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COMMENTARY

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The papers of Professors López Austin and Nicholson both give us valuable and related introductions to the materials they cover. López Austin writes on scholarship on the Nahuatl texts and limits the area of his discussion to major authorities, presenting his material in compact and manageable form. Nicholson's paper is on how they came into being and their value.

Nicholson has given us more than he promised, since in his initial statement he says that he will limit himself to the "*transmission media and techniques*" of the historical aspect of Mesoamerican studies at the expense of "native concepts" of history. However, he does give us some insights into native concepts of history and a large bibliographic guide to the material. His summary of the "writing" and calendars is most useful and handy. His advice that we should analyze each chronological problem on its own merits and then later attempt a synthesis is useful. He also observes that the records of the native past are valuable for the data they preserve to us in terms of traditional history. I was disappointed that he did not emphasize more that they also contain information, as he put it, "on cultural values, preoccupations, themes patterns, etc."

From the data presented in this paper we emerge with a picture of history as essentially a "chronological" series of dated objects related to people and to events taking place at specific places and in specific moments of time. But history is also the analysis of such persons, places and events so that from them changes or evolutions in the style of a people's art, a people's religion and even the evolution of a state can be derived. This "synthesizing" aspect of history seems to be of less interest in the paper than the more easily handled "chronological" aspect.

The sources for Pre-Columbian history which Nicholson discusses are classified into a number of categories. I would take issue with the name he gives his first category, "archaeological records", and point out that archaeology is essentially method and technique; thus the "archaeological records", as he calls them, are examples of sculpture (he excludes architecture and "artifacts"). As sculpture they are really works of art, of varying quality to be sure, but still products of the sculptor's art; they are only made available to us by the archaeologist. This is more important than it might seem, because as works of art they can potentially give us more information on the milieu than merely the dates they carry. This aspect of their value only touched upon in the paper is capable of greater expansion.

Within Nicholson's classification of the types of written and pictorial documents which have come down to us from the early colonial period I would also question the validity of his category "sporadically dated or undated annals". To me this is merely a sub-category whose members come from compressed colonial documents, but it would have made little or no

sense to the native scribe. I also feel that the category of "dynastic lists" is not really as valid in contrast with the "genealogies" as he would have it; one is essentially a sub-category of the other. One might mention in passing that the tribute documents are an important part and source of pre-Hispanic history that should have received a greater emphasis.

The assumption that "the typical *tlacuilo* seems to have been essentially a scribe, working under others..." is also questionable. I would submit that the distinction between writing and composing history is again Nicholson's. In contradiction, he himself later cites passages in Las Casas and Landa which strongly indicate that this division of labor was not a native idea.

The role of the "written" manuscripts as mnemonic devices and their relation to oral versions of the "texts" is not really resolved for us. If, however, the burden of this paper is to be "transmission media and techniques", one can fairly ask that positive statements on the relationship between these two aspects of pre-Hispanic history be made.

For instance, the burning of archives, the re-writing of history and the preservation of historical traditions over a long period of time, whether through oral or written sources or a combination of both, raise many questions. If a person or a group of persons among themselves had committed to memory all the history encompassed in the "written" documents, using them only as mnemonic devices, then the burning of archives would not be an irretrievable loss; the human "memory banks" could be called upon to record again in written (*i.e.*, painted) form the mnemonic clues for future memorizers. The whole archive could be reconstituted with only those lacunae due to the faulty memory of individual "memorizing historians". If the "written" texts were not merely mnemonic devices but, as I believe, actually documents which were "read", then the loss of an archive is closer to a total loss and of much greater moment in the historical culture of the society.

To answer this key question is to throw light on several aspects of pre-Hispanic society, including, among others, the problem of transmission media and techniques. One can note here in passing that data in some written texts of the *Relaciones Geográficas* of 1579-1586, hitherto unused in this context, does give evidence of the use of painted manuscripts, oral traditions, and the use of oral explanations accompanying pictorial manuscripts. Sahagun also states that his informants used pictorial manuscripts supplemented by oral comments. In some pages of his early work the oral explanations have been put down in writing and associated with the appropriate items to explain the pictorial representations.

Nicholson's paper, in agreement with most students of sixteenth century Mexican sources, points out the need for critical evaluation of the sources but does not give us a clear-cut method for doing this. Instead he advises us to deal with the specific rather than the general and thus, because he has too many specific sources to deal with, avoids performing this service. After reading a list of eighteen unanswered questions in an unbroken sequence and others throughout the copy at my disposal before this meeting, it occurred to me that some of these questions have been answered by Dibble in his Sahagun paper read before the International Congress of

Americanists in Argentina (1966) and that my own work on Mexican manuscript painting published ten years ago both phrased such questions and, if only tentatively, answered a significant number of them.

Perhaps a study in detail of one or more specific instances would have enabled useful deductions to be made from which methods for solving some of the problems might emerge. For what we really need are just such carefully thought out methods presented in a theoretical framework which can be applied and tested against a limited number of sources, refined, and then be used to test other sources.

To illustrate, let me pose the question of evaluating the relative native and European components in a small part of Sahagun's work, an important monument in pre-Hispanic history.

Father Garibay stated, in his introduction to Book Ten of Sahagun's *Historia*, that he thought this book gave us a picture of Indian life and society before Cortes. Following a suggestion of Nicholson's in footnote 18 that Garibay's theories deserve more criticism than they receive from his followers, I would like to demonstrate why I agree with Nicholson, why I cannot agree with Garibay's statement as it stands unqualified, how it can be tested, and in the process of testing suggest a method for wider application in the study of sixteenth century sources in general.

Book Ten is concerned in the early chapters with the men and women of native Mexico. In Chapter Eight the craftsmen, especially the carpenter, stone mason, and the painter, are discussed. The Spanish Text (Garibay) and the Nahuatl text in English translation (Dibble and Anderson) and especially the illustrations reprinted in Dibble and Anderson, describe carpentry in such a way as to suggest a considerable degree of acculturation. The English translation where it says the carpenter drives nails is quite clearly not native. The illustrations accompanying this section of the text show the use of a European plane, saw, and carpenter's square. Work is being done on a masonry building with gable ends and a European Renaissance base moulding. A column is being carved on a Renaissance pedestal base. The next section, dealing with "the stone cutter the stone breaker" the "*cantero*", describes the making of "curved stones" in the English translation, perhaps voussoirs; this is more explicitly stated in the Spanish text where the *cantero* can make "arches", certainly not known in the pre-Cortesian period. Again the illustrations show Renaissance pedestals and the European carpenter's square. The plumb line is a marginal case (did it appear in the repertory of native tools?). The description of the scribe (*tlacuilo*) says that the good scribe makes shadows (English translation); the Spanish text says that he can make shadows, paint space and foliage. None of these are part of the repertory of pre-Columbian artists from south central Mexico and appear in the manuscript paintings of the early colonial period with time in increasing degree only as other elements of artistic style also become more European.

In Chapter Ten of Book Ten the description of the good tailor has him making tailored clothes, not unfitted pre-Cortesian garments. In the accompanying illustration he is wearing tailored trousers and using European scissors. The spinner in the next section in the English translation spins on a spindle whorl (see also Chapter Fourteen where she spins in her lap),

but the illustration shows the use of the European spinning wheel. In the description of weaving the weaver pushes the headle bar down with her foot but is shown in the illustration using the native back-strap loom. In these last two examples we see the mixture of Mexico and Europe. In the first the description is of an Indian technique, the illustration of a European machine. In the second, the technique is European, but the illustration is Indian.

From studying these examples chosen because their European elements were so obvious we can deduce that the selected passages in Book Ten demonstrate acculturation. This method can be applied to other historical material: Deduct all elements which upon critical examination are surely European in inspiration with the thought that what is left will be native. The method can be applied as we have done it in terms of text and illustrations considered as parts of a single whole. Where only text or only illustrations are present the task is more demanding but still applicable. However, the task is not simple, for in the demonstration just made I made no statement on the use of the plum line —is it native or European? Nor did I deal with technical questions of carpentry, tailoring, and masonry techniques as described in the passages under discussion. In other words, the analysis must go further than this did before one can say all European elements have been abstracted and what is left is native.

We should now amend Father Caribay's statement in the introduction to Book Ten that its contents offer a picture of Indian life "*before Cortés*" by adding "*and also after Cortés*" and reiterate his warning (also voiced by Barlow in slightly more picturesque fashion in the first issue of *Tlalocan*) that we do not reconstruct a world with intuitions.

Using a similar approach to written source materials I arrived at the conclusion that Tlacaélel shows such strong evidence of influence from European romances of chivalry and rests upon such a limited historical base that he too can serve as an evidence of European influence upon the history and literature of the Aztecs. Perhaps much of the oral tradition which gives so much difficulty may turn out to be less native than one tends to think.

The role of the oral tradition and the use of earlier written (painted) sources is more difficult to define when studying another important group of native sources which are not part of the traditional bibliography and thus were not mentioned by either Professors López Austin or Nicholson in their papers: I refer to the Techialoyan códices. López Austin uses an outline which in a way precludes discussing his materials out of the context of the main individual editors and translators. The Techialoyans are perhaps better discussed as a series of texts with illustrations rather than in the context of the several scholars who have transcribed and translated them (Rosales, Chimalpopoca, Barlow, McAfee, and Jiménez Moreno). Nicholson, noting the almost complete absence of sources for the Otomí-Nahuatl region north of the Basin of Mexico and the Toluca Basin area, does not have this somewhat mechanical reason for omitting them. However, they do cast light upon a stage of scholarship in the study of Náhuatl and are the remaining sources in the native tradition otherwise lacking in this large and important arc north and west of the capital.

The pertinence of these códices to our discussion today can be pointed out quite succinctly: they are late seventeenth or early eighteenth century texts of significant length written in Nahuatl. Their content includes sections dealing with pre-Hispanic history, and these sections stand pretty much alone, in splendid isolation, as historical sources for an important area of pre-Hispanic Mexico. Following a simple outline, the Techialoyan códices give histories of the pueblos they come from—the first native conquerors, genealogy of the rulers, and the Spanish entrada with references to the *statu quo* at the point when the Spaniards arrive on the scene. The historical content follows a stereotyped format, as do other classes of native history. On the basis of other areas of content in the group, such as the description of the lands belonging to the pueblo in question which testing indicates to be reliable, their pre-Spanish history must not be disregarded but rather analyzed critically and then used to fill an important gap in our knowledge.

My studies of the Techialoyan group began from the point of view of the historian of Mexican art; thus, I was mainly interested in their pictorial content. With time my interest in the written Nahuatl texts increased. I found no theoretical study which would help me to unravel the relationships linking them with either a surviving oral transmission technique or pictorial manuscripts now lost but probably still existing when the Techialoyan manuscripts were written and painted (*i.e.*, edited). Possibly both kinds of sources played a part in the creation of the Techialoyans, but in any event this older material was edited to a standard pattern when being written down in Nahuatl. Because of the distance in time from the pre-Hispanic period, anachronisms occur which must be, as always, critically analyzed by the historian. These I have explained and pointed out elsewhere.

Commentators always run the risk, like book reviewers, of discussing the paper they would have written rather than the one presented. Perhaps to be a commentator is to have a more valid right to this privilege of speaking from one's own point of view than the book reviewer has. It is not fair in a way for the book reviewer to complain about omissions if the author states clearly that he has intentionally omitted certain aspects of the problem and is concentrating on others. The commentator, however, seems to have this as one of his built-in duties.