intensive settlement-pattern surveys. Hodge's analysis of demographic and territorial sizes of city-states based on combined lines of evidence demonstrates that political ranking correlated strongly with the size of the population that each *señorio* could control but not with the amount of territory it encompassed. The inference to be drawn is that access to labor rather than to land was the principal basis of political power in Aztec times. A similarly fruitful comparison of archaeological and documentary data is

5. See *Excavations at Cihuateopan, an Aztec Village in the Teotihuacan Valley*, edited by Susan R. Evans, Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology no. 36 (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University, 1988).

6. Mary G. Hodge, *Aztec City-States*, Memoirs of the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, no. 18 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984).

the contribution coauthored by Leah Minc, Hodge, and James Blackman. Their essay evaluates alternative models of pre-imperial market systems in the valley and finds that neither a regionwide nor a solar market system matches the archaeological distribution of certain diagnostic black-on-orange ceramic types, for which likely production centers were determined independently by neutron-activation analysis. As a third alternative, the coauthors propose that individual city-state boundaries were fairly permeable economically, while larger interpolity alliances appear to have provided the primary limitations on the exchange of pottery. In an avowedly postprocessual analysis, Elizabeth Brumfiel, Tamara Salcedo, and David Schafer attempt to relate changing frequencies in fairly small samples of obsidian lip ornaments at the Otomí site of Xaltocan to textually identified ethnic markers.

New archaeological data from outside the Basin of Mexico are reported in several contributions. Helen Pollard and Thomas Vogel discuss utilization of obsidian sources in the independent Tarascan state. Patricia Plunket and Gabriela Uruñuela examine archaeological evidence for the "Flowery War" practiced between the Aztecs and their Puebla enemies to obtain battlefield captives for human sacrifice. Michael Smith and Cynthia Heath-Smith review excavation data from the Capilco and Cuexcomate sites. Deborah Nichols, Cynthia Otis Charlton, and Thomas Charlton incorporate data from ongoing work at Otumba in the eastern Teotihuacan Valley into each of their reports on craft production at this conquered city-state and the variable consequences of Aztec political control on local economic production. José Luís de Rojas explores the ethnohistorical record for the province of Tepeapulco to consider Aztec political and economic strategies there, as does Manlio Barbosa-Cano for the Oaxaca region, where the Aztec garrison of Huaxyacac has yet to be documented archaeologically. Frances Berdan takes a broader view of provinces conquered by the Aztec state and draws a useful distinction between tributary provinces and strategic provinces, with the latter functioning mainly to insulate tribute-paying provinces from hostile neighbors.

Barbara Williams's contribution to *Economies and Polities in the Aztec Realm* examines the correspondence between a Texcoco residential ward's cadastral maps and the dispersed settlement zone delineated by Parsons's Texcoco survey in that same area. Her account proves to be an important cautionary tale for archaeologists. The acephalous site of Tepetlaoztoc presented such a distinctive community form that it was identified as an area of tenant farmer or *mayerque* settlement by William Sanders, Jeffrey Parsons, and Robert Santley. According to Williams, however, the sixteenth-century written sources indicate that the zone was occupied by a ward of commoner households, which maintained most of its agricultural land in garden plots near their houses. Inferring complex social and economic patterns from limited archaeological data sets remains a

problematic process for Mesoamericanists, as can be seen here by the divergent models for the organization and sponsorship of craft production developed by Nichols and Otis Charlton from the same workshop distribution patterns at Otumba. Following a similarly fragile deductive thread, Smith and Heath-Smith assume that the broad distribution of imported goods among their sample of Morelos rural households demonstrates that commoners and nobles alike enjoyed equal and independent access to regional markets where such goods were presumably purchased in return for agricultural or craft surpluses. Unfortunately, late pre-Hispanic redistributive mechanisms have received scant attention as an alternative to market exchange in this and most other archaeological models since the work of Karl Polanyi.

To what degree redistributive institutions played a part in the lives of most Nahua households is an important but elusive subject. As Kobayashi points out in *Tres estudios sobre el sistema tributario de los mexicas*, available documentary sources offer few clues about non-elite consumer behavior. In an important contribution to *Economies and Politics in the Aztec Realm* tracing the role of cloth in the political economy of the Aztec state, Frederic Hicks helps to unlock some key aspects of this question with ethnographic and ethnohistorical data by focusing on the technology and social organization of textile production. He calculates that peasant household-production strategies would have given each family enough time (eighteen weeks) to produce about twenty-seven lengths of plain cloth above the amount woven to meet tribute requirements and household needs. This potential surplus production, if realized, would have been enough to buy outside goods and services, especially cacao beans required for tribute, although lengths of cloth would have been too valuable to trade directly for ordinary household supplies. Despite its importance in peasant production, Hicks concludes that cloth exchange was mostly handled by members of the elite, who were the main recipients of tribute cloth and the major patrons of the market system. Before attributing the distribution of goods too readily to free-market consumerism, archaeologists should heed Hicks's caution that "the markets of ancient Mexico may have had more in common with upscale department stores than with the peasant markets of Mesoamerica today" (p. 104).

The final book to be considered here, *Mixteca-Puebla: Discoveries and Research in Mesoamerican Art and Archaeology*, edited by H. B. Nicholson and Eloise Quiñones Keber, differs in scope and content from the Hodge and Smith volume. Also deriving from a 1991 symposium at the International Congress of Americanists, its fifteen contributions are more narrowly focused. Most are in English, some are in Spanish, and all feature brief abstracts in the other language. They explore a discrete range of artifacts that have been taken as representative of the "Mixteca-Puebla style" manifested in the vivid iconographic polychrome pottery of

the Middle to Late Postclassic periods in the Oaxaca and Puebla-Tlaxcala regions and in the surviving Mixtec and Borgia group of pre-Columbian pictorial codices presumed to belong to the same geographical area. The Mixteca-Puebla concept was originally defined by George Vaillant in the late 1930s, reformulated by Nicholson in a 1960 essay, and has been reconsidered periodically in the ensuing years. Its durability, despite many definitional difficulties, can be traced to its embrace of the material products of what seems to have been a broadly unifying aesthetic of religious ideas and symbols. The widespread appeal of this aesthetic to elites as far away as the Yucatán Peninsula led Donald Robertson to dub it “the International Style.” Lacking any apparent military or political force to account for its distribution, the Mixteca-Puebla horizon contrasts starkly with the coercive presence of the partly contemporary Aztec Empire.

Among the contributions to *Mixteca-Puebla*, three report on new discoveries of Mixteca-Puebla-related art from archaeological excavations. In the Cuicatlan Cañada corridor between Oaxaca and Puebla, Ernesto González Licón and Lourdes Márquez Morfín have excavated a cave site with mosaic plaques depicting complex ritual scenes. At Ocotelulco, Tlaxcala, José Eduardo Contreras Martínez recovered a remarkable Late Postclassic polychrome wall painting. And at Tehuacán Viejo, Puebla, Edward Sisson and Gerald Lilly discovered another late mural, also related to the Codex Borgia in style and content. Many of the remaining contributions offer detailed studies of particular artifact classes. The codex-style pottery is the focus of chronological and typological studies by Sergio Suárez Cruz, Geoffrey McCafferty, and Michael Lind, each of whom follows different temporal and stylistic distinctions in analyzing ceramics from the critical site of Cholula. An article coauthored by Hector Neff, Ronald Bishop, Edward Sisson, Michael Glascock, and Penny Sisson summarizes the results of neutron-activation studies of Mixteca-Puebla-style pottery from a number of sites, demonstrating that multiple centers produced these distinctive Late Postclassic vessels.

Individual essays by Nicholson, Quiñones Keber, and Bryan Dennis explore issues related more directly to the codices themselves. Nicholson discusses the symbolism of a common motif shared by Cholula pottery and the Borgia group codices. Quiñones Keber analyzes issues pertaining to the comparison of ceramic motifs and particular codices. Dennis tackles the problematic provenance of the Codex Borgia. The remaining contributions to *Mixteca-Puebla* are more synthetic in nature, with John Paddock, Noemí Castillo Tejero, Marcus Winter, and Jane Stevenson Day each proposing a role for specific linguistic or ethnic groups in the development or spread of traits archaeologically identified as Mixteca-Puebla. John Pohl and Bruce Byland take the broadest look at cultural processes behind the expansion of these traits in their essay, which views the Mixteca-Puebla style as serving a language-neutral means of facilitat-



ing the exchange of information between regional elites in multiethnic polities.

Significant new archaeological discoveries and analytical findings notwithstanding, many questions remain about the meaning of this art to its producers and those who embraced it. Two essays are to be commended for establishing useful structural parameters for future research. Quiñones Keber lucidly delineates how problematic comparisons are between the abundant codex-style pottery and the small surviving corpus of screenfold codices, each one of which exhibits great stylistic individuality. As she points out, the two media differ greatly in such formal properties as the use of color, the importance of a frame line, and the relationship between images and background. Quiñones Keber concludes that whatever iconographic similarities they share are less likely to derive from a common school of painting than from a common core of shared beliefs or a shared context in which the artifacts were used.

Michael Lind's contribution to *Mixteca-Puebla* exemplifies just how productive a systematic exploration of iconography in both media can be. He compares imagery depicted in two contemporaneous phases of regional manufacture of polychrome ceramics, one from Cholula and the other from sites in the Mixteca Alta and the Valley of Oaxaca. Lind isolates motif categories and vessel forms statistically characteristic of each and finds that they reflect distinctive patterns of religious ritual documented as well in the pictorial codices attributed to the Mixteca or Cholula region. Cholula, an important sacred city with an elaborate priestly bureaucracy, produced pottery emphasizing themes of temple-based bloodletting and sacrifice, even when these themes were displayed on fine household utensils. Mixtec polychrome pottery, in contrast, reflected peculiarly Mixtec mythological themes and rituals and served primarily as fancy vessels for drinking pulque or chocolate. The codices reveal that these vessels were displayed at weddings and other important gatherings of the political elite ruling the many small late-pre-Hispanic kingdoms in what is now Oaxaca.

### *Final Considerations*

The study of late Central Mexican culture and society has reached newly refined levels of understanding in recent years, as the current selection of publications demonstrates so well. Ongoing archaeological fieldwork employing the highest standards of data retrieval has progressed hand in hand with advanced analytical methods to develop extraordinarily nuanced pictures of the social, economic, and religious structures that shaped Mesoamerica's protohistoric civilizations. These heterogeneous regional data have helped correct the normative elite-centered view of the past presented in the much-studied texts of six-

teenth-century Spanish ethnography. At the same time, scholars' ability to peel apart the layers of Nahua and European cultural filters in these texts has benefited from historiographic and philological approaches that probe the written record more deeply. Somewhat ironically, acknowledging these cherished chronicles, pinturas, and linguistic guides as hybrid products of an intercultural dialogue specific to the colonial period, rather than assuming them to be pristine reflections of the pre-Columbian past, has reinforced our dependence on archaeology for comprehending Aztec society. Despite the archaeological record's limitations as a partially preserved source of material information, this record accrued from all sectors of society to become an invaluable, broadly based reflection of late pre-Hispanic life.

Where Mesoamericanists have incorporated ethnohistorical and archaeological data in mutually reinforcing sets, as have several of the studies of settlement pattern and socioeconomic organization reviewed here, the results have been extremely productive and significant for both disciplines. To the extent that archaeologists continue to depend on "fill-in-the-blank" behavioral analogies drawn from disconnected peoples and places or to rely on assumed general rules of behavior in societies of comparable sociopolitical organization to make the leap from artifact patterns to behavioral rules, ethnohistorians will find their work of little interest. As Ian Hodder has reminded us, all behavior—even material behavior—is meaningfully constituted within specific cultural systems. The trick for archaeologists, as Michael Lind has ably demonstrated here without the crutch of postmodernist jargon, is to seek multiple patterns in the material record that reveal the unique cultural values and practices that produced it.