

Nahua Pictorial Genealogies

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A PHOTOGRAPH published in Antonio Peñafiel's *Ciudades Coloniales* (1909) captures a collection of colonial material culture on display in Tlaxcala around the beginning of the twentieth century (Figure 1).¹ In a somewhat haphazard arrangement, we see a royal coat of arms, Hernando Cortés' standard, early municipal titles of Tlaxcala, some clothing of the ruler of Tizatla, and in the upper right corner—the single largest object on display—a painted genealogy, a large lienzo (painted cloth) that is identified in the photograph's caption as the *Genealogía de Xicotencatl*. This torn cloth is now known as *Una Familia de Tepeticpac*, a sixteenth-century painting from Tepeticpac, Tlaxcala.² After it was displayed a century ago, the lienzo was repaired or at least stabilized, and today, *Una Familia* is found in the *Bóveda de Códices*, the cavernous and guarded storage vault in the basement of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City.

My own experience with Nahua genealogies—of which this painting of a family from Tepeticpac is one—began with the study of examples of the pictorial genre found now in the *Bóveda de Códices*. In my search for a compelling dissertation topic,³ I was first directed to a few published reproductions of the codices in the *Bóveda* by my graduate adviser Cecelia Klein, whose own investigations of gender issues in pre- and postconquest art of central Mexico led her to notice a relative preponderance of depictions of women in such manuscripts. I therefore saw my first genealogies in the *Colección de Códices* (1964), a catalog of pictorial manuscripts at the Anthropology Museum compiled by John Glass. Included among these were, for instance, the *Genealogía de Cotitzin y Zozahuic* (Figure 2),⁴ and the *Genealogía de Tetlamaca y Tlametzin*,⁵ among a number of other pictorials that were formerly part of the eighteenth-century collection of Lorenzo Boturini. After perusing the black and white photographs in the catalog, I soon realized that further investigations would need to begin with my viewing the original material. After some carefully scripted queries and well placed letters of request, I found myself retracing what I imagined to be Glass' own steps several decades earlier. Led down beneath the salas of the Museo Nacional to the vault of codices, I finally saw in person the indigenous manuscripts that would help form the basis for my dissertation. With an armed guard at hand, I pulled on my latex gloves, pulled out my ruler and magnifying glass, and, under the supervision of a member of the museum's *Dirección de Códices*, took my first focused look at a few choice examples of pictorial genealogies painted by Nahuatl speakers in the sixteenth century.

Immediately clear was that the physical quality of the genealogical codices is quite varied. *Una Familia de Tepeticpac*, for instance, is a cotton lienzo, whereas *Genealogía de Zolín*⁶ is a painting on native bark paper. The majority of

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¹Peñafiel 1909, Plate III, p. 198.

²Museo Nacional de Antropología (hereafter MNA) 35-27. See Glass 1964, pls. 28–29.

³See Cosentino 2002.

⁴MNA 35-84.

⁵MNA 35-83. See Glass 1964, pl. 88.

⁶MNA 35-43. See Glass 1964, pl. 43.

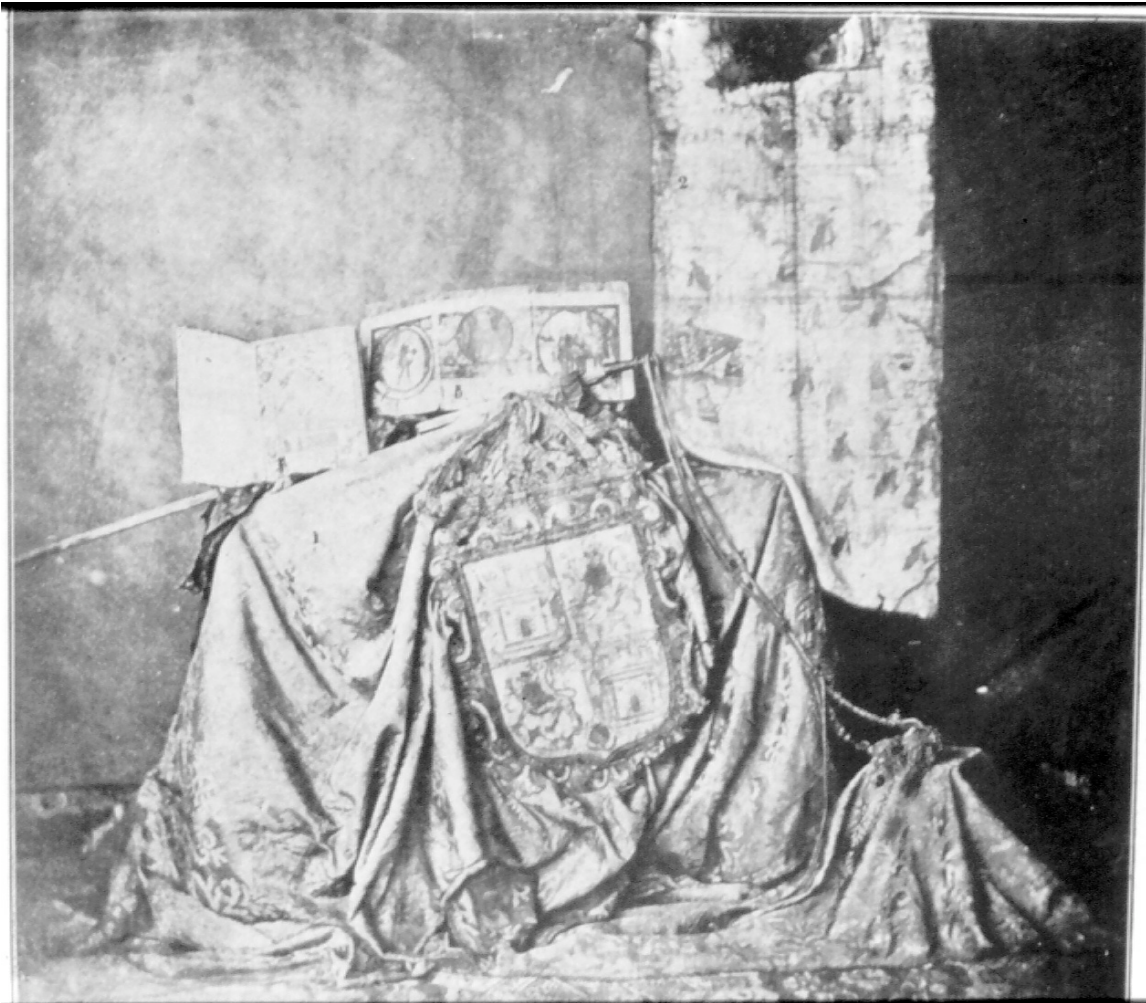


Figure 1. Display in the Municipio de Tlaxcala, first decade of the 20th century. After Peñafiel 1909.

examples, however, use European paper; the *Bóveda* genealogies are generally colorful, and some are grand in scale. Although some are now in tatters or at least fragmented, the works appear originally to have been polished compositions with careful applications of lines and pigment and are, now anyway, well maintained. In this respect, I began to suspect that the examples found in the *Bóveda* were not necessarily representative of the larger corpus of the genre of Nahuatl pictorial genealogies. This suspicion was indeed confirmed as my investigations began to extend beyond the walls of the museum.

Work by scholars such as H.B. Nicholson, Ronald Spores, and Pedro Carrasco indicated that much more genealogical material was extant. Another major set of sources for the genealogical pictorial documents I was interested in were the archives—local, state, national, and international alike. These archival genealogies tend to be smaller, less colorful, and less elaborate than the examples that



Figure 2. Genealogía de Cotitzin y Zozahuic, MNA 35-84. Courtesy of the MNA.

early collectors like Boturini found visually compelling, and which later ended up in museums. Of such mundane pictorials found in archives, Robert Barlow went so far as to declare, “they are often ugly.”⁷ On this point I disagree!

Genealogía de Citlalpopoca,⁸ now in the archive of the Bibliothèque Natio-

⁷Barlow 1950, p. 108. Lockhart (1992, p. 7) identifies a similar earlier reluctance to study mundane textual material in Nahuatl.

⁸BNP Ms. 104, also known as Genealogy of one of the four governors of Tlaxcala or Genealogy and properties of descendants of Citlalpopocatzin. See Reyes G. 1993, f. iv.

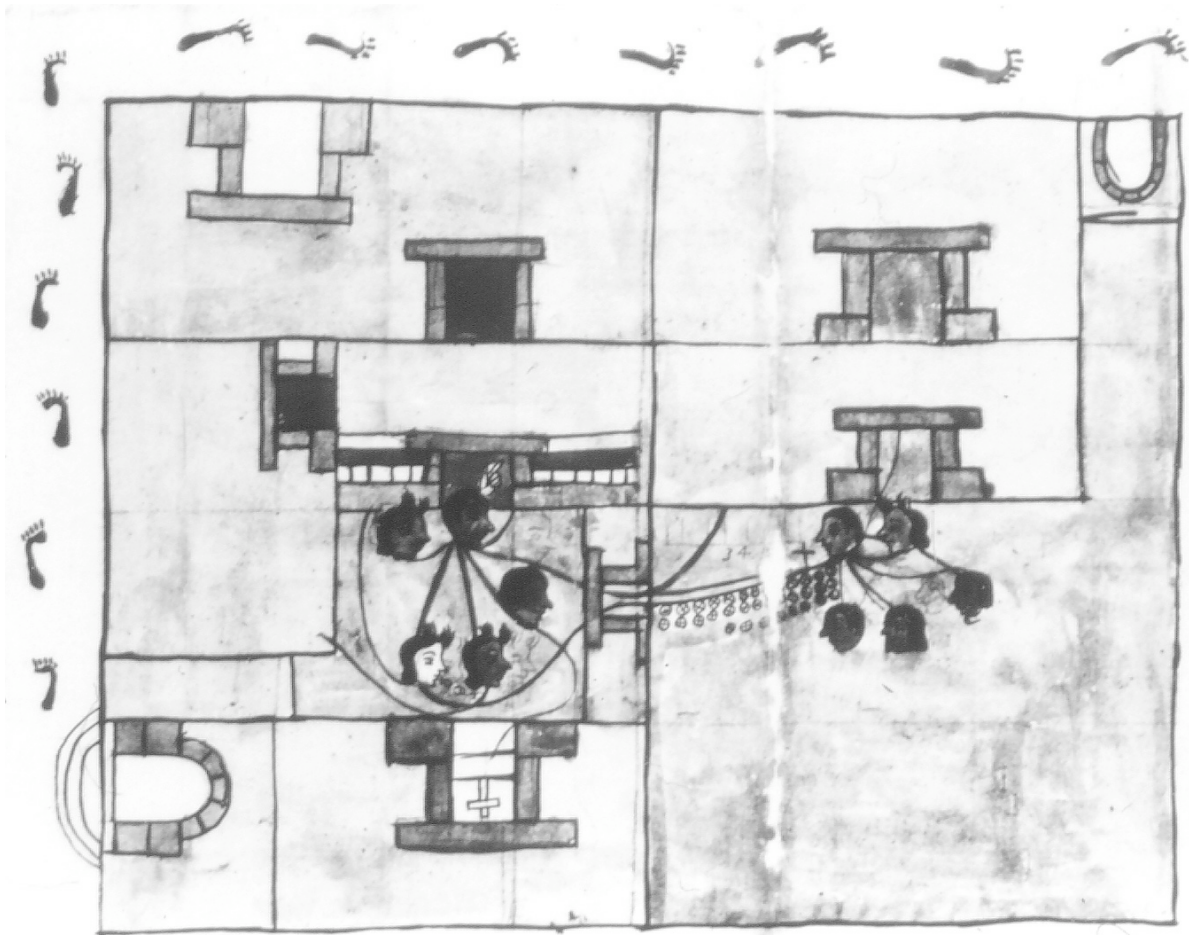


Figure 3. Intestados, vol. 301, exp. 2 (1653), Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico. Courtesy of the AGT.

nale de Paris, and a genealogy from Intestados (Figure 3),⁹ at the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City, demonstrate the simple black line drawings that often characterize genealogies found in archives. What such genealogies may lack in visual extravagance they make up for tenfold by the fact that the bulk are found in the company of textual material in both Spanish and Nahuatl. Written documents that I have found in conjunction with such pictorials offer specific instances of how, where and why the genealogies were created and put to use.

One of the most exciting recent developments not only in the study of these genealogies but for all kinds of native documentation—written and pictorial—is the material that is turning up in the particular kind of local archive known as the *fiscalía*. The *fiscalía* archive started in colonial times and was a collection overseen by the fiscal, a native liaison between the church and the community. Today local communities carefully hold under lock and key the remaining *fiscalías*. I am privy to information on them only in Tlaxcala and only through the tireless work of Luis Reyes García, who, with his team of students and colleagues, sought in recent years to review and document the contents of a large number of

⁹AGN, Intestados 301, exp. 2.

local collections from across the state. These fiscalías are very difficult to gain access to—Carmen Aguilera recounted to me the arm-twisting and negotiation she as a woman had to go through to see a document that she researched in the community fiscalía of Tepeticpac, Tlaxcala. I have not personally gained access to any material from these local archives (often just boxes of papers), but I benefited from the generosity of Reyes García who, as a highly respected citizen of Tlaxcala and a Nahuatl speaker, had more cachet in those circles than most. In 1997, he completed a preliminary record of his discoveries in an unpublished volume tentatively titled “Las fiscalías de Tlaxcala y sus archivos.” The tome notes the existence of thousands of documents and demonstrates the presence of an enormous body of native-language records, some dating to as early as the sixteenth century. Among the many genres of historical material found in such archives are a number of genealogies that have been recovered in recent years. Luis Reyes graciously provided pictures and slides of several of such finds; examples include *Genealogía de San Gregorio Metepec* (Figure 4)¹⁰ and *Genealogía de Chimalpa* from San Mateo Huexoyucan, Panotla (Figure 5),¹¹ both of which were re-found in the 1990s, when they were photocopied and photographed under primitive circumstances. These two examples remain in the fiscalías in which Reyes García located them after centuries of neglect.

The examples illustrated demonstrate some of the most visually salient features of the Nahuatl genealogies. Despite variations in the material used to produce the surface on which the representation would be made (rag, bark, canvas), the representations are fairly consistent in presenting conventionalized representations of figures, usually in full body profile, but also sometimes just their heads. When the subjects are pictured in full figure, the artist seizes the opportunity to distinguish gender according to rigid precontact convention. Typically, male figures are depicted with their knees drawn up to their chests, with their torsos and legs covered by a cloak (*tilmatli*). Men are often seated on stools (*icpalli*). In contrast, women are frequently seated directly on the ground, with their legs tucked beneath them, and may wear a classic tunic or long blouse (Sp. *huipil*, N. *huipilli*). Although the figures usually sit stiffly staring in one direction or the other, the occasional man or woman is shown raising a hand and apparently pointing in some kind of expressive gesture (e.g., Figures 4 & 5). Significantly, the figures are linked by usually simple ligatures, suggesting the nature of their relationships to one another. In many examples, allusions to land and space are incorporated into the drawings and paintings, sometimes in the form of a tree, a path, or a mountain (e.g., Figures 4 & 7). Plots of land may be rendered as simple squares alongside the string of stylized figures (e.g., Figure 6). In the case of the examples from Tlaxcala, a male progenitor generally sits in a stylized house structure positioned at the top of the lineage. Written documentation produced in conjunction with Nahuatl genealogies from across Central Mexico reveals that in most cases the genealogies were designed to demonstrate

¹⁰This unpublished, uncataloged pictorial is located in the Fiscalía de San Gregorio Metepec, Tlaxcala.

¹¹Also unpublished and uncataloged, this pictorial is located in the Fiscalía de San Mateo Huexoyucan, Tlaxcala.



Figure 5. Genealogía de Chimalpa. Fiscalía de San Mateo Huexoyucan, Panotla. Image courtesy of Luis Reyes Garcia.

relationships that could help resolve questions of ownership of land either in the context of property disputes or for issues of inheritance after someone's death.

Potential uses for research

A large number of indigenous pictorial genealogies from across the Nahuatl-speaking area of central Mexico are extant; these visual documents offer an excellent opportunity to make observations about regional variations based on comparisons of both quantity and quality of relevant examples from different areas in central Mexico. A working catalog that I have compiled includes almost eighty genealogical pictorials from a broad spectrum of Nahuatl-speaking communities, made during the first century of Spanish rule. The stipulations I set included the requirement that the pictorial be overwhelmingly genealogical in content; there was a clear need to limit here, since so many pictorial types merge. My no doubt incomplete compilation includes at this point approximately 10 from the central basin (like Santa Maria Copulco, San Cristobal Ecatepec) plus 8 from Tetzaco, 9 from the southern part of the basin (Xochimilco, Culhuacan, Copilco, Coyoacan), 9 from Puebla, 5 from Guerrero, 2 from Morelos, and 1 from the Toluca Valley (excluding several later Techialoyans that include their own distinctive genealogies).

But by far the greatest number of sixteenth-century genealogical manuscripts come from the Tlaxcala region, a fact that began to drive my dissertation. My catalog included 30 entries for Tlaxcala, which is to say more than a third of the examples that I recorded for the entire central Mexican territory. Still more compelling was the realization that the group of examples from Tlaxcala make up a formally or stylistically very cohesive group of pictorials; this suggested to me that there was something very distinctive going on in the region, an artistic and perhaps cultural reality that seemed to set it apart, as far as the genealogies are concerned, from the rest of the Nahuatl-speaking world. Surveying the entire corpus of Nahua pictorial genealogies, the Tlaxcalan ones were typically the ones that 1) consistently begin their narrative with the progenitor positioned at the top of the composition, 2) picture this founding member of the lineage in a house structure, 3) show subsequent generations descending from the progenitor vertically down the page, folio or canvas, 4) bear icons associated with the Tlaxcalan elite, including the *icpalli* and the twisted red and white headband both reserved for noble males, and 5) sometimes present figures in a carefully-rendered three-quarter view with precise articulation, especially of women, who frequently gesture. *Genealogía de San Gregorio Metepec* (Figure 4) and *Genealogía de Cuatzontzin* (Figure 6) illustrate the visual cohesiveness of the regional pictorial group.

In some cases, visual documents can help immediately identify phenomena that define, or sometimes defy strict regional boundaries in a way perhaps not so visible in written texts, as one particular example offered here demonstrates. Two manuscripts with genealogical content included in my broad survey of the corpus come from outside Tlaxcala, but are in fact consistent with certain traditions there. *Matrícula de Huexotzingo* and *Confirmación de elecciones de Calpan*, archival documents both in Paris, exhibit visual patterns that are more in line with Tlaxcalan genealogies than with manuscripts from the state of Puebla, where the

towns of Huexotzingo and Calpan are located today. In fact, the alignment is perhaps not surprising, since the two towns have pre- and postconquest histories that tie them closer to Tlaxcala than to the rest of the Puebla region.

The corpus of Nahua pictorials discussed here suggests that Tlaxcala and its environs constituted a very particular hub of genealogical representation. This region was home to a specific kind and large quantity of pictorial genealogy, which encourages my identification of some kind of artistic School of Tlaxcala, in the style of the School of Tetzcocho described by Donald Robertson to explain consistencies in the codices of Xolotl, Tlotzin, and the Mapa Quinantzín. It is a happy coincidence that the genealogical material considered here leads me to assert that such documents were at the heart of this Tlaxcalan School of representation.

While genealogical pictorials from other places in Nahua Mexico do not immediately seem to have as much group coherence as those from Tlaxcala, much can likely yet be learned on the basis of comparison with other images in the same genre, as well as with other materials using different communicative strategies, like alphabetic writing. It is worth recalling here that pictorial communication, in many different genres (histories, cartographies, cosmologies, to name just a few types), was a large part of the traditional method of keeping records all over native Mexico. The Nahua genealogies therefore extend an ancient tradition into the colonial period, becoming visual windows onto a number of different aspects of local realities, demonstrating powerful conceptual and spatial aspects of everyday life.

Nahua pictorial genealogies have potential for offering unique views of personal, family and household organization and history. Scholars in search of traditional native historical records may think first of the grandiose codices recounting migration stories of the Tolteca-Chichimeca and of the cartographic histories like those of the Tetzcocho School, or indeed the Mixtec screenfolds from Oaxaca, all of which tell epic stories of battles, victories, foundation and community power. In contrast, the genealogies are not community-oriented or civic tales, but rather focus on the most basic aspect of Nahua social life, kinship and entities at the level of the household or lineage. The genealogies indeed illuminate the kind of small-scale dramas that real life is made of, and present a tangible picture of the participants. The pictorials, especially those found in conjunction with written material, reveal intimate relationships to land. Visually, networks of related individuals are pictured in conjunction with plots of land; sometimes the individuals are literally shown on top of territorial depictions.

Leaving function aside, the visual content of the pictorials alone has the potential to shed valuable light on issues such as kinship. One might look, for instance, at how individuals appear to be arranged, which lines are traced, where they leave off, and which parties seem preferred or highlighted. One might investigate, for instance, if the way in which relationships are represented visually seems to coincide with or diverge from the way in which they are written about in associated texts. One important aspect of visual writing that Susan Kellogg¹²

¹²Kellogg 1995.

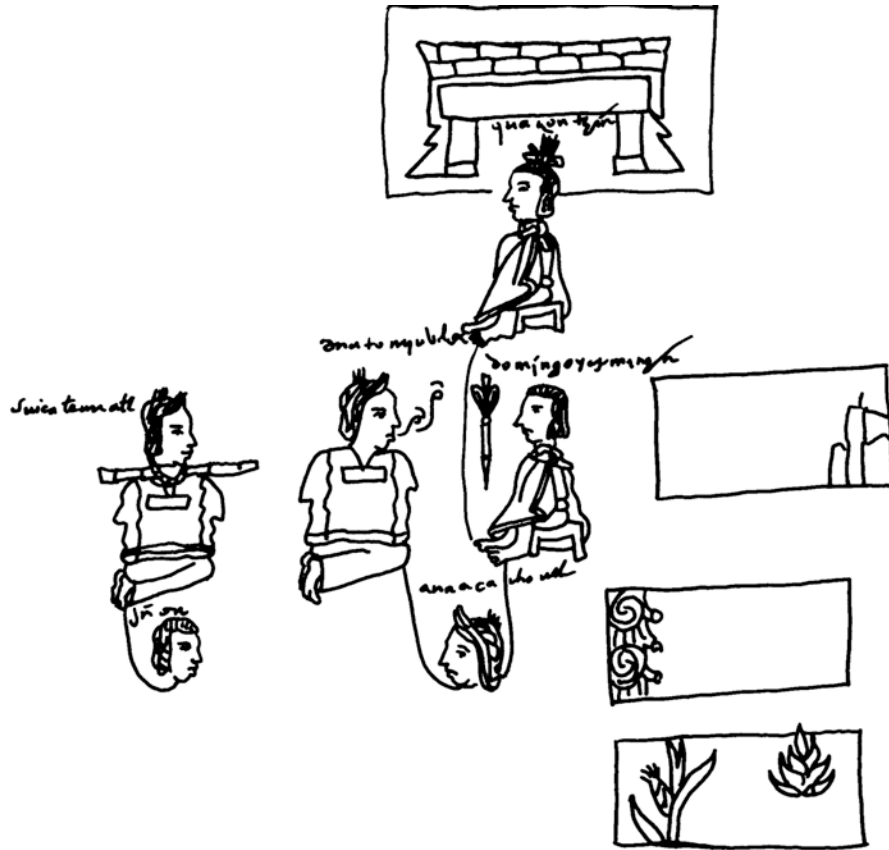


Figure 6. Genealogía de Cuatzontzin, Archivo General de Tlaxcala, San Pablo Apetátitlan: Fondo Colonia, Caja 3, Ex.1 (Courtesy of the AGT.)

helpfully highlights in her textually based study is *tlacamecayotl*, a word roughly meaning lineage or genealogy. The term literally translates as “person-rope,” from *tlacatl*, “person,” and *mecatl*, “rope.” Kellogg seems to have been the first to make an association between an iconographic use of the rope in certain genealogical pictorials and the literal meaning of the Nahuatl term. Indeed, cords that surely represent the visual translation of the linguistic *tlacamecayotl* linking some figures in Nahua genealogies. While I have not found that the pictorial genealogies can answer some hard questions about the nature of the concept, for instance, whether the term describes a concrete unit or an ego-oriented perspective of kin relations or perhaps both, I believe that there are connections to be made between such written and visual texts that can indeed shed light in both directions.

The Nahua pictorial genealogies raise questions of sixteenth-century conceptions of kinship units from a native perspective. We have seen in Mesoamerican ethnography that not infrequently native words do not have direct correlates in English, and therefore an inherent amount of slippage occurs in certain translations. My thoughts on this matter are very much informed by Jim Lockhart’s chapter on the household in *Nahuas after the Conquest*. To begin with, Lockhart chooses to name the chapter “Household” instead of “Family.” He

explains that in fact there is no exact term for family, and instead fray Alonso de Molina, in his sixteenth-century dictionary, uses words like *cenyeliztli*, *cencalli*, “being together,” “one house,” and other terms indicating that the Nahua family was conceived as a sort of social experience based on shared space. These spatial associations run parallel to the English concept of “household,” that emphasizes shared residence over shared blood.

Many of the genealogies reinforce the observations that Lockhart made and even add their own perspectives. In the Intestados example (Figure 3), for instance, we see two groups of related individuals linked by a web of lines that stretch across the floorplan of a multi-room house. We notice that the family members are not unified in a particular room, but rather in what appear to be courtyards, which we might therefore conclude are the communal spaces of that household. Since the pictorial genealogies deal not only with kinship but also with space, it seems to me that these are the natural documents to turn to when it comes to matters of the household. I have noticed very distinctive approaches to space and familial organization in the Tlaxcalan genealogies, and I believe there is much more to say about aspects of family life in other Nahuatl-speaking regions, judging the particular spatial composition of tlacamecayotl in different geographic areas.

Each Nahua pictorial genealogy offers us the opportunity to see normal familial relationships with all their mundane complexities. This point is demonstrated effectively in one such pictorial from Tlaxcala known as *Genealogía de Cuatzontzin* (Figure 6),¹³ found in conjunction with a dossier constituting criminal proceedings against one Juan at the request of one Ana Axochiatl. The documents record an original hearing that began in February, 1572; the bulk of the written material is the testimony of a parade of witnesses, spoken originally in Nahuatl but translated into Spanish. In addition to recording important names and dates, the alphabetic transcripts divulge information about the dispute that at once corroborates that which is deducible through the pictorial itself, and adds a number of interesting details. The text, for instance, explains the details of the complaint that initiated the court case, including the fact that Ana Axochiatl accuses her illegitimate half-brother of stealing material goods as well as land that she believes rightfully belongs to her.

In contrast to the pictorial, however, the Spanish transcription lacks important information about, for instance, the conceptual and spatial relationships between the people involved, and between individuals and their social domains and properties. In the associated genealogy we are presented with a picture that places the legitimate family members in the center of the composition and in association with a house structure, which represents the *teccalli* or lordly house. We also see the mother of the accused Juan shown with a yoke across her neck, positioned in the composition behind the legitimate wife of Juan’s father (also Ana’s father). Thus the painting demonstrates in a way the written text really does not the conception of Juan and his mother as de facto second-class citizens with few rights.

¹³Archivo General de Tlaxcala, San Pablo Apetátitlan: Fondo Colonia, Caja 3, Exp. 1.

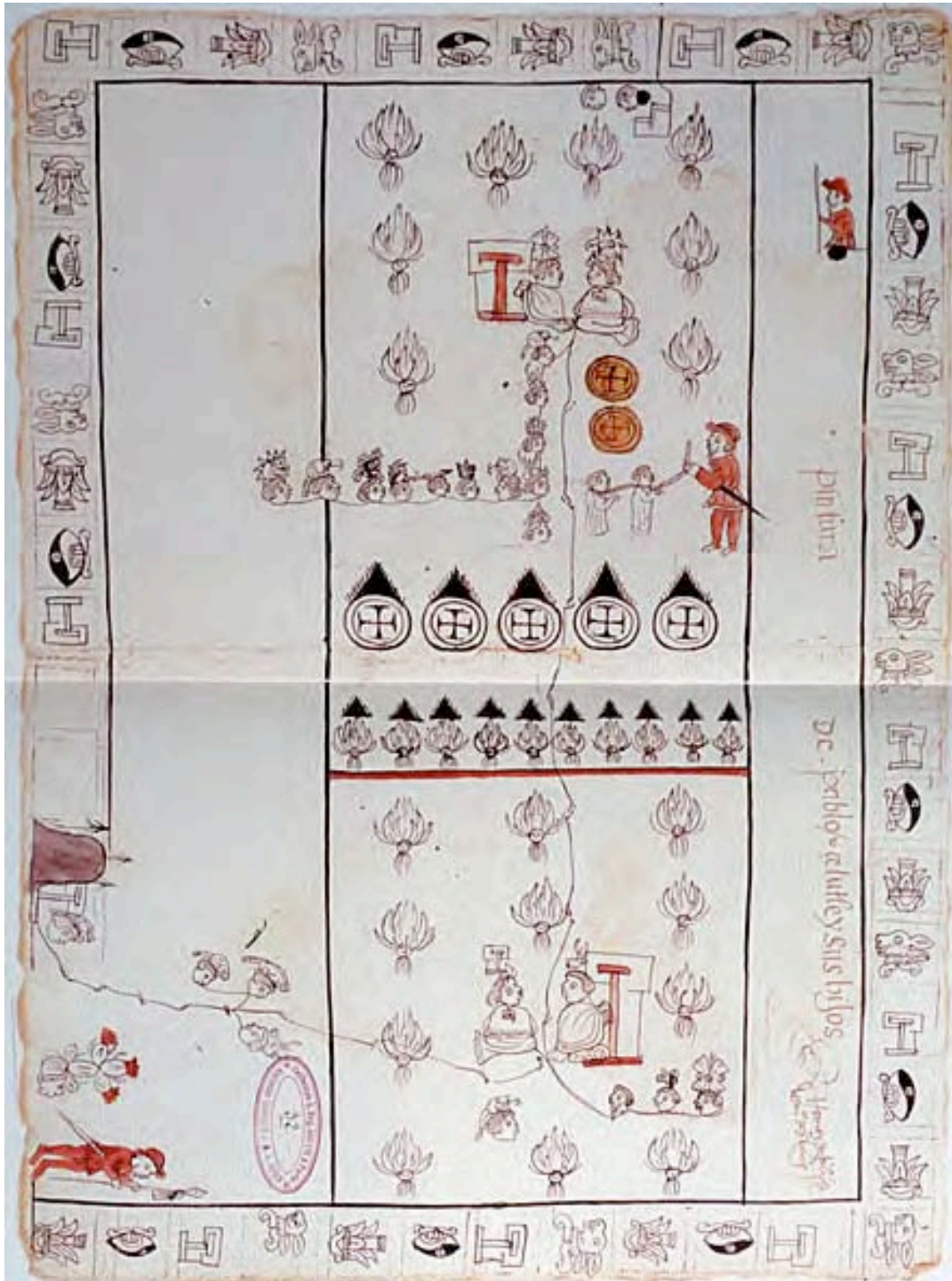


Figure 7. Pièce du Procès de Pablo Ocelotl et ses Fils. Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, Ms. 32. After Ruiz Medrano and Noguez, 2004.

At times, therefore, the visual component of this case alone exposes the social context of the accusations, the results of which were likely decided before the proceedings even began.

I believe it is of significance to remember that while the language of the transcripts reflects a translation of indigenous testimony, the pictorial representation is an unfiltered expression of indigenous experience, since the producer of the image was undoubtedly a Nahua artist who followed stylistic and formal conventions in native tradition. This is where I think that the study of pictorial documents in conjunction with texts—whether native-language or Spanish—really offers another dimension to the understanding of indigenous realities within the colonial context. Indeed, the discipline of art history is predicated on the idea that visual expression represents a world of formal and spatial relationships that communicate concepts reaching far beyond the written or spoken word. The study of colonial Latin American history ought at the very least to contain a careful consideration of visual expression in conjunction with texts, especially in view of the tradition of what have been called alternative literacies in indigenous America.¹⁴

Not surprisingly given the association between Nahua genealogies and the quest to prove ownership in the context of property disputes, I believe that the pictorials also have the potential to enrich our understanding of native relationships with land. As mentioned earlier, genealogical pictorials frequently include visual allusions to territory, including topographical features and plots of land, sometimes embellished with symbols of cultivation. While details of ownership—like the names and exact measurements of the plots in question—are frequently reviewed in accompanying text documents, the pictorials often offer more information about why that land might be valued. In the Cuatzontzin pictorial, for example, the nature of the properties in question is explained only pictorially. Of the three plots in question, one is apparently rocky, the other arable, as suggested by the presence of a corn plant, and the third is decorated by the traditional water glyph, probably in reference to irrigation. Beyond the quality of the land, genealogies show various kinds of human relationships with land. In some cases, topographical features are pictured near the progenitors or founders of a line, in others, alongside the descending lineage, and most interestingly, a sizable number of examples show the genealogy unfolding across an articulated landscape. A particularly compelling example from the Toluca Valley known as *Pièce du Procès de Pablo Ocelotl et ses Fils* (Figure 7)¹⁵ pictures a multi-generational line against the backdrop of a field of maguey plants and coins; this and others like it suggest the degree to which we might understand the intersection between native kinship, land, and economic power by closely studying these pictorial windows onto the past.

As Cecelia Klein first made me aware, women appear more frequently in the

¹⁴Elizabeth Boone has made the more specific argument for the particular significance of the study of pictorial expression in the Americas in her introduction to Boone and Mignolo 1994.

¹⁵This pictorial takes its name from the court case *Pièce du Procès de Pablo Ocelotl et ses Fils*, Tlacotepec, Toluca (1965). BNP No. 32.

genealogies than in other indigenous pictorial genres from central Mexico. Indeed, the corpus of Nahuatl genealogies offers scholars the opportunity to make observations about gender dynamics as revealed through not only the inclusion of both men and women, but also the ways in which the sexes are rendered, and the ways that these representations compare with depictions of such figures outside indigenous central Mexico. In even a cursory comparison, for instance, the scholar will notice that while Nahuatl genealogies will often begin with a single man and picture descendants—whether female or male—independently, Mixtec and Zapotec genealogical representations show men and women paired in generation after successive generation. The lack of such parallelism in most central Mexican pictorials may suggest distinctions in gender patterns between Nahuatl and Southern Mexican indigenous social customs. Kevin Terraciano, for instance, has related the Mixtec pairing of men and women in visual form to local political partnerships that characterized traditional government in that region.¹⁶ In the most extreme contrast I can conjure, the Nahuatl *Genealogia de Cuauhtli*¹⁷ features a lineage made up entirely of elite males.¹⁸

While Nahuatl men alone may have ostensibly dominated the state and lineage, however, the relative visibility of women in Central Mexican genealogies—as opposed to other pictorial genres from the region—suggests that the study of such images may offer great opportunity to see certain spheres of female power. I noticed in the Tlaxcala genealogies, for instance, that women often are pictured with a hand raised and finger pointing, apparently frozen in gesture, even when men appear passive, with their hands hidden under their tilmas. Furthermore, as though to suggest a different kind of female primacy, many examples include representations of women that actually take up more space than figures of men in the same composition; that is, volumetrically and visually, females appear dominant (see, for example, Figure 6) in a sort of feminist hierarchic scale, perhaps?

Pictorials used in the context of court cases demonstrate to us now, as they did then to the testifiers and judges, that women, who had the power to leave properties to their dependents, were considered legitimate links through which to trace inheritance. There is evidence of all this across central Mexico, as for instance Sarah Cline and Susan Kellogg have demonstrated using textual documents; the genealogies provide tangible, reinforcing proof of this tradition, as in many examples the figure of a woman is the lone individual used to trace the link between, for instance, two different generations of men. Although I myself have not studied more than a few specific instances, I believe that the genealogies that are found in the company of textual documentation offer an opportunity to observe how the two modes of communication work together and support or contradict one another. It is also instructive to consider the different circumstances under which written and visual documentation was created; in litigation, pictorials were created by Nahuats themselves, whereas testimony delivered in

¹⁶Terraciano 2001.

¹⁷MNA 35-128. See Glass 1964, pl. 139.

¹⁸I know of no other purely male genealogy. There is no female equivalent, i.e. no example that is made up entirely of women.

Nahuatl but recorded in Spanish necessarily went through a process of translation. Even in cases where Nahuatl writing was used, we must conclude that the author had been trained to use European alphabets, while artists depended on traditional modes of representation that did not necessitate European interaction. In this sense, the pictorials might be viewed as the most direct and unaffected expression of a native perspective. Even those who might disagree with the preceding statement—for Nahuas had their own manner of handling alphabetic writing, equating it with oral expression, and many pictorials have some hint of European devices and styles—will clearly see that the study of Nahua genealogies offers a real opportunity to bridge the gap between the disciplines of art history and history.

If we look briefly to the limitations of this promising genre, it is an unfortunate fact that many of the pictorials that fall within it now lack enough of their original context to be usable only as proof of certain formal choices made by Nahua artists at some unknown time in some unknown place for some unknown circumstance. Many of the genealogies are no longer found with accompanying textual material that might have helped to ground them historically. A significant number of examples are associated with a certain period (usually described in terms of a century) on the basis of visual style, even though they lack the identification with specific dates that might have allowed scholars to develop a useful chronology of their evolution. For this reason, a constructive diachronic analysis of visual and conceptual changes over time is not possible, except perhaps if one considers a smaller regional group. For instance, for Tlaxcala, only one third or so of the genealogies still have accompanying texts that reveal the year in which certain illustrations were executed. Surveying that particular collection of datable genealogies, however, I was able to identify an apparent peak in the production of court-related imagery especially in the 1560s and 1570s. Not surprisingly, these decades corresponded to the period that both Gibson and Lockhart have identified as a time of flourishing for local nobles across central Mexico. That said, however, this represents only a third of the Tlaxcalan genealogies, and we can only wonder how the specific dates of the rest of the corpus would affect our understanding of the development of the genre.

Although my initial approach has been to extrapolate what we know of the relatively small number of contextualized examples to the larger corpus, this method may create misinterpretations, since the genealogies come in a range of forms and may have served different functions. For example, while the most identifiable context for many of the pictorials is the courtroom where they were used as evidentiary documentation, all such genealogies are executed on paper. Some other types of images, in contrast, are painted on lienzos, and may have served different purposes. One Tlaxcalan lienzo depicting scenes of the conquest may have served as a sort of community charter;¹⁹ if a lienzo genealogy like *Una Familia de Tepeticpac* were viewed in light of its possible status as such a charter, we might understand it as a symbol of unity rather than the more divisive type of court genealogy that we saw, for instance, in Cuatzontzin's image.

¹⁹See Kranz 2001.

Regardless of these limitations, I believe the Nahua genealogy can be an extremely useful and important research and historical tool. In my own work, I have been able to make sense of the genealogy as a particular kind of visual instrument serving the interests of especially elite populations of Nahuas; this is an analysis that has not been dependent upon chronology. Instead, we might try to view the absence of specific dates as an opportunity to make general statements about the genealogical tradition among Nahuas and other indigenous Mesoamerican cultures, paying attention to the kinds of visual forms which characterized recorded communication before the introduction of Spaniards to the Americas.

Conclusions and points of departure

Nahua pictorial genealogies are a potentially extremely rewarding corpus of documents for study. I used my initial survey of the broader body of these pictorials from the entire Central Mexican region as an opportunity to note regional patterns and variations, ultimately paying special attention to examples from Tlaxcala. Further efforts might focus on different regional groups to flesh out our understanding of this pictorial genre. On a general level, the pictorials offer the chance to make observations about differences in conceptions of kinship, the household, and particulars of social organization according to region.

Because the corpus is entirely manageable in size, one can survey the range of pictorials efficiently and create subgroups with which to make more careful analysis. This was the approach that caused me to home in on Tlaxcala where, after a census of the larger group, I was able to see a distinctive kind of formal style in the pictorials that set them apart from the rest. In my dissertation, I worked to show a unique social situation reflected in that area; I related the almost standardized visual form of the genealogy to the *teccalli* system, a category of lordly houses that characterized the sociopolitical landscape of the eastern Nahua region in the early colonial period. Using this identification to make broader observations, I noted that genealogies from other places in the Nahua region did not visualize a highly organized and consistent relationship between the lineage and the “house” above them. In contrast to the suggestions of others, I have been able to propose that the *teccalli* of the Eastern Nahua region is not equivalent to a structure known as the *tecpan* in the Western Nahua area, at least from the perspective of the people within those social systems. This conclusion was made on the basis of the visual evidence alone, comparing one subgroup of examples to the larger corpus, but it interlocks well with much of the textual evidence. I believe that there is plenty more to be revealed by the genealogies, using a similar approach with a different focus.

The work I have done on Nahua genealogies is just a beginning. Mine is a single example of how the genealogies extend an opportunity to make observations about the Nahuas’ conceptions of themselves and their kin relationships, not to mention their ties to land. At a larger level, as windows onto cultural structures, the pictorial genealogies created by Nahua artists shed light on social and cellular organization at the community level and hence broaden the modern scholar’s interpretation of native realities during the first century or so of Spanish rule in central Mexico. Indeed, through the investigation of such pictorials, we

might see the conceptual and spatial organization of indigenous life from the perspective of the Nahua genealogist, who—as we learn from informants featured in Sahagún’s Florentine Codex—was recognized and honored by his own for his ability to “string people together and place them in order” (*teço tehuipana*).²⁰

²⁰The phrase occurs in Sahagún, 1950–1982, Book 6, p. 250.

Figure List

- Figure 1: Historical Photograph of Municipio Display
 Figure 2: Genealogía de Cotitzin y Zozahuic (MNA)
 Figure 3: Intestados Genealogy (AGN)
 Figure 4: Genealogía de San Gregorio Metepec (Fiscalía de Metepec)
 Figure 5: Genealogía de Chimalpa (Fiscalía de Panotla)
 Figure 6: Genealogía de Cuatzontzin (Archivo, San Pablo Apetatitlan)
 Figure 7: Pièce du Procès de Pablo Ocelotl (BNF)

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