

# THE NAHUA NEWSLETTER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY,  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE UNIVERSITY FORT WAYNE  
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WITH SUPPORT FROM THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES



NOVEMBER 2005

NUMBER 40

ISSN 1066-9089

## NAHUA NEWSLETTER NEWS

Welcome to the twentieth anniversary issue of the Nahua Newsletter. The NN was conceived to create a sense of community and self-support among scholars and anyone interested in the culture, history, and language of Nahuatl speakers but the scope has expanded to include any indigenous group ancient or modern in the Mesoamerican culture area. Over the past twenty years, there has been an explosion of interest in indigenous Mesoamerica with an exponential increase in publications from scholars in disciplines ranging from art history, to archaeology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, and ethnohistory. The NN is designed to be a common meeting ground for people from disparate disciplines and backgrounds but who are tied together by their mutual interests in the region. In this issue readers will find news notes, announcements, obituaries, book reviews, a continuation of the debate over the historicity of myth, and a directory update. We also have a letter from a Nahua prisoner in California who reports on his struggle to overcome the official ban on his language. As a special feature, James Maffie discusses the philosophical bases of pre-Hispanic Nahua religion.

The NN is sent out free of charge to all interested parties. Most subscribers are individuals but with each issue we increase the number of libraries, universities, and research institutions that receive the publication. Because of these institutions and our presence on the Web, it is impossible to measure the number of readers we reach. We currently send out 425 issues to subscribers in 15 different countries and with each issue the numbers grow. We should all be proud that the NN is a self-sustaining communication outlet that exists solely for the benefit of subscribers. Printing and mailing costs are covered each issue by donations from readers. If you would like to help out, please mail a check or money order made out to Nahua Newsletter, and send it to the address below. All money is used to offset printing and mailing costs and there are no administrative costs.

We will continue to send out issues of the NN by mail to our subscribers. However, we also have past issues posted on the Web that are accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. The Web versions are identical to the hard copy versions except that they do not include the illustrations. There are copyright problems associated with using illustrations from publications and the process of obtaining proper permissions is prohibitively complicated and time consuming. The address of the Web version of the NN is <http://www.ipfw.edu/soca/nahua.htm>.

To help celebrate our twentieth anniversary we want to present two poems written by contemporary Nahua. They are brief and they both have the same title: "Xochikoskatl," or "Necklace of Flowers." Most importantly, they both express sentiments that trace back to the great pre-Hispanic civilizations that have so captured the world's imagination and enriched our own existence. Cultural features from these civilizations survive today in the lives, thoughts, and artistic expressions of the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica. Ethnographers have shown time and again that these cultural traditions are a living part of the modern world for those who make the effort to see and understand.

The first poem is by José Antonio Xokoyotsij (pp. 44-45), from "Sempoalxóchitl, Viente flores: Una sola flor." Estudios de cultura nahuatl 18:41-95 (1986):

## "Xochikoskatl"

Nijkuikatia nititlachixtokej,  
 nikinkuikatia noikniuaj iuan tlaltipaktli,  
 tonana tlaltipaktli;  
 pampa tlachialistli keuak xochitl  
 uan keuak kuikatl: xochitl uan kuikatl.

## "Collar de Flores"

Canto a la vida, al hombre  
 y a la naturaleza, a la madre tierra;  
 porque la vida es flor y es canto,  
 es en fin: flor y canto.

The second poem is by Delfino Hernández Hernández (pp. 96-97), from "Poemas nahuas de la Huasteca." Estudios de cultura nahuatl 18:98-107 (1986):

## "Xochikoskatl"

Nochi santipanoj,  
 nochi titlakajteuasej;  
 yeka moneki matitlatlepanitakaj,  
 yeka moneki matitekitikaj;  
 yeka moneki matijtlalanakaj,  
 matijmaluikaj uan matikajokuikaj  
 tlen ika titlachixtokej:  
 xochitl una kuikatl.

## "Collar de Flores"

Todos somos fugaces,  
 todos nos iremos;  
 por eso debemos respetarnos,  
 por eso debemos trabajar;  
 por eso debemos recoger;  
 respetar y conservar  
 las cosas de la vida: la flor y el canto.

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You are more than welcome to play a part in helping us achieve the goals of the NN. Please forward announcements, questions, issues for debate, reports of research findings, plans, or anything of interest to the general reader. If the text is more than a few lines long please send it as an e-mail attachment to sandstro@ipfw.edu. You are also welcome to help accomplish our overall financial goal of staying independent of institutional obligations and oversight by forwarding a check to the address below. This twentieth anniversary issue represents a binding of the years for the NN and with everyone's help we will continue to serve our readers until the next twenty-year cycle is complete.

Please send all communications and donations to:

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## NEWS ITEMS

1. Barry L. Isaac sends this abstract of an article that he recently published, entitled "Aztec Cannibalism: Nahua Versus Spanish and Mestizo Accounts in the Valley of Mexico." Ancient Mesoamerica 16:1-10 (2005):

"This article engages the debate about Aztec cannibalism principally through the analysis of three accounts of cannibalism by trickery set in the Valley of Mexico. These three tales are practically the only form in which cannibalism appears in the major Nahua (indigenous Nahuatl-speaking) writings of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. The stories portray cannibalism as shocking, even abhorrent, to Aztecs — rather than as customary — and as a stratagem for humiliating an enemy or provoking a community to war. The contemporaneous Spanish writings, in contrast, are replete with allegations of customary cannibalism, while major mestizo (Nahua mother and Spanish father) authors are divided in their treatment of the subject. The three-way critical comparison (Nahua, mestizo, Spanish) raises the possibility that the idea of customary cannibalism originated in Spanish culture and was then transmitted to the indigenous population during post-Conquest religious conversion and Hispanicization."

2. Paul Proulx writes: "In NN no. 32 (November 2001), I presented the details of my research into the prehistoric status of women, notably in forager societies. This work and additional research results are now available in POD book form, and some are presently free downloads. See, for example, the following: The Thin Edge of the Sexist Wedge: Lexically Reconstructed Algonquian and Quechua Case Histories. Studies in Linguistic Paleontology Publication 3. North Carolina: Research Triangle, 2005. Available at <http://www.lulu.com/content/95249>. This work illustrates the original cause of sexual stratification in Neolithic society. Also see: An African Woman's Struggle to Live: The Writings of Beatrice Vuhugwa, available at <http://www.lulu.com/content/145594>, and Warfare and Women in a Set of Prehistoric Kin Based Societies: Lenapean (Algonquian), available at <http://www.lulu.com/content/159986>.

"I draw your attention particularly to the prehistoric Quechuas, since they had a high civilization in many ways comparable to the Nahua one. (This is a free download, with large 18 pt. print, so you can read the .pdf file without difficulty.) This is a general prehistory monograph: The Prehistoric Quechuas. Available at <http://www.lulu.com/content/98713>. The status of Quechua women is dealt with in a separate paper: 'Women in Proto Quechua Society: The Implications of Some Cultural Vocabulary,' to appear in 2005 in Lenguas y culturas de los Andes: Homenaje a Alfredo Torero. Edited by Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz. Bonn: BAS / Bonner Amerikanistische Studien; Bonn Americanist Studies; Estudios Americanistas de Bonn. For more information, visit: <http://www.bas-bonn.de>. Best wishes and happy reading."

Readers are directed to Paul Proulx's Storefront at Lulu.com: <http://www.lulu.com/Algic>.

3. H. E. M. Braakhuis of the Universiteit Utrecht writes to inform readers that a recent article entitled "Xbalanque's Canoe: The Origin of Poison in Q'eqchi'-Mayan Hummingbird Myth" has been accepted for publication in Anthropos. Here is an abstract of the publication:

"This article explores the origin of disease and intrusive magic in the context of Q'eqchi'-Mayan Sun and Moon myths. The mythical imagery is shown to be intimately connected to the rhetoric of disease-fighting. The Q'eqchi' theory of disease shares a basic assumption with an earlier Yucatec tradition in that sexual excess is seen to provoke the birth of disease agents. Finally, one of the myth's core images, viz. the 'Fever Vessel,' is traced back to the Classical period of the Mayas."

[The illustrations have been removed from the version posted at <http://www.ipfw.edu/soca/Nahua>]

4. Alan R. Sandstrom and E. Hugo García Valencia want to announce publication of their edited volume entitled Native Peoples of the Gulf Coast of Mexico, University of Arizona Press, 2005; ISBN 0-8165-2411-2 (cloth); \$50.00. Following an introductory chapter on the Gulf Coast by Alan Sandstrom is a chapter on the archaeology of the region by Lorenzo Ochoa Salas and Olaf Jaime Riverón. The next two chapters cover the ethnohistory of the region, including the southern Veracruz, written by Alfredo Delgado Calderón, and the Huasteca, by Juan Manuel Pérez Zevallos. Next is a chapter by E. Hugo García Valencia on the concept of the American Mediterranean as it applies to the Gulf Coast region. Each of the following seven chapters is devoted to a major Gulf Coast Native American group. Denise Fay Brown covers the Chontal Maya, and Félix Báez-Jorge and Félix Darío Báez Galván summarize research on the Popoluca. In the next chapter María Teresa Rodríguez López and Pablo Valderrama Rouy write about the Gulf Coast Nahua, and Pablo also has his own chapter on the Totonac. The Tepehua are covered by Carlos Guadalupe Heiras Rodríguez, and the Sierra Náhñu (Otomí) are discussed by James W. Dow. The final chapter is on the Huastec Maya and was written by Jesús Ruvalcaba Mercado. Most of the chapters were written by Mexican anthropologists who work in the region. The volume is the first in a new series, Native Peoples of the Americas, edited by Laurie Weinstein.

5. Edgar R. Marenco Morales writes from Pelican Bay State Prison to bring the following information to the attention of NN readers:

"Aztecs of North America, Inc., is a Native American Indian organization and our educational purposes are to teach the general public the Aztec Native American Indian culture, history, language, and to pursue historical recognition as Native American Indians for the descendants of the Aztec Native American Indians.

"We have been seeking state and federal historical recognition since 2002. At this time, this recognition is difficult to obtain because many people are not aware that Aztecs are Native American Indians....

"We are not seeking to establish a tribal government because that will take us many years to accomplish and it will interfere with our teachings and obtaining our historical recognition."

Written by Henry G. Villalobos (Aztec/Yaqui) President & CEO, Aztecs of North America, Inc., P.O. Box 325, Hayward, CA 94543-0325, voice/fax: 510-582-3880 / e-mail: aztecs1237@aol.com. Also direct any correspondence to: Edgar R. Marenco Morales, #C-43611, D3216, P.O. Box 7500, Crescent City, CA 95531.

6. Fran Karttunen writes that she has published a review article, "Nahuatl for the Twenty-First Century." Ethnohistory 52(2):449-77 (Spring 2005). Works covered in the article include:

Arte de la lengua mexicana concluido en el convento de San Andrés de Ueytlalpan en la provincia de la Totonacapan que es en la Nueva España, el 1º de enero de 1547. By Fray Andrés de Olmos. Edited by Ascensión Hernández de León-Portilla and Miguel León-Portilla. Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Facsímiles de Lingüístico y Philologie Nahuas, 9. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002.

Bernardino de Sahagún: First Anthropologist. By Miguel León-Portilla. Translated by Mauricio J. Mixco. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002.

Grammar of the Mexican Language with an Explanation of its Adverbs. By Horacio Carocho, S. J. Translated and edited with commentary by James Lockhart. UCLA Latin American Studies, vol. 89. Stanford: Stanford University Press; UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 2001.

A Guide to Nahuatl Language Manuscripts Held in United States Repositories. By John Frederick Schwaller. Berkeley, California: Academy of American Franciscan History, 2001.

Hippocrene Concise Dictionary: Nahuatl–English, English–Nahuatl (Aztec). By Fermin Herrera. New York: Hippocrene Books, 2004.

Introduction to Classical Nahuatl. By J. Richard Andrews. Revised ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003.

Making Dictionaries: Preserving Indigenous Languages of the Americas. Edited by William Frawley, Kenneth C. Hill, and Pamela Munro. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Nahua Confraternities in Early Colonial Mexico: The 1552 Nahuatl Ordinances of Fray Alonso de Molina, OFM. Edited and translated by Barry D. Sell, with contributions by Larissa Taylor and Asunción Lavrin. Berkeley, Calif.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 2002.

Nahuatl as Written: Lessons in Older Written Nahuatl, with Copious Examples and Texts. By James Lockhart. UCLA Latin American Studies, vol. 88. Stanford: Stanford University Press; UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 2001.

Sahagún at 500: Essays on the Quincentenary of the Birth of Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún. Edited by John Frederick Schwaller. Berkeley, Calif.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 2003.

Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest. By Matthew Restall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Workbook for Introduction to Classical Nahuatl. By J. Richard Andrews. Revised ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003.

7. Leonardo López Luján writes to let readers know that two new books of his have just come out:

Aztèques: La collection de sculptures du Musée du quai Branly. By Leonardo López Luján and Marie-France Fauvet-Berthelot. Preface by Stéphane Martin. Paris: Musée du Quai Branly, 2005. Pp. 192. 172 illustrations.

The Offerings of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan. By Leonardo López Luján. Revised ed. Foreward by H. B. Nicholson; prologue by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma; translated by Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. Pp. 421. 160 illustrations.

8. From Santa Fe, New Mexico, Peter Furst writes to share with NN readers his observations on the recent death of Doris Heyden:

"It was late in the evening of September 28, 2005, that Elizabeth Benson called with the terribly sad but also liberating news that our old and dear friend and colleague Doris Heyden had died three days earlier at her home in Coyoacan. For her, at least, it must have come as a liberating experience. For much as she loved life, for too many years she had to endure confinement to her bed from the effects of the massive, near-fatal stroke she suffered in 1999 on the one day of the week when she was alone in her house, and from which, but for the heroic efforts of her Mexican doctors and the support of her many friends she would surely have died. Sad, because everyone who knew her loved her — as a woman with a welcoming heart as wide as the Mesoamerican world to which she devoted a productive lifetime, and as an intuitive and imaginative mind free from hidebound dogmas, interested in everything, and ever open to new ideas.

"It was from Doris that I first learned of the accidental discovery of the long volcanic tube that leads to the four-lobed cave beneath the center of the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, and of her intuition that, as the subterranean home of a great goddess, this might have been the reason for the very existence of the great pyramid and its more modest predecessor. She had lots of ideas like that, and of course, all Aztec symbolism, pre-Columbian architecture, caves and their meaning and function in the Mesoamerican universe, the world of plants, and even something so esoteric as what might have brought smiles to the faces of the mysterious male and female sonrientes of Classic Veracruz fell within the crowded purview of Doris' fertile imagination and scholarly interests.

"Having emigrated from Florida to Mexico in the early 1940s, Doris led an incredibly full and long life, with a worldwide reputation as one of the important Mesoamerican scholars. She was always secretive about her true age, but from her longtime friend Tim Knab I finally found out that she was 93 when she died. She was physically debilitated, frail and looking very small propped up against her pillows, but her mind was all there when Tim and I visited last March. I hadn't seen her for years, but she knew both of us at once, grasped our hands in hers, cried, admired the flowers we bought for her at a nearby flower market, and conversed with us in a voice that had become tiny and quiet until at last she was too tired to continue.

"When the end finally came she had outlived too many of her friends and colleagues to list them all here. But a few come immediately to mind: Thelma Sullivan, who died of lung cancer on the operating table, who taught Tim and many others Nahuatl and with whom Doris shared an infectious enthusiasm for the language of the Aztecs; Beatriz de la Fuente, who died of cancer accompanied by complications from a stroke, just a few months after she had honored us so bravely, though physically frail, with a welcoming lecture at the Mesa Redonda Olmeca in March 2005; Fernando Horcasitas, the founding editor of Tlalócan, whom she loved and with whom she collaborated on a translation into English of Fray Diego Durán's work on the Aztec gods and the ritual calendar, and who himself had died years ago, much too young, of — as I recall — a heart attack; Mariana Yampolski; Frida Kahlo, who died in 1954, and Diego Rivera, who followed her in 1956; Doris' own ex-husband and father of their two children, the photographer Manuel Alvarez y Bravo; Pablo O'Higgins; Ignacio Bernal, for whom she once worked as assistant and secretary and who later was one of her mentors and a member of her Ph.D. committee; Juan Comas; Barbro Dahlgren; Nigel Davis, and many others.

"In what is now a half century since I first met her, Doris has been godmother, confidante, hostess, sometime mentor, and ever-ready facilitator to what seemed a never-ending parade of students, especially female ones, from the U.S. and Europe, who were in Mexico for research in anthropology or the arts, past and present. Some stayed with her for days, others weeks, and I remember one who lived with her for eight months. As Janet Esser remembered when I called her in San Diego with the news of Doris' death,

Doris' house was always full of those fortunate students, many of whom later became our colleagues and who, like Janet and me (and Doris before her stroke) left teaching careers behind us, though not research and writing. I am pretty sure that it was at Doris' house that I met Ruth Lechuga and got to see the wonderful collection of Mexican folk art that covered every inch of her apartment, not excluding the ceiling. There I met all sorts of other longtime friends and colleagues — Esther Pasztory, Clemency Coggins, Nigel Davis, Betty Ann Brown, Martha Turok, and Elizabeth Boone, who having replaced Mary Elizabeth Smith at Tulane, is now temporarily exiled from her campus thanks to Hurricane Katrina until the debris is removed, buildings are repaired, and it reopens, hopefully next January. I can't remember whether I first met Janet and we talked endlessly of the Mexican masking tradition at Doris' house at the end of the Privada de los Alamos in Coyoacan or at UCLA. But it doesn't matter. We both remembered that well-worn blue chenille bathrobe out of which Doris was often too busy with talk about art and anthropology and the needs of her guests to change into street clothes.

"Finally, in the summer of 1974, it was at Doris' art-filled house that my then wife Dee and I met one of Doris' house guests, a graduate student in pre-Columbian art history from the University of New Mexico by the name of Jill Mascaro. The next night the three of us were invited to dinner at Thelma Sullivan's home, and in the following year, after Dee was tragically killed in a car crash while I was away in Mexico City, Doris — ever the matchmaker — saw to it that Jill and I got to know each other. So in a sense I have her to thank for the 20 years of marriage we enjoyed and our collaboration in the writing of books on pre-Columbian and North American Indian art. I told Jill, who has kept my name and who continues to teach art history in Philadelphia, of Doris' death in an e-mail. 'I feel very sad,' she wrote back, but 'of course, in her state, it was time to leave. But I remember her in her salad days 30 years ago. She didn't want to pay for garbage pickup (or at that point was too pinched to be able to), and we used to each take a small bag of garbage in the evenings and walk down Insurgentes, find dumpsters, chuck the bags, and skitter off quickly. A garbage run, she called it. She'd shout up the stairs, Are you ready for a garbage run? And off we'd go. What a character! We are so lucky to have known her.'

"We are indeed."

9. The following news release dated June 8, 2005, from Stanford University (sent by Lisa Trei, News Service, 650-725-0224 / lisatrei@stanford.edu) reports on the death of Mesoamericanist Benjamin Paul:

Benjamin Paul, Founding Father of Medical Anthropology, Dead at 94  
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"Benjamin David Paul, a leading anthropologist who introduced the behavioral sciences into medical teaching and research, died May 24 in Atlanta from complications following a cerebral hemorrhage. He was 94. Paul became a professor emeritus in 1976 but lived on campus until 2003.

"Paul joined Stanford's faculty in 1963 as a professor in what was then the Department of Anthropology following a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. From 1963 to 1971, he directed the Program in Medicine and the Behavioral Sciences, and from 1967 to 1971, he oversaw the Department of Anthropology's rapid growth. 'He played a major role in helping to build [it] into one of the premiere departments in the country,' said his son, Robert A. Paul, dean of Emory University's undergraduate college and also an anthropologist.

"Sylvia Yanagisako, professor of cultural and social anthropology, said Paul hired Michelle Rosaldo and Jane Collier, the department's first tenure-track female faculty members. 'That had a huge impact,' she said. 'He moved the department forward at a crucial period. He clearly increased its national stature.'

"Before coming to Stanford, Paul worked at Harvard University from 1946 to 1962 in a variety of teaching, research and administrative positions related to social anthropology and public health. In 1951, he was invited to start a new program in the School of Public Health that introduced social science methodology to the medical curriculum. 'He was the founding father of medical anthropology,' his son said. While at Harvard, Paul edited Health, Culture and Community: Case Studies of Public Reactions to Health Programs, a textbook published in 1955 that became influential in the emerging field of medical anthropology. The book is still in print and used by students today.

"As an anthropologist, Paul wrote on a variety of subjects in the field of Mayan ethnography, from bone setting and midwifery to coffee production, education and the emergence of an indigenous tradition of painting. According to Paul's son, his best-known and most influential paper, which he co-authored with William J. Demarest, is 'The Operation of a Death Squad in San Pedro La Laguna.' In the 1988 account, his son said that Paul 'used his matchless intimate knowledge of the players to unravel the layers of meaning and motivation in a case of political murder and betrayal' in the Mayan Indian village in highland Guatemala that he first visited in 1941 as a graduate student.

"Paul returned to live and work in San Pedro throughout his life, most recently visiting when he was 89 years old. 'He was beloved in that town,' his son said. 'There is a school named after him. When he died there were three days of mourning. A Mass was said at the Roman Catholic church.'

"Paul was born in Manhattan on January 25, 1911. Soon after his birth, Paul's Jewish immigrant parents moved to Gunnison, Utah, to join an agricultural commune formed under the Homestead Act. Although the group, known as the Clarion Community, collapsed after about two years, Paul's parents remained farmers their whole lives and raised cattle, alfalfa and corn, and later hogs, on a farm in Indiana. Paul's son said his father's rural upbringing explains why he was drawn to the village of San Pedro. 'He really loved simplicity,' Paul said. 'He felt at home there.'

"Paul earned his bachelor's and doctoral degrees from the University of Chicago in 1938 and 1942,

respectively, after attending a two-year 'experimental college' program at the University of Wisconsin. He served in the U.S. Army from 1944 to 1946 as a clinical psychologist.

"Paul often worked as a consultant to the Ford Foundation, UNESCO, the U.S. Public Health Service and state health departments. He was a former president of the Society for Medical Anthropology. In 1994, the American Anthropological Association honored him with its Distinguished Service Award.

"Paul's wife, Lois, a research associate in the Stanford Department of Anthropology, died in 1975. He is survived by his sister, Fannie Zuckerburg of Chicago; his brother, Elias Paul of Phoenix; his son, Robert Paul of Atlanta; his daughter, Janice C. Paul of Ann Arbor, Mich.; two grandchildren and a daughter-in-law.

"The family requests that donations be made to a charity of one's choice. Paul's own philanthropy favored groups helping American Indian people and the indigenous people of Guatemala, his son said."

10. It is with sadness that the editor also reports the recent passing of two Nahuatl specialists. Norman A. McQuown, professor emeritus of anthropology and linguistics at the University of Chicago died on September 7, 2005; R. Brad Coon, reference librarian with the rank of associate professor at Renee Library, Montana State University, died on November 30, 2005, in Bozeman.

Professor McQuown's obituary, appearing in the latest (November 2005) issue of Anthropology Newsletter 46(8):34, is excerpted here: "An expert on the indigenous languages and cultures of Mexico and Central America (editing the linguistics volume [1967] of the Handbook of Middle American Indians), he was long a leader in promoting the teaching of indigenous languages based on sound linguistic and anthropological methods as part of scholarly responsibility for keeping local cultures vital. With this in mind, he translated or directly published much of his work in Spanish, making it more accessible to concerned scholars. He devoted much scholarly effort to compiling and editing vast documentary archives on these indigenous peoples and their languages, from the earliest available colonial records to modern fieldwork reports (many by McQuown and his students), in an unparalleled collection, "Microfilm Collection of Manuscripts on Cultural Anthropology," now housed in the Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. McQuown was the central figure in the development of microanalysis of human interaction, in which the techniques of the field linguist recording and transcribing language in use are broadened to encompass all of body motion, gesture and voice characteristics, thus rendering them available for study as systems of nonverbal but potentially meaningful forms of interpersonal communication.... He wrote, collaborated on and edited language courses on Tzeltal, Yucatec and Quiché (Mayan), Nahuatl (Mexicano) and Huastec, and all told, did significant fieldwork on some 26 indigenous languages of Mexico and Guatemala."

R. Brad Coon studied with Norman McQuown at the University of Chicago from 1989 to 1991, and went on to earn master's degrees in liberal studies at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne, and in library science at Indiana University. Brad will be remembered fondly by his colleagues and friends for his devotion to the study of linguistics, particularly his work in progress on Aztec and Maya libraries, on proto-Taracahitic and its place in Uto-Aztecan, on "Tezcatlipoca's Song," and on his commentaries on Benjamin Whorf's "Hopi Language." He wrote a master's thesis entitled "Proto-Wakashan Roots: Reconstructions, Phonologies, and Implications for External Relations" in 1995, and prepared a paper in 1991 while at the University of Chicago on "Kwakiutl Soul Complex." He also wrote a thesis in 1989 for his bachelor's degree in anthropology (and individualized major in linguistics) on "Phonology of Southern Eudeve."

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## **BOOK REVIEWS**

Ritual, identidad y procesos étnicos en la sierra de Zongolica, Veracruz. By María Teresa Rodríguez López. Mexico, D.F.: Antropologías CIESAS (Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social), 2003. Pp. 358. Glossary, two tables, five maps, 10 b&w photos, 28-page bibliography. ISBN 968-496-485-4 (paper).

From the outset, let me say that I like this book. It is a welcome addition to the literature on religious practices among contemporary Nahuas. The setting, the Sierra de Zongolica in west-central Veracruz, has received less attention than other Nahua regions. The principal focus — religious cargo systems — is a classic subject in Mesoamerican studies. Few topics provide as many insights into other aspects of culture and society, including world view, ethnic identity, social organization, and political economy. And the greatest strength of the book — its richness in ethnographic detail — should inspire future comparative research.

The work, however, does exhibit a variety of editing oversights, factual errors, and logical inconsistencies. I note all of these below, not to chide the author, but to alert the reader in advance. The author, María Teresa Rodríguez López received the licenciatura degree in social anthropology from the Universidad Veracruzana, and a master's in social anthropology from CIESAS–Golfo in 1993, where she has worked as an investigator since 1994. She also holds a master's and earned a doctorate in anthropological sciences from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa (UAM–I) in 2000. The book is a revised version of her doctoral dissertation. Two organizations provided research funding: Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT) in 1994-1999, and Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI) in 1998. Her advisers included Enzo Segre Malagoli (UAM–I), Carlos Garma Navarro (UAM–I), and Alan R. Sandstrom (Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne). Let me summarize the book's key points and point out what I feel are errors for correction in future revisions.

The Field Site Community: The study focuses on the municipio of Atlahuilco. In 1995 it had a total population of 7,292, of which 6,055 or 83 percent spoke Nahuatl. The administrative center is a so-called "vacant town" (p. 50), similar to the pattern found in highland Guatemala and Chiapas. The center is home to the church, school, government offices, and cemetery, but 80 percent of the municipal population lives elsewhere, dispersed among mountain hamlets. For the most part, the Nahuas of the municipio function as one community, reinforced by endogamous marriage patterns and participation in a single religious cargo system. A few hamlets operate independent cargo systems with separate chapels, and some residents have converted to Protestantism, orthodox Catholicism, or charismatic Catholicism. Becoming a Protestant (specifically, joining the Luz del Mundo sect), isolates the person so completely from normal social relations, however, that many converts have returned to the Catholic Church.

The Region: The Sierra de Zongolica consists of 14 Nahuatl-speaking municipios on the western end of central Veracruz. This is tierra fría, a cold, humid territory whose altitude ranges from 500 m to 2,500 m above sea level. The ecology lends itself to forests (oak, pine, cedar), swidden agriculture for household subsistence (corn, beans, squash, oats, fava beans, peas, lentils), sheep and goat herding, and at the lowest altitudes, coffee cultivation. Parts of the region suffer from serious deforestation and soil erosion. The closest major cities, both outside the region, are Orizaba and Córdoba. Within the region itself the two main population centers are Zongolica and Tequila. Systematic exploitation of the forests to produce charcoal, building materials, and furniture dates to the 1980s. Another option, migration to the United States, apparently began in 2000.

The Fieldwork: Rodríguez López did her first fieldwork in the Zongolica highlands in 1983 as part of a project headed by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. The sponsoring organization would later become

CIESAS–Golfo. Numerous researchers participated, and the project resulted in various publications over the years 1986-1992, including two books by Aguirre Beltrán, and a 1988 monograph by Rodríguez López on Nahuatl language retention. Fieldwork for the present book took place in 1995 and 1998, for periods of three to six weeks at a time at different seasons of the year, to cover most of the major events in Atlahuilco's annual round of ceremonial and economic activities. During fieldwork Rodríguez López resided with a bilingual family in the head town of the municipio and traveled continually to witness rituals held in homes throughout the municipio. Rodríguez López acknowledges that her Nahuatl language skills are limited, however, almost everyone she met spoke Spanish to some degree. In addition to interviewing cargo holders, she observed a wide range of ceremonial occasions. These included betrothals, funerals, weddings, preparations for religious feast days, related banquets, routines for changing cargo holders, and rituals to establish godparenthood.

**Analytical Perspective:** The approaches that Rodríguez López adopts are largely familiar and include the following: treating the cargo system as a process rather than an institution; the result of choices and not a "survival" from earlier times (pp. 14-15); a product of interacting Nahua and Christian world views; an example of communal values operating in a class-based society; and a means of expressing and reinforcing ethnic identity. Rodríguez López also invokes Victor Turner's concept of liminality, Ronald Grimes's notion of public festivities as dramas that express differential status and power, and social organization as a form of "grammar" (p. 217). But these occasional references to grand theory seem rather artificial and forced.

**Chapter Contents:** The Introduction describes the author's academic background and fieldwork arrangements. Chapter 1 addresses regional geography and history, with special attention to the natural environment, territorial organization, and economy. Chapter 2 reviews scholarly debates on the origins and function of cargo systems, mainly from the 1930s to the end of the 1980s. It also discusses the literature from the late 1990s on religious diversification, that is, evangelical Protestantism, orthodox Catholicism, and charismatic Catholicism.

Chapter 3 describes the feast days that comprise Atlahuilco's annual calendar of 42 unranked mayordomías (religious cargos). Four are what the author calls "ceremonial-center renewal fiestas" (translation mine), including New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, Corpus Christi, and the feast of San Martín de Tours, Atlahuilco's patron saint (pp. 95, 108). Unlike other feast days whose main events occur, with attendance by invitation only, at the cargo holder's santohkalli ("freestanding domestic shrine"), the renewal fiesta sponsors hold events in the administrative center and encourage the entire municipal population to attend. Chapter 4 describes in meticulous detail the duties associated with holding a religious cargo in Atlahuilco.

Chapter 5 focuses on the earth cult, the lords of Tlalokan, and other largely non-Christian rituals and beliefs associated with health, individual well-being, agricultural fertility, the life cycle and death. Most of this material comes from publications by other investigators, mainly Aguirre Beltrán, Félix Báez Galván, and Alfredo López Austin. Chapter 6 repeats and expands on issues covered in previous chapters. These include religious diversification, newer hamlet-level saints' cults, relations with local "mestizos" (i.e., non-Nahuas), and how Atlahuilco's cargo system constructs and reproduces a sense of community among the Nahuas despite the pressures of living in a nation-state and a global society. In a postscript section entitled "Comentarios finales," Rodríguez López reiterates various theories she covered earlier on the relationship between ritual and ethnic or cultural identity.

I have not seen the dissertation, so I do not know how it compares with the book. My impression, however, is that Chapters 5 and 6 were added later to expand the content beyond the author's actual field work. Although interesting, they do not match the quality of Chapters 1 through 4. The book does include a very useful "Glossary of Nahuatl Terms" (pp. 323-28).

Oversights, Errors, and Inconsistencies: Better copy editing would have solved a number of minor flaws in the text. For example, the author says there are 14 Nahuatl-speaking municipios in the Sierra de Zongolica (p. 21), but the map (p. 60) depicts 15, while the chart (p. 36) lists only 13. (The missing municipios are Tilapan and San Andrés Tenejapan, but perhaps Nahuas are in the minority there.) Many of the charts found in the book were skipped in the table of contents list (e.g., pp. 187, 144-45, 204-5). The climate zone map (p. 61) lacks a key to the abbreviations used. Most of the photographs have no connection to the text. For example, the description of Holy Week activities in Atlahuilco (p. 165) is accompanied by a photo of female weavers from a different municipio. The chronology of certain theoretical debates is difficult to follow unless one knows the literature very well because the bibliography lists mainly Spanish editions of foreign works, with no indication when the original publications first appeared. The entry in the bibliography for the 1974 book Los pueblos de habla náhuatl is incorrect: Hugo Nutini's coauthor was Barry L. Isaac, not Betty Bell. I also spotted three factual errors in Rodríguez López's reporting of orthodox Catholic doctrine and practices: the feast of Saint Joseph is March 19, not February 19 (p. 141); August 15 celebrates the Virgin Mary's bodily assumption into heaven, not her physical death (p. 141) because Catholic doctrine denies that Mary ever "died"; and the purpose of All Saints Day (November 1) is to memorialize "saints," that is, persons who reputedly led holy lives, not "martyrs" (p. 130), a term that refers instead to persons killed in defense of their faith.

Some of the author's statements are problematic as well. She says women of reproductive age abstain from attending activities in the santohkalli unless they belong to the host household or to a special committee (p. 177), but she does not clarify why. The author alleges the existence of gender asymmetry (pp. 175-77), that men in the community exert rigid control over female conduct, and that women who try to copy urban norms of behavior are subject to "control mechanisms" (p. 176), but then presents no evidence to support these claims. Also, if women are recluses in their homes, as Rodríguez López asserts, who does the errands while their husbands are away working on plantations or in cities? In a similar vein, if all are required to visit their godparents on All Souls Day (November 2) (pp. 132-33), how do they arrange to receive visits from their own godchildren the same day?

Rodríguez López speaks repeatedly of the "rotación de cargos" within the municipio (e.g., pp. 93, 169, 209-10, 212-13), but this is misleading. Rotation refers to movement in a fixed order, eventually returning to a starting point. This is not what the author describes in her study. Atlahuilco cargo holders, called "mayordomos," are self-proposed via waiting lists (p. 183). The waiting list determines where the cargo goes next, not any form of rotation. Meanwhile, many Mesoamerican communities do practice cargo rotation: the saint's image and stewardship duties move from one customary subdivision in the community to another, in a precise order, at regular intervals. Setting all these criticisms aside, Rodríguez López has produced a commendable work. Chapters 3 and 4 present a wealth of ethnographic information about a religious cargo system that differs considerably from better known systems in, say, Oaxaca or Chiapas. I sincerely look forward to seeing more from this talented ethnographer in the future.

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Alcohol in Ancient Mexico. By Henry J. Bruman. Foreword by Peter T. Furst. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000. ISBN 0-87480-658-5.

Alcohol in Ancient Mexico is a thoroughgoing treatment of indigenous alcoholic beverages in New

Spain and is based on the author's Ph.D. dissertation from the University of California, Berkeley, written in the late 1930s under the direction of Carl O. Sauer. In his forward, Peter Furst states that this book provides a comprehensive account of all alcohol regions in Mexico along with native fermentation processes utilized in each region. Although the material was collected in the 1930s, it was not published until 2000 because, according to Bruman, publication was "interrupted by war." Bruman was professor of geography at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he founded the Henry J. Bruman Maps and Government Information Library. He died this year after a long and distinguished career.

Chapter 1 describes the features of the northern Mexico region where alcohol production and consumption is generally lacking. Bruman attributes alcohol's scarcity in the north to the area's transient population, limited pottery, abundance of the alternative hallucinogen peyote, and distance from the great cultural centers of the south-central plateau where alcoholic beverages are more prominent. In addition, language diversity and unfavorable environments impeded the spread of fermentation techniques. A map of alcohol-producing regions is presented in Chapter 1.

The remaining chapters of the book describe specific beverages and where they are found throughout Mexico. Chapter 2 discusses mescal and sotol. Mescal was common throughout a wide geographic area of Mexico, but was predominant in the northwest. Bruman claims that mescal was popular because pottery is not required in the fermentation process, and that the mescal plant contains notable nutritional benefits. A table shows the different uses that 61 groups made of mescal for both food and drink, and a detailed summary of how raw materials for mescal are procured is included in this chapter. Bruman notes that the plant used to make mescal is called "maguey" by the Spaniards and "metl" by the Nahuatl. Sotol is similar to mescal but it is only briefly discussed in the chapter. Apparently it is not very palatable and it was a second choice for native peoples who rarely drank it.

In Chapter 3, the author covers the arid northwest region where the sahuaro cactus grows. This cactus supplied copious amounts of food and was important to the people of many cultures making yearly migrations to the region. South of the sahuaro-cactus zone were the pithaya (Lemnaireocereus thurberi) and tuna (opuntia sp.) regions. Bruman spent years talking with native informants to better understand the fermentation techniques involving these plants. For all three of these cactus varieties, the pulp was mixed with water and boiled down. More water was added and then the mash was boiled down again. After boiling multiple times, the product was left in the sun to ferment.

Chapter 4 explores tesgüino, a beer made from sprouted maize that was widely popular in the Sierra Madre Occidental area. Bruman claims the alcoholic drink is "inextricably intertwined with the roots of economic and ritual life" (p. 37), especially among the Huichol and Tarahumara. The word tesgüino is derived from Uto-Aztecan, probably Cazcan. Bruman describes a variety of fermentation processes to produce this drink. The most common involves moistening the grains and allowing them to sprout while protected from the sun. The product is then ground and boiled. Sometimes flavors are added during the boiling process (which Bruman lists in an appendix). Fermentation occurs after boiling by setting the mixture in the sun for a few days.

Chapter 5 deals with alcoholic beverages made from tuna and mesquite, found among the peoples north and northwest of the Otomí. In the northern part of this region, alcoholic beverages in general were not significant due to the abundance and widespread use of peyote. For the alcohol that was produced in this region, Bruman quotes Gonzales de las Casas who said that these peoples did not have clay vessels but instead used baskets woven so tight they would hold liquid. This statement refutes the previous claim that ceramics are a prerequisite for people to ferment drinks. Instead of boiling the liquid in clay pots, people poured the juice into these baskets and left them in the sun. Included in this chapter is a table listing the percentage of sugar in the edible portions of tuna and mesquite.

Chapter 6 briefly discusses cornstalk wine, an alcoholic drink found primarily in central Mexico. It was processed by crushing cornstalks and collecting the juice. The juice was then boiled down to a syrup and allowed to ferment. Sometimes roots were added during the boiling stage for flavor. Native informants considered cornstalk wine to be a low-quality beverage and tended to drink it only when tesgüino was unavailable.

In Chapter 7, Bruman covers pulque, the alcoholic beverage made from the agave plant. Because of the widespread popularity of this drink, Chapter 7 is the longest in the book. Bruman describes the geographic distribution of pulque and provides a detailed map of southern Mexico showing the climatic regions where it was found, and explains the different types and locations of agave found in Mexico. The chapter also contains a detailed explanation of how the juice was extracted from the plant and the steps entailed in the fermentation processes. Bruman proposes two possible origins for pulque production: the process may have been discovered while the agave was being utilized as a food source, or the technique for tapping palms for wine was transferred to the agave. The Huastec believed that the ancient Olmec people were the first to make pulque. Their myth tells of a woman who learned to tap maguey and a man who later added roots to create the wine. Adding roots to the liquid that has been extracted from the maguey plant to enhance the flavor and alcoholic content is a common practice throughout Mexico. A chart lists the various roots used and how they affected the flavor. Bruman claims pulque was extremely popular because it intoxicates, but that it has a variety of health benefits as well, including being a good source of vitamin B. People thus not only made wine from the agave plant but also used it as a food source to supplement their diets. A final section of the chapter looks at the etymology of the word "pulque" as well as native terms used to describe the beverage.

Plants used to produce mescal and jocote, found primarily along the southwest coast, are the focus of Chapter 8. Bruman lists the variety of plants used to make mescal and the native and Spanish words that refer to each type of mescal wine. Jocote is barely mentioned but Bruman indicates that it may have been distilled. Chapter 9 is entitled "The Region beyond Mescal" and deals with the Yucatan and parts of Central America. Information on alcohol production and consumption in this area is scarce. Researchers are hampered by a lack of knowledge of the early native inhabitants of these regions and by changes in the linguistic and cultural patterns caused by conquest. Honey was used in alcohol production in the region west of the Quiché Maya. Bruman also discusses wine made from the coyol palm and the use of balaché bark in wine made from honey. In Central America, sugarcane was introduced early on by the Spaniards and the Maya adopted it to make intoxicating beverages for religious festivals. Jocote wine is cited as being prevalent in Guatemala. In Nicaragua and Honduras, maize beer was popular, and the author describes a variety of ways to process and ferment beer using maize.

Appendix A provides a checklist of the alcoholic beverages from each region and the indigenous groups that used them. Appendix B charts auxiliary herbs, the groups that used them, the beverage to which they were added, and the scientific name of each herb. Explanations for why herbs and roots were added to beverages follow the chart. Four particularly interesting paragraphs explain why toads were added to beverages to increase the intoxicating affects. Appendix C lists such intoxicating beverages.

Alcohol in Ancient Mexico is a classic study that provides encyclopedic coverage of the fascinating topic of alcoholic-beverage production and consumption in ancient Mexico. The work contains many maps for each alcohol region, but lacks an overall map of Mexico with information on locations of major rivers and the territories of indigenous groups discussed. Given the nature of the discussions in the text, such a map would be useful for those not familiar with all of Mexico's geography. Also lacking in Bruman's work are sources that update his original fieldwork done in the 1930s. I found that the author cited just two sources published after the 1930s.

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**COMMENTARY**

"Flourishing on Earth: Nahua Philosophy in the Era of the Conquest"

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The summary that appears in this issue of the NN is part of a longer encyclopedia entry entitled "Aztec Philosophy," available at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/axtec.htm> in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

### I. Defining Problematic of Nahua Philosophy

Conquest-era Nahuas regarded the earth as a dangerously slippery place whereupon humans easily lose their balance and as a result suffer misery and misfortune constantly [1]. I suggest Nahua tlamatinime (knowers of things, sages, philosophers) [2] conceived the *raison d'être* of philosophy to be the providing of practicable answers to the question posed by this existential situation: "How can humans maintain their balance and in so doing flourish upon the slippery earth?" Indeed, this situation-cum-question constitutes the very problematic that frames Nahua philosophical inquiry. Nahua philosophers accordingly conceived morally, aesthetically, and epistemologically appropriate attitudes, conduct, objects, and states of affairs in terms of human flourishing.

I thus propose we understand Nahua philosophy as a way-seeking rather than truth-seeking philosophy. Way-seeking philosophies (e.g., classical Confucianism and Daoism, many indigenous philosophies of the Americas, and contemporary Anglo-American pragmatism) are driven primarily by a concern to answer the pragmatic question, "Where is the way?" They aim for orthopraxy, that is, models of right conduct that enable humans to find the path and live the "way" life is to be lived. In contrast, truth-seeking philosophies (e.g., Hinduism and most Western philosophy since Plato) are driven primarily by a concern to answer metaphysical questions such as "What is real?" and "What is the truth?" They want to get to the bottom of things by establishing rational principles, theories, or facts that characterize the way things "really" are. They aim for orthodoxy or right (true) belief [3].

The difference between these two approaches is a matter of emphasis, as each at some point typically addresses the other's question. It is matter of which question they find more compelling and so treat as foundational, which question, less compelling and derivative. Consequently, even though both may pursue a common goal such as human flourishing, truth-seekers do so by way of finding the truth first, while way-seekers do so by way of finding the "way" first. I suggest the 1524 dialogue between Mexica priests and Spanish Franciscans recorded in the Coloquios dramatically illustrates the differences separating way-seeking and truth-seeking philosophers (respectively) as well as the difficulties they face trying to communicate with one another [4].

To characterize Nahua tlamatinime as way-seekers is not, therefore, to say they lacked a metaphysics. Of course they had a metaphysics; indeed, it framed the very problem they hoped to solve. Similarly, this is not to say they never raised questions about truth, illusion, or reality. Of course they did. This notwithstanding, Nahua tlamatinime nevertheless appear not to have subjected their metaphysical system en toto to sweeping, radical doubt. As a defining element of the problem they wished to solve, their metaphysics served as a commonly shared background assumption for their inquiries. This enabled them to devote the lion's share of their energies to solving the practical problem at hand. In what follows, I briefly flesh out this interpretation [5].

### II. Metaphysics

Nahua philosophers' way-seeking presupposed a monistic, processive, and pantheistic metaphysics according to which the cosmos and its human inhabitants are constituted by and ultimately identical with a single, vivifying, eternally self-generating and self-regenerating, sacred force or power: what they called teotl [6]. Nahua pantheism holds: (a) everything that exists constitutes an all-inclusive and interrelated unity; (b) this unity is sacred; (c) everything that exists is substantively identical with the sacred; (d) the sacred is teotl. There is therefore only one thing, teotl, and all other forms or aspects of reality are identical with teotl, and; (e) teotl is not a minded being, agent, or person (in the Western sense of having intentional states or the capacity to make decisions) [7].

Teotl's ceaseless becoming is characterized by dialectical polar dualism. Teotl presents (rather than represents) itself primarily as the ceaseless, cyclical oscillation of mutually arising, complementary polar opposites (e.g., being and non-being, order and disorder, life and death, etc.). Teotl's ceaseless generating-and-regenerating of the cosmos is one of ceaseless self-transformation. The Nahuas understood this process in artistic and shamanic terms. Teotl is a sacred artist/shaman which endlessly fashions and refashions itself into and as the cosmos. As a consequence, the cosmos is teotl's in xochitl, in cuicatl, or "flower and song." The Nahuas used in xochitl, in cuicatl to refer specifically to the composing and performing of song-poems, and generally to creative, artistic, and metaphorical activity (e.g., singing poetry, music, painting-writing) [8]. Just as the singing of birds and flowering of plants are instances teotl's flower and song, so likewise are well-balanced, flourishing human lives.

### III. Wisdom

Tlamatiliztli (wisdom) aims at cultivating appropriate in ixtli in yollotl or "a perfected, wise face and good heart" in individuals, that is, character traits and skills that enable individuals to craft balanced, flourishing lives [9]. It consists of knowing the "way," that is, knowing how to maintain one's balance, like a skilled mountaineer, as one walks upon the narrow, twisting, jagged path of life [10]. Nahua sages thus conceived wisdom in pragmatic terms. Wisdom is creative, concrete, situational, and performative — not passive, abstract, or contemplative. Successful balancing and flourishing require not only that humans accommodate themselves to the cosmic cycles of teotl but also that they actively participate in as well as contribute to these cycles.

### IV. Value Theory

Nahua value theory deems human flourishing intrinsically valuable, that is, worth-cultivating, worth-pursuing, and worth-having for its own sake [11]. As necessary conditions of flourishing, balance and purity are deemed extrinsically valuable. Nahua value theory evaluates the appropriateness of human conduct, attitudes, and states of affairs from the standpoint of creating, preserving, and restoring balance, purity, and hence human flourishing. Righteous (in quallotl in yecyotl) actions, attitudes, and states of affairs promote purity, balance, and flourishing. To the degree humans attain balance and purity, they perfect their humanness and flourish; to the degree they do not, they destroy their humanness and suffer beastly, miserable lives.

### V. Epistemology

Epistemologically good cognition likewise promotes balance, purity, and flourishing. Unlike truth-seeking epistemologies, Nahua epistemology does not embrace semantic goals such as truth for truth's sake, correct description, or accurate representation. Knowledge (tlamatiliztli) is performative, creative, and practical — not discursive, representational, or theoretical. It consists of knowing how to make things happen, how to behave in an appropriate manner, etc., rather than knowing that such and such is

the case or apprehending abstract principles, facts, or propositional truths.

Neltiliztli (truth) is an essential feature of knowledge. The Nahuas conceived truth in terms of well-rootedness in teotl, authenticity, genuineness, and alethia (i.e., non-referential disclosing of teotl) — not in terms of correspondence, aboutness, or description [12]. They characterized persons, actions and things equally and without equivocation in terms of truth. That which is well-rooted in teotl is true, genuine, pure, well-balanced, and non-referentially disclosing and unconcealing of teotl [13].

Humans thus cognize knowingly if and only if their cognizing is well-rooted in teotl, and their cognizing is well-rooted in teotl if and only if teotl burgeons and flowers within their heart [14]. And this occurs if and only if humans possess a volteotl or "teotlized heart," that is, one charged with teotl's sacred energy. One possessing a "teotlized heart" has "teotl in his heart" and is "wise in the things of teotl" [15]. Song-poems ("flower and song") rather than discursive arguments are the finest medium of philosophical expression, and philosophers are performe poet-singer-songwriters.

## VI. Language

Language functions first and foremost as a practical instrument for guiding behavior and making things happen in the world — not for representing the world or reporting propositional truths about the world. Its purpose is to effect change in the course of human and non-human events with an eye towards human and cosmic balance, and hence human flourishing.

## VII. Aesthetics

Nahua philosophers defined aesthetic goodness in terms of human flourishing as well. Aesthetically good (cualli) "flower and song" (art) improves both its creator and audience metaphysically, morally, and epistemologically, and is an essential ingredient of a flourishing life. Aesthetics is thusly conceptually interwoven with moral and epistemological purposes. That which is aesthetically good is morally as well as epistemologically good. And conversely, it is well-rooted, well-balanced, true, genuine, pure, and non-referentially unconcealing of teotl. That which is aesthetically bad is unrooted, undisclosing, inauthentic, impure, and false.

## VIII. Conclusion

The ephemerality and fragility of life loomed large over Nahuatl-speaking peoples. Nahua wisdom aimed at enabling them to flourish under such circumstances by helping them to walk in balance upon the slippery earth. Balance, purity, and flourishing were simultaneously moral, epistemological, and aesthetic notions: they involved one's being well-rooted, authentic, wise, knowledgeable, true, morally upright, and aesthetically good. A life wisely lived offered humans a fleeting, momentary repose from the inevitable sorrow and suffering of earthly existence. It enabled humans, if only briefly, to flower and sing.

Acknowledgments: This essay has benefitted from exchanges with James Boyd, Gordon Brotherston, Catherine DiCesare, Willard Gingerich, Julie Greene, the late David Hall, Grant Lee, Joanna Sanchez, Alan Sandstrom, and Ben-Ami Scharfstein.

## Notes

1. As Burkhart observes, the earth's name, "tlalticpac," means literally "on the point or summit of the earth," connoting a narrow, jagged, point-like place surrounded by constant dangers (Michael Launey,

quoted in Burkhart 1989:58). The Nahuatl proverb, "Tlaalahui, tlapetzcahui in tlalticpac," "It is slippery, it is slick on the earth," was said of a person who had lived righteously but then lost her balance and fell into wrongdoing, as if slipping in slick mud (Sahagún 1953-82:VI, p.228, trans. by Burkhart 1989).

2. I follow León-Portilla (1963) in thinking that the reference class of "tlamatinime" includes individuals engaged in philosophical reflection.

3. This discussion is indebted to Hall and Ames (1998).

4. Indeed, one could argue the two approaches are incommensurable. I owe my understanding of the Colloquios to Sanchez (2000).

5. This interpretation parts company with León-Portilla (1963) who construes Nahua philosophers as Western-style truth-seekers. For further discussion, see Maffie (2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004).

6. See Boone (1994), Burkhart (1989), Klor de Alva (1979), Monaghan (2000), H. B. Nicholson (1971), Read (1998), and Townsend (1979, 1992).

7. See Levine (1994) for a general exposition of pantheism. On Mesoamerican pantheism, see Beyer (1910), Hunt (1977), I. Nicholson (1959), Sandstrom (1991) and Sandstrom and Sandstrom (1986). Levine (1994:96,102) argues that while pantheists are committed to the metaphysical immanence of the sacred they are not necessarily committed to the epistemological immanence of the sacred (i.e., to the thesis that the sacred is easily or in principle knowable by humans). Spinoza is one such pantheist who rejects the epistemological immanence of the sacred. León-Portilla (1963:95-103) apparently believes metaphysical immanence entails epistemological immanence, and he concludes that Nahua metaphysics cannot be pantheistic since the sacred is epistemologically transcendent. I find León-Portilla's argument unsound since it rests upon this mistaken premise.

8. See León-Portilla (1963) and López Austin (1988, 1997).

9. See León-Portilla (1963:113-15).

10. See Burkhart (1989), Gingerich (1988), León-Portilla (1963), and I. Nicholson (1959).

11. This discussion is indebted to Burkhart (1988), Gingerich (1988), and López Austin (1988, 1997).

12. Here I largely follow León-Portilla (1963) and Gingerich (1987, 1988).

13. See Gingerich (1987, 1988) and Maffie (2002b, 2003).

14. I owe my appreciation of burgeoning to Brotherston (1979).

15. López Austin (1988:I, pp.258ff., 1988:II, pp.245,298); see also León-Portilla (1963).

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Editor's note — As we have reported in previous issues, the NN is received by a number of prisoners in California, many of whom are Nahuatl speakers. We have also reported that in many prisons, there is a policy forbidding inmates from possessing materials in Nahuatl and other languages such as Swahili and Celtic. The NN reports on this situation but takes no editorial position regarding the legal or ethical implications of such policies. Following is a commentary from an inmate, published with permission.

Dear Readers of the NN —

I am a state prisoner serving a life sentence. I am housed at the Pelican Bay State Prison (PBSP). Within the prison I am confined to the Security Housing Unit (SHU) for an "indeterminate" period due to prison officials' claims that I am an active prison gang associate.

The claims of gang association are based in part upon the fact that I simply possessed a list of Nahuatl words with Spanish and English translations and not upon any claims that I used or intended to use the language for any illegitimate purpose.

Prison officials have and continue to routinely use prisoners' simple possession of Nahuatl and "related material" (depictions of hieroglyphs or art containing depictions of items related to heritage, especially Mexica) as a means of labeling prisoners gang members or associates and housing such unfortunate prisoners in the SHU at this prison for terms of indeterminate duration (but a minimum of six years).

Prison officials believe (or simply claim) that they are justified in treating a prisoner in this way who simply possesses Nahuatl or related material as I've described above because officials assert a prison gang has "represent[ed] itself as an ethnic organization rooted in their Mesoamerican cultural past. As part of this representation, the group has attempted to claim the language and cultural icons of Mesoamerica as their own by using the language as a source of code for communication between inmates and translating cultural icons for present use" (Inmate Appeal [CDC 602] PBSP Log No. D03-01214, IAB Case No. 0300516). Even assuming in arguendo that the assertion bears some degree of truth this does not appear to justify the policy and it is certainly violative of fundamental fairness for officials to find on these grounds that any prisoner who possesses Nahuatl or related material is affiliated with a prison gang and should be transferred far away to the SHU at this prison for an indeterminate period.

It followed that in December 2001 the warden at this prison enacted a local ban on material "written in" Nahuatl. And in classic "give them a hand and they will take an arm" fashion, officials at this prison have interpreted the policy in a manner that allows for the broad prohibition of material which merely contains Nahuatl, the self-servingly vague "related material," and material not even indirectly mentioned on the documents describing the ban — such as "Mayan and ancient Peruvian words and meanings" (CDC 602, *supra*).

Through litigation I am seeking to reverse the policy of finding that simple possession of Nahuatl amounts to gang activity and is valid evidence of prison gang association or membership, and to have the ban on Nahuatl deemed unconstitutional. Proceeding in pro se, I have presented my case to all of the available state courts (without success) and am currently seeking relief in the U. S. District Court for the Northern District of California (Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus No. C04-2253 WHA [PR]. Also, Complaint under Civil Rights Act, 42 U. S. C. 1983, *Avila v. Woodford, et al.*, No. C05-2063 WHA [PR]).

I have sent copies of this letter to individuals listed as authors of articles printed in the

"Cultura/Tradición" section of the September and October 2004 issues of Latina Magazine, as well as individuals quoted in the articles. Specifically, an article entitled "The Power of the Past," by Lizz Carroll (discussing the Nahuatl language) in the September 2004 issue, and an untitled article discussing the Mixtec people and culture by Claudia S. Melendez Salinas in the October 2004 issue, respectively. It has been some months now since I mailed the letters. I have not received any type of response and am resigned to the belief that I will not receive any reply to those letters.

I've read the above-mentioned articles. The ideas and beliefs expressed therein mirror my own and I believe together with the pertinent facts support my contentions regarding how and why the prison policies revolving around Mesoamerican culture are patently unfair, over broad, and must be invalidated as unconstitutional.

As Lizz Carroll's article points out, the desire to maintain or obtain ties to the cultural past is "an increasingly common sentiment these days as more and more Chicanos look to reclaim their indigenous heritage" (Carroll 2004:74). "A study of the language provides an insight [into your heritage] that no study of archeology does (ibid., quoting Fermín Herrera, Chicano Studies professor, California State University, Northridge). And "Nahuatl is still spoken by about two million people in the United States and Mexico" (ibid.; see also Mexico, Library of Nations, Time-Life Books (1986) estimating the number at 3.5 million in Mexico).

In contrast, the ideas, opinions and beliefs explicitly and implicitly expressed by prison officials in support of their policies and practices are in direct contravention of Ms. Carroll's article.

Prison officials make a point of referring to the language(s) and related material as "ancient." While the reference may be literally correct, prison officials use the term to imply incorrectly that the material is entirely insignificant in today's world, and thus, banning the material is of no real consequence and there could be no right to the material in existence significant enough that it outweighs, or even mitigates the policy purported to be a security measure. I stress "purported" because there is evidence to support my contention that the policy is designed to attack and diminish individuals' morale, morale of the type described by Ms. Carroll in Latina Magazine: "Learning Nahuatl makes you think you're not inferior because you come from such strong people.... You feel you can do anything." (Carroll 2004:114, quoting Elvia Martinez). Punish those who study the material and deter others from daring to do so. However, material related to Mesoamerican culture and heritage, like the "Mixtec codices... are comparable in cultural importance to the Koran or the Bible" (Melendez Salinas 2004:74).

In my opinion it is extremely doubtful if not completely inconceivable that prison officials would attempt — much less ever be justified in — placing a comparable ban upon the Bible or Koran and related material.

The fact that prison officials perceived that they could enact such an expansive ban in the first place is a clear example of second-class status being assigned to Mesoamerican culture and heritage (people). Indeed prison officials holding rank as high as captain refer to depictions of culturally significant items as nothing more or nothing more significant than "gang symbols" (in re P. R. Avila, supra, at Exhibit C).

Pursuant to case law the court will afford prison officials great deference while considering questions of prison administration. Although I subscribe to the sentiments, beliefs and opinions expressed in the Latina Magazine articles, and I have included such things in support of my arguments to the court, the fact is that I am a prisoner without any authoritative credentials whatsoever. And while I think I should be able to expect a court to allot due weight to any truth regardless of who presents that truth I believe it would be unwise for me to count on the court to do so. I should not fail to at least

attempt to seek out and obtain the testimony of individuals who possess the credentials, education, and expertise the court would be inclined or compelled to accord deference, so that I may offset the deference the court must allot prison officials' administrative decisions.

For the foregoing reasons I write to you with what I hope you will consider an entirely reasonable and not burdensome request. That is, would you be willing to provide me with documentary or testimonial evidence (e.g., printed studies, affidavits or other papers that record facts, opinion and beliefs such as those upon which the aforementioned articles are based) attributable to yourself and other credentialed individuals or institutions?

In respect to affidavits: I realize that you may (or may not) find my request to be somewhat vague. I can be more specific but will reserve specificity for when or if you respond favorable to my request. Also, if after reading this letter you are interested in knowing more about the causes before the court and/or any other aspect of the circumstances related to prison officials' treatment of culture and heritage you should feel free to ask and I will do my best to answer your questions.

As I've indicated above I am not represented by counsel, which is not a comment one way or another regarding my chances of prevailing. I am unsure as to when I can expect the court to move my case(s) forward. Please provide me with your reply as soon as possible and trust that I will continue in the future to be very mindful of your time.

Thank you very much for the consideration given this letter and my request(s).

Respectfully,

Perry R. Avila, #K-89657  
P.O. Box 7500  
Crescent City, CA 95532

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"The Woodpecker Perspective: A Reply to Offner"

By David Henige

dhenige@library.wisc.edu

And what should they know of England who only England know.

— Rudyard Kipling, "The English Flag"

There are known knowns. There are things that we know that we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is, we know there are some things that we know we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns — we don't know we don't know [1].

I

In 2004 researchers announced that the ivory-billed woodpecker, thought extinct for more than fifty years, had been re/discovered in an Arkansas wildlife refuge. Great excitement and fanfare accompanied this announcement, but there were some skeptical ornithologists who thought it highly implausible that this bird could have eluded sightings for so long in an area heavily frequented by potential observers. Spurred by these doubts, the bird's champions gathered further evidence that convinced the skeptics, who pronounced that they were "delighted" with the outcome.

The case is an almost textbook example of the role of skepticism in the knowledge-production and knowledge-testing process. In particular we have every reason to believe that the doubters truly were happier to be proved wrong than to be proved right. Conversely, there is no evidence that those who preferred to accept the findings resented the skeptics' efforts to prove them wrong, seeing it as a legitimate function of the scholarly process. The results justified both points of view: the case for the survival of the ivory-billed woodpecker — in lieu of actual specimens — is weightier than if the skeptics had joined the believers from the beginning.

Of course, neither such tidiness nor such reciprocal approbation is always the case.

II

My son teaches a required course in art history and the arts in general for entering freshmen. He admonishes his students — both in his syllabus and orally — to avoid writing papers that are based entirely on scrounging up disparate data churned up by the various search engines. He points out that, while this might have the advantages of instant gratification, and also allows more time for partying, it is also ineffective, unscholarly, and bad practice for the life ahead because it allows others to make their mistakes for them. He specifically discourages them from stringing together a series of sound bytes, especially if they represent only one facet of a complex state of affairs. If students ignore his warning, he feels justified in grading accordingly. It is no surprise that my son's way of doing business sprang to mind as I read through Jerome Offner's reply (Offner 2005) to my earlier paper (Henige 2004) [2].

I compliment Jerome Offner on his success in the Internet dragnet he carried out — or had carried out for him. Offner was no doubt delighted to discover several negative comments on my work. I join him in his delight, since I would have been disappointed had no colloquy developed with respect to the arguments he cites. Thus readers in these fields now have the chance to form opinions based on two very different arguments placed before them. I should point out that, with a bit more diligence, he could have ferreted out even more damning comments on my work. For instance, I have been accused of promoting "a new world form of Holocaust denial" because I decline to join the lemming-like rush to ultra-high estimates of the contact populations of the Americas, preferring instead to treat the matter as one of the

Great Unsolvables of our time or of any time [3]. Surely this would be grist for Offner's mill. I haven't checked, but perhaps this particular criticism hasn't made it into Google [4].

### III

As long as it is well argued, skepticism about skepticism is no less legitimate a heuristic tool than any other form of doubt. But it does not come with special rules that preclude any need for an open mind or a wide canvass of evidence. In fact, if skepticism requires anything in particular, it is both of these, the first stimulating the second, the second justifying or overturning the first. I welcome the chance to clarify what Offner finds obscurantist, but also apologize for the cannonade of seemingly trivial points necessarily raised; perhaps they might serve as a measure of character and credibility.

In the circumstances I cannot fail to be bemused when I read (Offner 2005:15) of my "selectively mustered notion of skepticism" — whatever that might mean. Perhaps I am being scolded for not being one of the nihilist skeptics who deny the existence of existence? Or perhaps I am being reproached for disagreeing with certain cherished positions and not with others? Or perhaps Offner is parroting Iain Provan here? At any rate, I make no apologies, agreeing instead with David Hume (1993:73) that "[a] wise man... proportions his belief to the evidence" [5].

Offner has clearly read — remarkably selectively, I might say — through the sources he has chanced upon with a vigilant eye to isolating a severely circumscribed ensemble of comments and agglomerating these as if they represent some kind of balanced microcosm or even some miniature totality, rather than a selectively mustered omnium gatherum. Nary a word about what differences of opinion might have spawned these comments in the first place. Nary a word about those who might — actually — agree with the positions I've taken in these instances. And, as we will see, nary a critical instinct when deciding which of them to put to use.

I'll comment at length on only one of these — Iain Provan's "deft exposure" of... I'm not sure what. There Provan (2003:213) peculiarly characterizes skeptical arguments as attempting to "'prove' [sic] too much to be taken seriously." If only. With or without the extra set of quotation marks, the comment is well adrift of any position taken by skeptics of — in this case — biblical historicity, including myself, but it is not untypical of Provan's well-oiled faculty for wishing away all such criticism, and it reflects well his animus toward what he regards — as I suppose all true believers must — as "a discredited philosophy," unworthy of sensible commentary (Provan 2003:434) [6].

Provan's and his fellows' views of biblical historicity are a bit beleaguered these days, and I suppose that it is no wonder that they feel obliged to lash out against their critics, who are, by definition, skeptics as well. An easy, if slightly bizarre, way of doing this is to impute mindless disbelief — not considered doubt — to the skeptics. But no skeptic I have ever encountered would use words like "proof" or "prove" or any of their corollaries favorably in their discourse. They leave that lexicon to those who prefer to believe and who have not been slow to employ it indiscriminately. For Provan, a few well-chosen epithets stand surrogate for reasoned engagement. Both Offner and I have provided citations to Provan's arguments. Let readers decide for themselves.

Offner (2005:13) joins in this chorus when he writes of "the burden of proving that Henige takes on to disprove." I confess that I am entirely at a loss here, since I am in no way attempting to disprove — or to prove — anything at all. How could I go about this activity in the face of the lack of evidence either way? I suppose that skeptics will always be feared by those who think they are intent on disproving rather than doubting, annihilating rather than stimulating, asserting rather than demonstrating, all in aid of resisting entrenched regimes of truth and their pernicious effects. An obligation of those who would

disbelieve skeptical arguments is first to doubt them; that is, to learn the distinction — an almighty distinction — between the two words before attempting such arguments.

At no point — here or in any of the other papers whose replies he refers to — do I seek to prove anything and therefore I can hardly seek to "disprove" them either. The essence of the zetetic process that caused him so much umbrage is the suspension of belief — and of disbelief — while awaiting more evidence, better arguments, a more extensive and relevant comparative framework.

Offner's problems in understanding my argument are further laid bare when he claims that I "offer mere 'zetetic' belief" (Offner 2005:14). There is not, nor can there ever be, any such thing. Just the same, it is commonplace to attempt some kind of cross-genetic breeding between doubt and dis/belief. Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah expressed this sentiment better than most when they damned their critics with the comment that "[c]redence requires less faith than inflexible doubt" (Cook and Borah 1966:230). But who is — or was then — talking about "inflexible" doubt, which I take to be a euphemism for "disbelief?" Offner continues in like manner that I claim that any pre-conquest historical texts (I guess) "cannot [have] exist[ed]" (2005:14). Again, no skeptic would ever use the word "cannot," except to say things like "cannot be sure," nor do I use it or anything like it.

#### IV

Offner notes gratefully that Provan quibbles about a couple of trivial deviations when I was quoting him, but characteristically fails to note as well Provan's observation (2003:415) that these are "relatively minor inaccuracies." With this I would have to agree since a missing comma, a missing ellipsis, and a that/which switch are the culprits at issue [7]. Offner (2005:15) is pleased to call these misrepresentations. Offner also approvingly quotes Provan approvingly quoting George Berkeley (of falling-tree fame) that skeptical arguments "admit of no answer and produce no conviction" and so must be dead-end wastes of time. Interestingly, and perhaps again characteristically, Provan (2003:436 n.30) does not actually quote Berkeley, but the Encyclopaedia Britannica, quoting, he thinks, Berkeley. This is an untenable procedure in any case, and it is especially gratuitous here, since locating a superseded print edition of the EB (Provan cited the 15th edition, 1991) is far more difficult than locating copies of Berkeley's own writings, which have been reprinted many times and are held in numerous copies or editions in all research libraries.

But wait! It appears that Provan (2003:413,436) got it wrong — in fact he got it pretty much backwards [8]. The criticism that Offner via Provan via EB attributes to Berkeley was actually leveled against Berkeley by David Hume [9]. Unluckily for both Provan's and Offner's credibility, it was Provan ("[a]s Berkeley once put it...") who made the error in his anxiety to find historical precedents, and not the Encyclopaedia Britannica ("[a]s Hume says in his Enquiry...") [10]. All this seems unnecessarily careless — more "daft" than "deft" — and might even be considered... yes, misrepresentation.

Elsewhere, Provan (2000:295) has dismissed doubt and verification as leading to "an advance in ignorance." Offner would be right if he suspects that I reject — and reject emphatically — the prodigiously arrogant conceit that the study of the past can be, even should be, a relentlessly cumulative pursuit, so that we can — and do — overcome the puzzles thrown up by the record just by trying — a resounding "A" for effort. Or the even more repugnant notion that we should claim success even when we don't achieve it. If this is what constitutes "conviction," I hope to remain unindicted.

Offner and I seem to be at cross-purposes regarding the everyday meaning of several words and phrases [11]. For the record, I do not use "every chance" to describe certainty. Quite the opposite in fact. If someone had told me that Giacomo had "every chance" to win the Preakness because he had already won the Kentucky Derby and Belmont Stakes, this would hardly have deterred me — were I a wagering man — from betting on another horse instead, say, Afleet Alex, who actually did win the Preakness. Nor would assuring me that I had "every chance" to win the lottery induce me to buy a ticket. In short, "every chance" is never meant to convey certitude and so is not, pace Offner, the polar opposite of "no chance."

Offner has problems in understanding many of my other arguments as well. In his very first paragraph (Offner 2005:13) he signals his estrangement from Pyrrhonist thought by implying that its "adherents" claim to "know" (or maybe "no"?) the answers to questions almost before they're asked and certainly before they're understood. How extraordinary! The only time I used the K-word in Henige (2004) was to ask how or what we could "know."

I'm not at all sure in fact that I understand Offner's comment that I "exclude evidence... before it is understood" (2005:13). Is this an admission that the evidence for, say, pre-Conquest Texcoco is not yet understood? I'll buy that. As to "exclud[ing]" evidence, I was under the impression — I still am — that I was suggesting the benefits of seeking out more evidence from beyond Mesoamerica before accepting the evidence from there, and suggesting further that in doing so, we all keep a mind open to, and prepared for, disillusion, even refutation. In rereading my paper, I find no use of words like "exclude" or "reject," or any synonym, except in an offer to reject some of my own arguments with cause.

Offner (2005:13) deplors my description of Aztec historiography as an "oral genre" but fails to notice the context in which I employ this term. There I also classify the works of Thucydides, al-Tabari, and William of Malmesbury (and hundreds of others by implication) in the same way, because I am treating them as the final, written stage of a chain of oral transmissions of indeterminate length. Thus, while their own work is in written form, its content is to varying degrees the result of once having been oral, with all the consequences [12]. I would be interested in seeing arguments against this having happened with Aztec historiography, whether before or after the Conquest.

As to practicing "old-style Western hegemonic rhetoric and discourse" (Offner 2005:15), well, that could be — whatever that is. These days this is an easy criticism. No doubt about it, every word in this phrase except "old-style" and "and" has perfervid votaries these days [13]. Could the crime be in assuming that there is only — can be only — one "truth"? I think anyone would have trouble finding where I have asserted this or anything much like it, except as an unrealizable ideal, even if one worth pursuing lest we fall into epistemological disarray. There is the "truth" — whatever actually happened as distinct from any contemporary or subsequent perceptions of that — and there is "truth" — that which each of us firmly, and we think, reasonably believe, possibly because it is supported by a preponderance of available evidence, which we seek constantly to improve, if only incrementally [14]. At the same time, this has to mean rejecting those interpretations that fall short of this not-very-lofty standard, whether or not we happen to sympathize with the premises underpinning them. For, while there is always more than one way to select, evaluate, and interpret the data, this does not further signify that these are equally acceptable, no matter what the criteria.

But why and how is this a "Western" or a "hegemonic" concept? Does it really represent a "denigration of indigenous historical traditions, histories, and historiographies" (Offner 2005:15, emphasis mine)? Is it because it takes into account physical laws, for instance, and applies them to the testimony of societies who were not aware of them? To put it another way: Can we not assume, if only for the sake of argument, that both before and after the Conquest, Mexica intellectuals denigrated the fruits of Tarascan intellectuals, and vice-versa? Do I exempt "Western" historiographical traditions in my

work? Check the record. Do I descry "detritus" and "undergrowth" only in the oral record and only in societies that can't defend themselves? Again, check the record. In short, there is no Western–non-Western, civilized–uncivilized, right–wrong dichotomy involved.

Nor will Offner find any examples where I treat even well-constructed arguments from silence as more than suggestive, very much worth keeping in mind in all our work because that can quicken the search for evidence that would nullify the silence. He will have far less trouble finding examples in which I argue — not only suggest — that arguments against silence should not be taken very seriously. In fact, I have written a few papers in which I point out apparent silences in the historical record as a way to stimulate the search to breach these silences [15]. In these I have noted the vulnerability of this argument, but that by itself is hardly reason not to wield it as long as the silence persists, especially if it persists despite both the passing of time and concerted efforts to overturn it.

Throughout, Offner (quite like Provan) sees skepticism as a dead-end philosophy, arguing, for instance, that I see using it "as an end and as an end point" (Offner 2005:14). On the contrary, I thought that I had made it pretty clear that pyrrhonism is a tool crafted specifically to investigate, challenge, and stimulate. Evidently not, so let me just say it again: pyrrhonism is a tool crafted specifically to investigate, challenge, and stimulate. By itself it can never bring closure, nor is it intended to, but by itself it can encourage renewed vigor in the quest for resolution. Those who are unwilling to confront devil's advocacy must be assumed to have little faith in their positions.

## VI

Offner's defense of the reality of some level of pre-Conquest "literacy" is fine, but off-target. The question isn't whether there was — or was not — some kind of literacy that could have produced texts that might — or might not — have been "historical" in our sense of the word (i.e., striving to be accurate; differentiating between the wheat and the chaff; displaying notions of time, duration, and causation), but how well any such productions — or at least their content — survived the trauma and turmoil of the Conquest and its aftermath [16]. Barring much opportunity for direct comparison, we are left with following our predispositions. Offner's and mine are patently different.

We all want to think that the objects of our affections are sui generis, but if Offner really believes that "[t]he Spanish engagement with native documentation and orality was... different from Henige's portrayal of contact situations in other parts of the world" (Offner 2005:14) because of pre-contact literacy (whatever that might have been), he should by all means take a look at the other Indian experience [17]. There, several thousand years of prolific literary activity did not suffice to preserve earlier materials unscathed from the effects of the onset of colonial rule, nor of course render them reliable as true history in the first place. And the same can be said about southeast Asia including Indonesia, And much of west and north Africa. And ancient Israel. And Iceland. And Poland. And Greece, ancient and modern. And in all the other times and places where conditions of hegemony–subordination have existed — very much including today [18].

If I have "misrepresent[ed] the work of others" (Offner 2005:15), then some examples, please, and I mean more than hit-and-run allusions to the anguished outcries of Dobyns, Hudson, et al., and others, who complain but never refute. In fact, here is what I suggest that Offner might do to escape the bonds of the Internet and its concomitant cherry-picking, self-fulfilling modus operandi, and actually come to grips with my views on the matters he raises [19]. Instead of relying on Henry Dobyns, try reading Numbers from Nowhere; instead of relying on Darlene Wilson, try reading the review to which she is reacting or even my reply to her, which immediately follows; instead of relying on Iain Provan — by whom he was blind-sided — try reading the article to which he is trying to respond; instead of relying on Charles

Hudson, et al., why not try reading the several back-and-forth articles that contextualize that debate? Doing this is bound to be time-consuming, but there is every chance that it would enable Offner to avoid his happenstance middle-persons and confront and criticize my arguments directly rather than through ventriloquism [20].

I wish him good hunting.

## VII

Offner will probably not forgive me if I remain — still — less sanguine than he (2005:14) is about the length and breadth, the reliability and originality of "pre-Conquest historiography" in Texcoco and elsewhere in central Mexico, and even less sanguine than that about its ability to survive the imposition of Spanish rule without being deleteriously affected. Since I had thought that my comments in this regard were fairly routine devil's advocacy, I was disquieted by the vehemence of Offner's reply, until I realized that he, like Provan and many others, see systematic doubt as nothing more than a threat — a slouching beast to be fought off at all costs, no prisoners to be taken [21]. That's a pity, because — to repeat myself — doubt stimulates rather than stifles; more than anything else, dissatisfaction with the status quo generates and ensures continuous progress. I can only hope, though hardly expect given Offner's affinity for Provanesque argument, that he will come to understand this and realize that, in the end the most important questions a scholar can ask are: Why do I think that I know? Can my arguments and my evidence withstand determined criticism?

### Notes

1. Donald Rumsfeld, 12 February 2002 communique, posted at [http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t02122002\\_t212sdv2.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t02122002_t212sdv2.html).

2. Or why I thought the same thing when I happened to catch the wrap-up of golf tournament on television. It consisted of showing only the good shots of the winner and only the bad shots of the loser, even though the difference between the two players' scores for the entire tournament was only two strokes.

3. I was not allowed to respond to the charge.

4. I've now checked, and it has.

5. Those who are not nihilists will naturally credit various "realities" differently. Skeptics accept that the battle of Marathon occurred, but will be more dubious of exactly on which day, how many Greeks and Persians were killed, whether Herodotus' account of the mile-long trot of the Greek hoplites could have happened (modern experiments suggest not), under what circumstances and for what reasons the Spartans failed to appear in time, or whether Pheidippides actually ran back to Athens and died after gasping the word "victory." About the siege of Troy, conversely, they have an obligation to be skeptical of every detail in the *Iliad*. They will accept much more of the accounts of the battle of Gettysburg, but will not overlook the fact that these contradict each other at times, and they will have no reason to believe unstintingly what Lee, Longstreet, Meade, and others had to say about their motivations and actions before, during, and after the battle.

6. For the next installment see Henige (2005a).

7. Nevertheless, I admit failure since I was trying to be word-perfect.

8. Of course, I learned this only because I was selectively skeptical of Provan's reliance on a tertiary

source.

9. Hume (1993:106-7 n).

10. To be fair, this might be the only time Provan has done this.

11. Offner (2005:13) introduces his discussion of this by referring my "pace" ("with all due respect to") as "a paternalistic religious idiom." This was news to me, so I decided to pursue the matter a bit, only to find that it was used by such assorted non-Christians (and non-fathers?) as Livy, Velleius Paterculus, Pliny, Terence, Aulus Gellius, and Quintilian. So I'm afraid that this too leaves me befuddled.

12. I discuss some of these in Henige (2003).

13. This is not to say that I deny that "old-style" and "and" might have followings of their own, only that I have been unable to trace them.

14. Perhaps a concrete example of this approach in action can alleviate, though probably not banish, any confusion. The Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) is a large group of men and women dedicated to improving the statistical record of baseball one home run, one RBI, one strikeout, one stolen base at a time. None of these researchers anticipates that this collective effort will produce a perfect record at any time in the future, but nonetheless aim in that direction, and in sum have corrected the historical record significantly. Thus, for sixty years or so it was deemed to be "true" that Ty Cobb had 4,191 hits and a lifetime batting average of .367. A closer investigation of the record, however, shows that he had 4,192 hits, but because several more at-bats were also uncovered, his lifetime batting average actually slipped to .366. The history of the world will not be changed by this example of evolving truth, but labors of the members of SABR (and this is only one of scores of examples) to edge toward defensible accuracy is certainly worth noting in the debate over the singularity or multiplicity of truth.

15. See, for instance, Henige (1999, 2005b:173-85; n.d.). In none of these cases has the silence yet been penetrated.

16. For a survey of the effects of acculturation on oral and written texts see Henige (1982).

17. As for Offner's footnote comment on Hindu interpretations of the past, I refer readers to the "Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies," which contests much of recent Hindutva interpretations of earliest Indian history. It is available at <http://users.primushost.com/~india/ejvs/>.

18. For those interested, I am establishing a bibliographic Web site at <http://minds.Wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/180>. A preliminary version of this should be available in late 2005 and eventually will comprise several thousand references to a variety of categories relating to historical method published since 1975.

19. I hope that I am right to think that Offner does not treat his sources for Texcoco in quite the same way.

20. I would like to comment on Offner's note 9, but I don't get it, especially the "again" in the first sentence.

21. I used the expression lèse-majesté in my previous comment and it is clear that it was well chosen.

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**REPLY**

"All Done 'Zetetics'"  
 By Jerome A. Offner  
 Houston, Texas

My brief journey with the burden of David Henige and his gnostic bundle of "zetetics" is not unlike that of others.

"Henige is a pettifogger, sowing seeds of doubt everywhere, by whatever means. More often than not, however, his doubts devolve from slipshod readings of the documents and from his own preconceptions about what the members of the expedition should have done.

"Henige's ignorance of archaeology — both specifics and generalities — does not inhibit him from flailing away at use of archaeological evidence by Hudson, et al.

"David Henige is expending a great deal of time and energy contesting every word written by Hudson and his colleagues about DeSoto, Pardo and Luna. His motives elude us. Does he imagine himself to be a self-appointed guard, keeping the barbarians from the gate? Is he intent on persuading people that what Hudson, et al. are attempting to do cannot be done? Or is he intent on getting their attempts to reconstruct the activities of the Spanish explorers out of the way so he can try his hand at it? If it is the latter, he is off to a bad start." (Hudson, et al. 1994:727,728,733)

Henige's earlier commentary (2004) and the current one have obliged me in his roving statement by showing more of what lies behind the slim apparatus of "zetetics": multiple odd ad hominem speculations regarding details of my (and Iain Provan's) psychology, situation and past thoughts and behavior — sufficient empirical demonstration of which would require physical instrumentalities unknown to me; use of a predatory metaphor — hunting — unfit as a mode for disputation; several weak defenses better left unlaunched; and ill-fitting similes and warping of semantic ranges of common words and expressions worthy of a White House word wonk. Also offered are renewed pronouncements of "I will have told you so" futility for the efforts of Mesoamerican historians based on Henige's continuing failure to comprehend what they have accomplished, are accomplishing and trying to accomplish. As is most often true of ideologies, methodological strictures imposed on others by the ideology are irrelevant to the task of defending it.

I stand by my comments. "Zetetics," apparently a school of one, is a typically teratoid ideology on an unstable foundation with the attendant sequelae: It is a selectively mustered notion of skepticism. Henige's reply once again admits of no answer and produces no conviction, except perhaps his own. Because "zetetic" attacks are so often launched from a base of ignorance, as displayed in these pages and in the cited and other forays outside Henige's limited area of expertise, Henige cannot claim to be advancing scientific discourse. Neither can all or any substantive historiographic revisions worldwide be claimed as support for this enterprise. The preceding pages, along with the experiences of others, indicate to me that further engagement with this ill-disciplined "zetetic" inquisitor with no substantive knowledge of Mesoamerica and suspect claims of knowledge of so many other parts of the world, will result only in endless, profitless argumentation. Having rushed into Mesoamerican studies and committed serious errors, Henige still calls for trust in his opinions regarding historiography on a worldwide scale.

David Henige, a university library bibliographer, may or may not realize that the Internet with its diverse search engines, has transformed research. To begin with, there is the open Internet access to the card catalogs of major research universities. The Internet also provides easy initial access to JSTOR,

Project MUSE, AnthroSource, etc., although the full text of articles, at least for ordinary people, are available only via affiliation with a university library. We do have such institutions in Texas, notably Rice University's Fondren Library and the University of Texas Library System, with its celebrated Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection in Austin. Annual membership costs including lending and stacks privileges are \$100 and free, respectively. Henige may or may not realize that a modest digital camera, a few memory sticks and a portable computer comprise an excellent photocopy system enabling large amounts of published matter to be captured quickly at no cost and burned to disk for legally permitted personal use at leisure. Limited physical time in a library is thus directed to browsing the stacks or reading the latest journals for that new or overlooked idea. And of course, all imaging is time-stamped so that what research was conducted when can be easily recovered and demonstrated. Perhaps I should point out to Henige that not using the Internet in nearly any field of research by now constitutes egregious neglect, and that among the Internet and library research findings, I did omit — as distracting — from my earlier reply and also this current reply, are plenty of harsher conventionally published criticism of him as well as intemperate and embarrassing quotes attributed to him by newspapers.

It seemed time to chronicle Henige's periodic attacks outside his limited range of expertise because they were each being treated in isolation, with none of the historians assailed by Henige showing an awareness of the history of these attacks. Along with dispensing with Henige's substantive errors, my reply was designed precisely to form a collection of Henige's attack work in order to identify and isolate its patterns so that it can be judged in full context. It is obvious that the bibliography in my original reply (Offner 2005) is easily used as an entry point to revisit these often protracted controversies in full detail simply by retracing the bibliographical links. The quotes used provide accurate insights into the reactions and perspicacity of "zetetic" targets. My reply to him was also deliberately intended as a beacon on the Internet for past and future targets so that these serial attacks no longer benefit from the relative isolation fostered by time, academic specialization and conventional printed matter, but are instead recognized and dealt with as part of an essentially parasitic pattern. The Internet, in fact no stranger to Henige, has already created a broader stage with harsher lights for all of us — we can live it or live with it.

Clearly, Henige is in recruitment mode in his statement and tries to appear in this instance somewhat well mannered and misunderstood. It is exactly for this reason that I have marshaled these other examples of his crashing into areas of which he knows little to nothing and launching repetitive misdirected attacks filled with mistakes rooted in his ignorance. If he cannot competently participate in these areas and produce substantive arguments based on substantive knowledge, he cannot claim to be forwarding our understanding of them. Instead we observe behavior that is more akin to exhibitionism and attempts at vandalism.

Passing over Henige's histrionics provides clarity, for in the end "zetetics" is but a smallish form of parasitism. It is an unimaginative attempted rebranding of select slivers of the age-old process of historiography, diminishing the substantive accomplishments of historians of all periods through a conduit constructed of the ill-disciplined and impromptu methodology exhibited in these pages. Standard procedure involves forcing historical materials onto a Procrustean bed of nineteenth-century, inappropriate, irrelevant or ethnocentric dimensions and design, so that their inevitable failure to "fit" will drain off claims of knowledge that somehow prove the prophetic prescience of its purveyor. In the meantime, the rather fuller range of historical research goes on. "Zetetics" is mere sideshow, perhaps initially attractive to the impressionable.

I now shed my burden of David Henige. I find that his gnostic bundle — along with his tin ear for cultural matters — leads only to illusory landscapes and on into emptiness. As to methodology, philosophy, epistemology and the like, I remain interested in the substance of Mesoamerica and its history — what we can know of its past, present and future. Talking about talking about (... etc.) history,

particularly with the negligently ignorant, remains a background concern. "Zetetics," a parasitoid ideology with saprophytic pretensions, is free to consume itself or simply dry up for lack of any substance. Perhaps it can find a way to learn to achieve its own substantive research, but could it ever overcome its own published doubtings or meet its own mercurial standards, not to mention accepted research standards? Neither Henige's arguments nor the very little and suspect evidence he offers withstand criticism. Henige's facile final question can be asked by anyone of anything. It is substance and results that matter.

Approaching three decades in this curious and occasionally nettlesome field, I can only observe that — with apologies to Thomas Gresham, Branch Rickey and their predecessors — good history will drive out bad history, and vice versa.

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#### ILLUSTRATIONS IN THIS ISSUE

Illustrations that decorate this issue come from Tamtok: Sitio arqueológico huasteco = Tamtok: Site archéologique huastèque, vol. 2. By Guy Stresser-Péan and Claude Stresser-Péan. Drawings by Françoise Bagot. México, D.F.: CONACULTA/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia; Instituto de Cultura de San Luis; Fomento Cultural Banamex, A.C.; Centre Français d'Etudes Mexicaines et Centraméricaines, 2005. Vol. 2, ISBN 968-6029-80-X; with CD-ROM in French, ISBN 968-6029-81-8. A critical review of this volume is scheduled to appear in a future issue of the NN.

[The illustrations have been removed from the version posted at <http://www.ipfw.edu/soca/Nahua>]

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