Although all the alphabetic writing in Nahuatl in the postcontact centuries had the same ultimate origin in the philological work of Spanish ecclesiastics, it soon bifurcated. One corpus of texts continued to be sponsored and supervised by Spanish clerics, while another, which grew much larger than the first as time went on, featured texts written by Nahuas more independently. Some were produced privately, notably historical annals and the so-called títulos primordiales, but the vast majority were working documents connected in some way with the local indigenous municipal council and church organizations, and this corpus forms the topic of the present article. Although most were written by indigenous notaries, not all were notarized documents, and their main characteristic is their everyday, practical, local nature, so that we call them mundane documents, a term already well understood by those who work in this subfield. Let us say that although this literature is notable for including females as principals (testators, petitioners, etc.) and mentioning them nearly as frequently as males, males wrote down virtually all the texts, indeed all that we know of. We turn, then, immediately to a description of the main genres of this corpus.

**Testaments**

The premier genre of mundane Nahuatl documentation is the last will and testament, easily the type preserved in greatest number in archives and private collections. Estimates of the proportion of testaments range from over half of all extant Nahuatl documents to a much higher figure. The first examples appear in the 1540s; by the last quarter of the sixteenth century wills are standard fare, and they remain the staple for as long as mundane Nahuatl texts continued to be produced; as with other genres, the number tapers off rapidly after about 1770, but individual examples continue to be found for later decades, and a sizable collection from the Toluca Valley, dated in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, has just recently been discovered.¹

Nahuatl testaments from first to last are closely based on the Spanish model, with a religious preamble, followed by requests for a mass and burial, then in the body of the will a number of bequests of property, usually to close relatives, each framed as a separate item, with witnesses and often an executor or two named at the end. Debts owed by or to the testator may also receive attention toward the end of the will, or even as a postscript. Some testaments, especially the earlier ones, read as if they were translations from a Spanish original. In the corpus overall, however, as we will see, some persistent differences between Nahuatl and Spanish testaments assert themselves.

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*© Rebecca Horn and James Lockhart 2010. The present article is meant for publication in a future supplementary volume of the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* edited by Michel Oudijk. When the publication appears, the present piece will be withdrawn from this collection.

¹By Miriam Melton-Villanueva, presently a doctoral student at UCLA. See Melton-Villanueva and Pizzigoni 2008 and 2008a.
Such differences, as well as the stunning success and popularity of the genre all across the Nahua world, suggest that it had a precontact precedent. Yet not only is the basic structure and to a large extent the special vocabulary European, another indication of the newness of the genre is its total lack of a pictorial component. The well established precontact oral/written genre of historical annals retained a strong pictorial element through the sixteenth century and in some cases much longer. The same was even true, in some areas at least, of documents having to do with the transfer of land. The contrast is all the more striking because most testaments, seen from a certain point of view, are primarily documents having to do with the transfer of land.

Well considered, however, the lack of a pictorial dimension in a postconquest genre says only that it was not something recorded on paper before contact, not that it did not exist as an oral means of expression. The late sixteenth-century collections of Nahuatl song, also without images, by their nature demonstrate clearly that the structure, vocabulary, and much of the content of the genre goes back to precontact times; it was merely that such rhetoric largely escaped preconquest writing techniques, so that the songs were not written down even in the sense that historical annals were (which was far indeed from a word-by-word transcription of the oral presentation). The same is true of petitions and speeches. Thus there is every reason to think it likely that a speech in which a dying person gave final commands to an audience was part of precontact Nahua culture.

Actual examples of a precontact form are virtually absent. The closest approach is perhaps the informal statement of one Miguel Oçoma recorded posthumously in the Testaments of Culhuacan (Cline and León-Portilla 1984, Doc. 69, ca. 1580), in which Miguel asks two men (the equivalent of his executors, though the word is not used) to draw near, and speaking directly to them tells more about the nature of the burial feast than usual, then proceeds to charge one of them in a very human, personal way with taking in his child, to whom he leaves almost all he owns. The bequests are not formally divided into separate items in the usual way. Hints of this direct speech of the testator to executors, heirs, or all listeners are found throughout the testament corpus, though usually masked by Spanish conventions. They and other features in which Nahuatl wills differ from those in Spanish may help us reconstruct precontact testamentary practice, and surely they reveal the idiosyncrasy of the Nahuatl corpus. But first let us become better acquainted with the side of the genre that is clearly of Spanish origin.

Models of wills in Nahuatl must have first been forged in the centers of philology—in Mexico City, Tlatelolco, Tetzoco, Tlaxcala, perhaps Cuernavaca—by teams of mendicant friars (primarily Franciscans) and their specially trained Nahua aides. Considerable attention has been given to one such model which came to be published, put out by fray Alonso de Molina in 1565. It is surely of interest, but it should not be seen as the one definitive origin of the Nahuatl testament genre. For one thing, it is too late. Fully formed Nahuatl wills were issued already in the 1540s; moreover, they vary considerably from Molina’s sample. In identifying the place where the will was issued as a parish, in providing for a certain inheritance for the spouse and equal division among the
children, in making certain charitable donations, in making elaborate provision for the liquidation of debts, and in yet other ways, Molina’s sample represents Spanish practice but was not generally followed by Nahua writers of testaments as the genre evolved. The document is not even divided sharply into separate entries as was the custom with testaments in both Spanish and Nahuatl. (See Appendix B, Lockhart 1992.)

It would appear that mendicant philologists in various centers, together with their aides, prepared separate models, all building on an essentially uniform Spanish practice, and that Nahua writers while adopting the models immediately began to vary them. Generally speaking, the earlier a testament is, the more likely it is to conform in all ways to a Spanish model.

The religious preamble of a testament will maintain essential consistency in all the productions of a given notary, though becoming more elaborate corresponding to the wealth of the testator. The typical elements in testaments of the first generations and indeed of the whole time up to about the middle of the seventeenth century (corresponding to Lockhart’s Stage 2; the stages are succinctly explained in Lockhart 1999, pp. 208–09) are all taken from the Spanish equivalent, often based on the credo: mention of the Trinity, of the omnipotence of God, of the Virgin Mary as an intercessor, declaration of belief in all that is held true by the Roman church. The soul is consigned to God and the body to the earth of which it was made. The preamble was originally austere, lacking the saints who proliferated there later. Though in Stage 3 it became somewhat permeable, it was long much less open to change than the rest of the will, becoming frozen ritual speech, a sort of incantation, while the remainder evolved. It is also the part of a will most subject to errors, both omissions and repetitions. In addition to the testator’s name it usually locates the testament in a certain altepetl or in a tlaxilacalli (subdistrict) thereof, or both.

The entry, or two or three, devoted to requesting a mass and any other observance, with associated offerings, is nearly as frozen in its expression as the preamble, and equally close to Spanish precedents.

The body of the will also has its conventions, but is in freer speech ranging over any topic that needs to be covered. Usually attention is given first to a house or houses, then to the distribution of land. The translator must remember that the ubiquitous word calli can mean either one building or a whole complex. Generally, one-room buildings surrounded a patio (which is left unmentioned) and are located by cardinal direction; thus a house described as iquiçayampa tonatiuh itzticac, “facing east (literally where the sun rises),” is on the west side of the patio, and one facing west (where the sun sets) (icalaquiyampa tonatiuh itzticac) is on the east. The dimensions of lands bequeathed are often given, at least in one direction, using a unit universal in the given subregion, most often the quahuitl, “stick,” sometimes the matl, “hand/arm,” and occasionally others. All of these seem to have been in the neighborhood of seven feet, sometimes more.

The executors, witnesses, and the notary are named at the end in a self-explanatory fashion, though as we will see, much can be said on this point. The date, fully in the Spanish style from the beginning and sometimes using actual Spanish words, can come either at the beginning or at the end.
Now let us look at some ways in which Nahuatl wills came to deviate from the Spanish model. Virtually all these deviances can be subsumed under a central distinction. A Spanish will was dictated by the testator in the first person to a notary, with no audience, and all others than the testator were referred to in the third person. Witnesses verified the fact that the document was done before a notary but were not necessarily privy to it. The will was a private written artifact.

Nahuatl wills adopted the convention of the first-person testator speaking about the heirs and others in the third person, but at certain junctures the fiction might be abandoned and the testator might speak directly to an heir, to the executors, or to an audience. Just under the surface of a Nahuatl will is the fact that the transaction is in the first instance oral and before listeners, listeners who back up its content as well as the mere fact that it was properly issued. A Nahuatl will was more like a trial transcript than an artifact which existed as writing from the beginning like a Spanish will. It is consonant with the whole principle of Nahuatl orthography, which reproduced within its limitations the speech of the writer rather than spelling words in an abstract uniform fashion.

The most obvious testimony to the presence and importance of an audience was a Nahua innovation, what we can call the peroration, a statement at the end of each command that it should be carried out or not violated. Very common were neltiz, “it is to be realized or carried out,” mochihuan, “it is to be done,” and macayac quitlaco, “may no one violate it,” but there are many combinations and variants. They are to be understood as exhortations to an audience responsible for overseeing the proper execution of the commands.

The admonitions did not come into vogue immediately. In the earliest wills they are absent except for some occasional hint. Even in the Testaments of Culhuacan, the great collection of ca. 1580, most bequests are left undecorated, although perorations are present at times, and one or two texts written only a few years later repeat an admonition consistently (see Doc. 60). The picture in the sixteenth-century testaments of Mexico City published by Luis Reyes et al. (1996) is much the same. By around 1600 it was the normal thing for bequests in Nahuatl testaments to end in a peroration, and that continued to be true for as long as the genre persisted.

The other main way in which the oral, performative nature of Nahuatl wills manifested itself was in the lists of witnesses. In the Spanish tradition only three were required, all males, although there might be more for an important document, and as we have said, their function was to attest to the legality of the procedure. In sixteenth-century Nahuatl testaments we usually see a larger number of witnesses, often if not usually of both genders. They represented the local community which was to enforce the testator’s dispositions. Another Nahua strategy was to have as witnesses some of the highest local indigenous authorities, of the municipal council, the church organization, or both, representing the enforcing power of the community in a different way.

Testaments in Nahuatl retained most of the above characteristics for as long as they continued to be written, but changes continued decade after decade. It is possible in a general way to point to features that separate the time after about 1640–1650 (Lockhart’s Stage 3) from the preceding era, the time from when
testaments first appear up until then (Stage 2). Some differences are superficial, some have far-reaching implications. Stage 3 wills usually have the heading “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” entirely lacking in Stage 2. The bequests of Stage 2 wills are marked at the beginning of each with a sign something like an underlined cursive v; Stage 3 wills gradually abandon the sign and often put a dash at the end of a bequest instead. A very meaningful change took place with the witnesses, who are reduced in number and rarely include a woman; officials, especially the fiscal (main steward of the church) and other church officials, become ever more prominent.

Stage 3 preambles and related formula derive in part from those of earlier, but the styles change. The Trinity is still at the core of the usual beginning, but the earlier almost universal phrase *ma quimatican in ixquichtin*, “May all know . . . ,” coming directly from the Spanish form, becomes rarer. Early preambles were austere, often with a mention of the Virgin but no other saints, and Mary would be called “very true virgin” or the like, not “our precious mother” as the Nahuas gradually came to call her. Stage 3 preambles do use “our precious mother,” or “our precious revered mother,” and some of them abound in invocations of other saints as well, also called our mothers and our fathers, not to speak of the saints constantly mentioned in the body of the wills, at least those of the affluent. The Testaments of Culhuacan, in contrast, have no saints in the preambles and virtually do not mention saints in the body, except for a few crucifixes.

In Stage 3 the quahuitl and other indigenous units of land measurement began to give way to Spanish-style terminology, such as the dry measurements *almud* and *fanega*, indicating how much seed would fit in a certain parcel, or the *yunta*, indicating the amount of land a yoke of oxen could work, though the quahuitl was never forgotten in some areas.

Yet though Stage 2 and Stage 3 testaments can be legitimately distinguished as separate types, not everything happened instantaneously across the whole Nahuatl-speaking area in the decade 1640–1650. In recent work on testaments of the Toluca Valley, it has been discovered that documents of the time 1650–1700 are a mix of Stage 2 and Stage 3 characteristics, and it is not until around 1700 or indeed a little after that the Stage 3 model fully obtains (Pizzigoni 2007).

Within the marked uniformity of the genre, testaments also varied with region. Bell-ringing was usually mentioned in some areas, not in others; certain sequences of saints were standardly included in testament preambles in some places, not in others. Work with testaments in two subareas of the Toluca Valley shows that not only were there general differences between the two including a markedly different preamble style, but, as has been long suspected, many tlapilxilacalli had distinct styles and even to an extent distinct vocabularies and orthographies. Although testaments were done in a certain proximity to Spanish priests, who often added annotations in Spanish about the performance of masses, such evidence points to a quite independent transmission of the genre and all its details from one local notary to the next. In the later centuries, the texts of testaments were often spelled in a way that priests cognizant of Nahuatl would not have approved of and possibly not have understood.
Land documents

To go now beyond testaments while staying in the realm of documents in Spanish-based genres that can be found throughout the time when Nahuatl writing flourished, a major department is land documentation, including investigations, grants, and above all bills of sale, some with the participation of the local municipal council, some merely notarized (a great deal of information on these genres may be found in Horn 1997).

The Nahuatl bill of sale was based on a Spanish model, the *carta de venta*, and followed a standard format: it named the seller(s) and buyer(s) and identified each by home community; described the parcel of land; stated the purchase price; and noted the date in terms of the Christian calendar either at the beginning or the end of the document. Following Spanish custom, the notary typically provided the purchaser with the bill of sale, and many have been preserved among the titles of Spanish estates or as evidence in records of land disputes.

It was necessary for the buyer of purchased land to receive ritual possession of it. A Spanish official or the Nahua governor and/or other town council members would observe as the buyer walked around the plot performing minor destructive acts as a symbol of ownership. The main features of the possession ritual are drawn from Spanish tradition, though at times we see an admixture of indigenous elements, such as gestures to the four directions. A document attesting to the performance of this rite, called the *posesión*, at times accompanies the bill of sale proper.

The ease with which bills of sale and other types of land documentation took hold, plus other features, as we will see, point to an indigenous precedent, and indeed, we know that pictorial land registers were a major precontact genre. Land records constitute the major exception within mundane documentation to the lack of a pictorial component precisely because they were identified in the minds of the Nahuas with existing genres. Although diminishing in number over time, pictorials are commonly found associated with land documents throughout Stage 2, at times appearing even later. Line drawings depict house and land in land transfer documents from Tetzcoco through the early seventeenth century, as well as in documents from Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco at the same time. The alphabetic text typically repeats and elaborates on information presented in the pictorial, which still exhibits familiarity with the preconquest pictographic tradition—fields represented by uniform rectangles, with plot dimensions, location, and boundaries indicated by glyphs. With time, as the preconquest pictographic tradition weakened, depictions of property in Nahuatl land documents became more realistic, eventually differing little from those found in Spanish counterparts.

Like testaments, Nahuatl land documents differed from Spanish counterparts in the presumed presence of an audience that assents to the validity of the proceedings. One bill of sale from Coyoacan directly refers to the validating role of the witnesses: “all the witnesses declare that it is really his [the seller’s] property.” As with wills, witnesses typically numbered more than the three adult males needed to make a Spanish document legal and might include municipal officials, neighboring landowners, Spaniards, and women. The public nature of
such acts also emerges in indigenous-style feasting that at times accompanied
land transfers. A striking example from 1583 concerns the now well known case
of Ana of Tocuillan in the Tetzcoco region, in which she approaches members of
the local municipal council to request a piece of land and, after providing them
with pulque and tortillas, receives the grant (Lockhart 1991, pp. 66–74).

Again as with testaments, bills of sale also often included admonitions. In
some form they appear in land records by the mid-sixteenth century, earlier than
in testaments, perhaps reflecting preconquest practice. A seller might admonish
children who would have been potential heirs to make no future claims to the land
or provide for a fine to be paid to local officials if anyone were to renege on or
challenge the agreement. Bills of sale also included various other statements
directed to an audience and intended to establish the legitimacy of the sale in
terms of both Spanish law and local custom. Reflecting Spanish law, bills of sale
went to great pains to cast land sales as voluntary, using such words as -yollocaca-
op (from yollotli, “heart”), meaning “voluntarily, willingly,” and -paccanno-
notza, “to agree gladly.” Often a seller declared that the money for the sale was
actually in his or her hands and then stated huel pachiuihtica noyolol, “I am very
satisfied.”

To establish the right to sell land in the first place, some statements indicated
how the seller had initially acquired it, whether by inheritance, purchase, grant, or
exchange, or simply asserted that the land was truly the property of the seller.
Other statements reflect the distinction in Nahua land tenure between categories
considered alienable or inalienable, as in the phrases ca italcohualli, “it is pur-
chased land,” ca huehuetlalli, “it is inherited land,” considered alienable, or camo
tequitcatlalli, “it is not tribute land” or camo altepetlalli, “it is not altepetl land,”
land more closely controled by community officials. Still other statements pro-
vided alleged justifications of the sale, including that the seller held property
elsewhere with which to sustain him/herself or needed sale receipts to pay tribute
or other debts. First person narrative is often used with statements concerning the
legitimacy of sales.

At the core of the bill of sale and other land records is the description of the
land parcel, varying in length and detail depending on the notary, region, or date.
A collection of Nahuatl bills of sale from Coyoacan, the largest preserved for any
subregion, demonstrates that land descriptions in the region changed over time,
reflecting in part the growing influence of Spanish practices. From the mid- to late
sixteenth century, the description of land parcels in Coyoacan bills of sale
identified the location by place name; provided dimensions in such indigenous
units as quahuitl and matl, typically in terms of both length (hueyac) and width
(patlahuac), and used cardinal directions along with the identification of neigh-
boring landowners and striking features of the local scene to indicate land
boundaries.

For the most part Nahuatl did not adopt Spanish terms for cardinal directions
until Stage 3. Before then the solar directions were indicated by the indigenous
phrases mentioned above, whereas no general words were in use for north and
south, the directions being indicated by easily identifiable places, prominent
towns or peaks, with the addition of the suffixes –pa, -copia, or –pahuic, meaning
“toward.” By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the use of place names, dimensions, and cardinal directions fell into disuse in many places; a plot was henceforth described by identifying the owners of adjacent land or houses and citing notable vegetation or geographical or human-made landmarks, much as in Spanish documents.

Other changes are evident in Stage 2 land documents. We have already mentioned that pictorials, associated with alphabetic land documents from the first, diminished with time and, where they remained, conformed more to European conventions, a process largely complete by the first years of the seventeenth century, well before the end of Stage 2. And admonitions and alleged justifications for sale became more elaborate with time, a reflection perhaps of the expanding Spanish land market and the growing concerns on the part of both Nahua and Spanish officials about the loss of indigenous land.

Regional differences surface in Nahua land documents as well as in wills. Stronger Spanish influence in and close to the capital may be a factor, but at this point it is hard to systematize the variation or make other general statements on the topic.

Nahuatl land documents provide concrete examples of Nahua land tenure as practiced at the local level. Along with testaments, which in large part also concern land, land documents shed light on aspects of land tenure that tend not to appear in more generalized Spanish accounts. Here we see the pattern of a core plot (callalli) and scattered properties; categories of land, some considered alienable, others not; range in the size of individual and household properties between and among nobles and commoners; units of measure, typically in vigesimal-based dimensions; a 400-square unit standard measure; and the role of municipal officials in the allocation of land as well as transfers that led to the loss of land to Nahua communities.

We find hints of preconquest practice as well as transformation consequent on contact with Spaniards. The Coyoacan bills of sale demonstrate, for example, that Nahuas continued to assess taxes on the basis of landholding long after Spaniards had gone to a head tax. They also demonstrate the complex process of response to changes introduced by Spaniards. At first, Nahuas resorted to traditional land tenure concepts in the new setting and then, in a subsequent stage, adopted the appropriate Spanish term, which would be affected by though not identical to the Nahuatl one. Consider the terms huehuetlalli and patrimonio. Initially, bills of sale referred to a piece of land as huehuetlalli (land closely associated with the family) to justify its sale under the Spanish system. Later, some texts substituted the Spanish loanword patrimonio, “patrimony,” clearly with the same meaning as huehuetlalli, for it occurred in precisely the same context and for the same purpose, and sometimes was also compounded with tlalli, giving patrimoniotlalli.

**Other genres**

Other types of mundane Nahuatl documentation are extant in smaller numbers than testaments and land documents. They are generally speaking correspondingly less well known and understood, and much of the basic philology remains to be
done, so that they will be treated less extensively here.

**The Cuernavaca-region census records.** A set of early texts from the Cuernavaca region, written in the late 1530s and early 1540s, at once censuses, cadastrals, and tax registers, are unparalleled and constitute an important genre in themselves (a large section of them is in Cline 1993, along with substantial analysis of the contents, and see Cline’s contribution in this collection). They are virtually the only sizable direct evidence of the state of the Nahuatl language in Stage 1, the first generation after contact, when hardly any linguistic change had yet occurred, for generally speaking alphabetic writing could be said to be a product of Stage 2. The texts are organized by sociopolitical units and within that by households; the facts for each household, starting with the names of its members, follow one after another, each item preceded by *iz catqui*, “here is.” Although there is not the slightest pictorial component, the text reads like a description of a pictorial document in front of the writer, and the content corresponds to typical precontact-style pictorial cadastral documents. It can be said of Nahuatl documentation as a whole that the earlier the text, the stronger the pictorial element, and that the pictorials correspond in some fashion to the precontact pictorial component, the alphabetic part to the old oral component, with the alphabetic part gaining ever more dominance. But it now appears that there was an initial time before the integration of the two modes, and the Cuernavaca censuses are a major manifestation of that early period.

The writers of these documents are in their way well trained in alphabetic writing, but they remain anonymous, and there is no sign that their role is identified with that of the Spanish notary as in the later corpus, nor is there any evidence of Spanish documentary genres. The body of texts constitutes unique, important evidence on precontact and conquest-period household organization, the land regime, and tribute duties, and it includes a huge repertory of precontact-style names.

**Parish records.** Another body of mundane documentation, often with some phrases and procedures tantalizingly similar to things found in the entries of the early census records just dealt with, are parish records in Nahuatl, recording principally baptisms, marriages, and burials. Separate books might be kept for each type of record. The size of this corpus is not yet clear, nor is its geographical and temporal range. It appears that many areas went over to Spanish for records of this type at a relatively early time; the examples of which we are aware are from Stage 2. These registers are serial records composed of many brief entries, each made in the course of everyday affairs, yet as a body providing a multitude of similar cases extending over a considerable time. They were usually done in the presence of a Spanish priest, which distinguishes them from most other mundane documents. The entries are relatively uniform in format, presenting a limited range of information. The usefulness of records such as these for all kinds of demographic research will depend on whether or not they prove to exist in numbers comparable to their counterparts in Spanish. Since texts of this type are barely known, we have searched out a few examples in the Mormon microfilm archive (Genealogical Society of Utah, microfilm, rolls # 0-036-261, 0-610-883, 0240-671) and report here some provisional results.
Judging from a sample originating in San Cosme at the end of the sixteenth century, a baptismal entry typically provides the date and the names of the primary individuals involved: the baptized child, the child’s parents, and the godparents. The Nahuatl neologism *quaatequia*, “to baptize,” which was conventional by this time, appears in each entry in the reflexive as passive with the child (*piltontli*) as the subject. The child’s father and mother are named, typically in that order, as well as the godparents, using the standard phrases *teoyotica itatzin* and *teoyotica inantzinzin*, the child’s “father and mother through sacrament” (earlier these phrases had sometimes referred to the actual parents if they were married in the church). Occasionally a child has a godmother only. It is interesting that the baptized child usually carries a single name, whereas most adults have two, in this case largely drawn from the usual repertory of Spanish saints’ names and religious terms. The question arises as to whether the second name, so important in conveying social rank, was added only later. In the San Cosme sample, each entry mentions the day of the week as well as the official date. The majority of baptisms were performed on a Sunday, though other days are mentioned as well. A friar, who we presume to have carried out the baptism, signed most entries after they were written, but not all. In some cases one signature may serve for multiple baptisms performed at the same time, but in others baptisms on different days lack his signature, and one may wonder if the indigenous aides did everything themselves.

A marriage entry might be more extensive. In Coyoacan in the 1630s a marriage record would provide the bride and groom’s names, ages, and tlaxilacalli (groom first), say whether it was a first or second marriage for each, and report that on interrogation the couple declared not to be related to each other (*amo miximati*, “they do not know or recognize each other,” has that meaning in this context). Stock phrases include *quin iyopa in omonamicti teoyotica*, “was married in the church for the first time,” and sentences like *quipia 15 xihuitl amo quipatia in tlacalaquilli*, “She is 15 years old; she does not pay tribute [yet].” A marriage entry typically ends with a large number of witnesses, mainly relatives of the bride and groom apparently, of both genders and from old to young. These extensive lists remind us of the early witness lists of testaments and land records; they are an excellent source for naming patterns and kinship terminology of the time and place.

Of the three types of parish records considered here, burial records are the briefest, at least based on a sample from Acatzingo, Puebla, in the 1640s. Each entry mentions that the individual died (*omomiquili*) and that a friar buried him/her (*oquimotoquili*), the date given apparently being that of the burial. The entry also names the deceased’s spouse (even if already also dead) and the tlaxilacalli or, instead, very interestingly, the estancia of a Spaniard where the person mainly lived, and whether or not he/she paid tribute, presumably because some of those on the estancias did not pay. As with the baptismal records above, these burial records also note the day of the week on which the burial occurred.

**Cofradía records.** Closely related to parish records are the records of cofradías, lay sodalities, which were also produced not far from the presence of Spanish ecclesiastics and often written by the very same notaries who produced
baptismal registers and the like (see Lockhart 1992, pp. 218–29). The elaborate constitutions of these organizations, which have received a good deal of attention, belong to the realm of formal ecclesiastical Nahuatl. But for the rest the cofradía books are of a mundane nature, including reports of sessions of the officers, expenses for masses and burials, and lists of membership and dues collection. The genre is not yet well explored, and the list of examples can be expected to expand with time.

The one set of cofradía records that we have studied thoroughly is that of the cofradía of the Santísimo Sacramento in Tula, mainly from the late sixteenth century, with sporadic further entries as late as the eighteenth. From the sessions reported at intervals one can glean the notion that the organization operated fairly independently, with occasional drastic measures caused by an ecclesiastical inspection. It is possible to follow the officers of the cofradía quite closely. The membership and dues lists, which are the same thing in this instance, are a major resource; though the individual entries are skeletal, the lists contain hundreds of names and tlaxilacalli affiliations. Such materials could be put to many uses; in this case, in conjunction with the records of sessions, they show a very strong female role in the organization, almost amounting to dominance even though the main officers are male.

The Tlaxcalan Actas. One of the most permanently successful measures taken by the Spaniards in central Mexico at the beginning of Stage 2 was the establishment in every altepetl of a municipal council on the Spanish pattern at least as to the titles of most of its members. Spanish councils (cabildos) kept records if not actual minutes of their sessions, but that practice did not generally take hold among the Nahuas, at least to our knowledge, with one notable exception, the four-part complex altepetl of Tlaxcala. Even there we have consecutive records only from 1547 to 1567. The reports are polished, in the style of Spanish actas de cabildo, specifying the date and the attendance, with succinct summaries of topics discussed and actions taken. The indigenous structure is strongly reflected in the document, however. Members attending are listed strictly by the four constituent altepetl in the prescribed order, though that is not made explicit. Many special commissions are assigned to groups of four, one person from each altepetl. And occasionally the format departs from the Spanish to reproduce a cascade of Nahuatl oratory. (See Lockhart, Berdan and Anderson 1986, which contains some full samples with translation and commentary.)

Petitions. Many extant documents issued by the indigenous cabildos (the word cabildo faded in time, the group being called instead oficiales de la república) are the very land documents that we have already discussed. Petitions constitute another significant block of cabildo documents, of two types, those addressed by the cabildo to Spanish authorities and those addressed by individuals or groups to the cabildo (plus others directly to Spanish authorities instead).

All of these types of petitions were originally modeled on the preconquest-style Nahua speech or oration, and particularly the kind given before rulers and judges of which we see several examples in Sahagún’s Florentine Codex, Book 6, featuring a whole collection of figures of speech concerning rulers and ruled, elaborate expressions of humility, and frequent doubling of phrases in a rich
rhetoric. Some early petitions, notably the now famous one from Huejotzingo’s cabildo to the crown in 1560 (in Lockhart 1993, pp. 288–97) protesting a hike in the tribute, are transparently in this vein, with only a scattering of words and phrases modeled on similar Spanish documents.

The Huejotzingo petition begins with elaborate phrases of bowing before an infinitely high and compassionate ruler. The long presentation proceeds by large paragraphs each with a well defined topic, each introduced and marked by the same vocative phrase, *totecuiyototlatocatzine*, “O our lord, o our ruler.” Each one concentrates on a simple theme or fact, not so much developing it as elaborating on it, almost one might say belaboring it, as if for oratorical effect. The cabildo members are presumed to be (as they actually were) traditional lords and nobles and contrasted with the commoners, the *macehualtin*. As in later petitions, the cabildo emphasizes the poverty of themselves and the altepetl, which is presented as facing immediate ruin and the disappearance or dispersal of its people (with consequent loss of royal revenue). This staple of the whole literature was thus there from the very beginning.

As time went on, municipal petitions (including those of dissatisfied factions, which are written in the same fashion) assimilated more and more to Spanish modes and vocabulary, but even in eighteenth-century examples one will often see vestiges of the old rhetoric, phrases speaking of the weeping of the petitioners, of the authority as a father, etc.

Petitions from individuals are often even more obviously speeches, given in the first person despite the Spanish convention of having them cast in the third person by the attorney who wrote them and handed them in. They sometimes have hints of the same polite rhetoric but may quickly go over to a very detailed, graphic narration of the problem (with all quotes given in the original person and tense), and an appeal for a solution. A now well known example is a petition to a cabildo in Tulancingo ca. 1584 in which a man tells blow by blow of a turkey theft and an ensuing altercation and asks that the culprit pay for medical care for his wife (Lockhart 1992, pp. 460–62). This statement begins *totecuiyohuane tlatoque*, “O our lords, o rulers,” almost the same as the Huejotzingo letter, and has nothing specifically reminiscent of Spanish legal language, though some statements at the very end, affirming that the other party is a habitual bad liver, may be of indirect Spanish inspiration. A somewhat later example, a woman’s accusation of her daughter-in-law before the governor of Coyoacan in 1613 (Lockhart 2001, pp. 128–29), has all the same characteristics but also shows a greater awareness of Spanish-style legal terms and procedures, as in *inin noquereulla juramentotica nicneltilia*, “I attest to my complaint by oath.”

Private correspondence in Nahuatl is presently so rare a genre that we will not attempt to devote a section to it. For two examples, see BC (Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhart 1976), Docs. 32 and 33. Private letters are by no means the same as petitions, but they resemble them more than any other type in that they are based primarily on traditional Nahuatl oral discourse; the known examples show strong traces of the elevated speech often used in social encounters. The examples presently known to us are from Stage 2, indeed from the late sixteenth century, and the writers were not specifically notaries, but well educated nobles.
Things could have changed later, or possibly private correspondence in Nahuatl withered in later centuries.

Petitions have not been studied as closely as wills and land documents. Individual examples are scattered in various publications; a critical edition of a broad collection would now be called for. Two valuable published collections of corporate petitions do exist, but as it happens they both concern the periphery. Here we have a case of studying the exception before studying the rule.

One of the publications contains a series of cabildo petitions seeking the removal of a priest in seventeenth-century Jalisco; the texts depart from the norm in their language and in other ways, as their editor points out (John Sullivan 2003). For the most part they are rough, graphic, and much like individual complaints, but they are by no means devoid of the old rhetoric. The other collection (Dakin and Lutz 1996), which is most substantial, is even further afield, a set of petitions to the crown ca. 1570 from Guatemala, written by cabildo notaries whose first language seems not to have been Nahuatl. Yet they are actually closer to the central Mexican norm than the Jalisco petitions. Some approach the mode of the Huejotzingo letter; others are simpler. As the principal editor points out, the language seems mainly derived from an older Nahuatl brought into the area before the conquest, the predecessor of the type predominant in the Valley of Mexico in the sixteenth century, but it is mixed between that type and current central Valley phenomena. As it happens, the same thing can be said of the Jalisco petitions.

**Election reports.** A special branch of cabildo documentation is the election report, addressed to the viceregal government. Robert Haskett has made effective use of this genre in his treatment of indigenous municipal government in the Cuernavaca region (Haskett 1991), and the dissertation which preceded his book (Haskett 1985) gives some examples of the genre. Some hint of the old rhetoric may be present, but even when the text proper is minimal and straightforwardly factual, the accompanying lists of names and titles of office are highly informative.

**Tax collection records.** Scattered through the mundane documentation are references to books kept by the cabildo referring to the internal collection of tribute (primarily for the crown, though also supporting community government). At present we are acquainted with just two examples of this genre. First, a volume from Tehuacan dated in the 1640s and quite close to the methods of Spanish account-keeping. (Selections are published in Anderson, Berdan and Lockhart 1976, pp. 130–37). Each year starts by naming the cabildo membership, and then follow a number of entries in which the contribution of each tlaxilacalli is reported as it is brought in to a central collection place. The structure of the altepetl in terms of tlaxilacalli emerges clearly, as well as the names and positions of officers at that level, and through the amounts their relative sizes. The tax categories are seen, here the main money tribute, the *tostón*, and a secondary assessment, the *servicio*, half the amount of the other; and also some sporadic contributions in maize.

A second known example of tribute collection records is from Tepemaxalco in the Valley of Toluca, dated 1658 to 1665 (described in Pizzigoni 2007, pp. 6–7,
and Lockhart 1992, pp. 128–29); a sample is published in Karttunen and Lockhart 1976 (NMY), pp. 108–11. The tlaxilacalli of Tepemaxalco are listed for each year in invariant order (and there happen to be the classic eight of them). All that is given under each tlaxilacalli is a list of names and the amount contributed by each person, but the name lists alone are invaluable.

Of a quite different kind and probably virtually unique are some mid-sixteenth-century records from Coyoacan reporting money contributions from the marketplace to the governor (and traditional ruler). They have been studied in Horn 1997 and Lockhart 1992 and are of importance more for exploring the groups in the market than for their tax implications. They are part of a larger corpus of municipal documentation from Coyoacan at the time, showing the cabildo not yet having adopted as many fully Spanish forms of action and recordkeeping as later. (See Horn 1997; many relevant texts are reproduced in BC, Anderson, Berdan and Lockhart 1976).

**Litigation.** Full-scale litigation carried on within the indigenous municipality is scarce in the known corpus. Typically we see only elements of it, including the petitions and land investigations mentioned earlier, which make up a large part of what is extant. The other feature, and a very valuable one, is the testimony of witnesses, which is often in the first person, not in the third as in Spanish proceedings, and is correspondingly closer to actual Nahuatl speech.

The known materials are mainly early; the largest concentration is from Tlaxcala and has been published (Thelma Sullivan 1987). Most of the suits are over the familiar topic of land inheritance, but a couple concern criminal matters; the texts center in the 1560s, contemporaneous with the extant Tlaxcalan cabildo records, and overlap with them both in official personnel including notaries and in the very considerable degree of absorption of Spanish legal procedures and terminology.

A very substantial amount of testimony by witnesses is included. Although they are sworn in and instructed in the Spanish manner, they are not made to follow a questionnaire as in Spanish practice, but tell their own experiences and opinions freely, and their statements are given in the first person. These parts will reward close study for their colloquial nature, their wandering into topics hardly touched in other kinds of Nahuatl sources, and their implications for earlier times, for much of the land testimony concerns previous generations.

Material is also available from sixteenth-century Mexico City (Reyes García et al. 1996). It is mainly scattered in more fragmentary units than the Tlaxcalan suits, but the total amount is substantial. The general characteristics of the testimony given (also mainly concerning land inheritance and transfer) are almost identical, and the same kind of interest attaches to it.

Larger bodies of litigation in Nahuatl become rarer with the passage of time, but there is reason to believe that all the procedures of Spanish-style litigation, including the recording of testimony, remained alive and approached ever closer to the Spanish model. In 1746 in Amecameca, witnesses were interrogated as a result of a suit between two cousins, over land as usual, and the testimony along with a petition and other legal acts has come down to us in Nahuatl (Karttunen and Lockhart 1978). Nearly all the procedures are now identical to what would
happen in a Spanish court, and the terminology is now very closely modeled on the Spanish. Thus in Spanish a year before the present was always referred to as el año pasado de . . .; in the Amecameca documents we find this phrase used exactly the same way, although expressed through a calque, in ipan xihuitl oíthualpanoque de . . ., literally “in the year that we passed of . . .,” using pano as an equivalent of Spanish pasar. The testimony is still quite detailed, but now it is given in the third person and closely related to specific questions. But though the entire proceedings are so Spanish in nature, something of the earlier Nahua oral expressiveness remains. The defendant is cited (mocitaroa), but in addition to acknowledging the citation, he goes on to denounce the plaintiff at some length and in crusty terms.

The philology of mundane Nahuatl texts

Having dealt briefly with the original corpus of interest here, we now turn to an even briefer discussion of its philology in recent times. We hardly need repeat that for generations after the revival of Nahuatl studies in the late nineteenth century, mundane documents were neglected, though numerous wills, sales, and petitions were labeled in the Mexican archives as being in “mexicano.” A few reached the public almost by chance, but it was not until the appearance in 1976 of Beyond the Codices (BC, Anderson, Berdan and Lockhart 1976) that an effort began to deal systematically with the world of mundane Nahuatl texts, collecting them, transcribing and translating them, identifying the genres, beginning the process of interpretation. The purpose of that book’s title was to point out that the familiar spectacular and more preconquest-oriented items, often studded with pictures, were by no means all of the Nahuatl documentary legacy, but that a whole larger world of quotidian fare, concerning primarily the time in which it was written, cried out for attention.

Beyond the Codices contained a preliminary study characterizing the mundane corpus in a provisional way, but no comments accompanied the individual documents beyond some notes on specific words or passages. In an ongoing process across the intervening time until today, the fruitfulness of detailed commentary on each document published has gradually been seen and acted upon, in perhaps the most meaningful evolutionary thread in the whole philology of this corpus.

Transcription. Equally in evolution, however, has been the even more basic matter of how to present such texts, how to transcribe them. This problem is in principle the same no matter what kind of text is involved, whether the Florentine Codex or a testament. But ecclesiastically sponsored Nahuatl texts tend to be so much more standard and regular than mundane texts, or at least than some of them, that we must face the question with the present corpus particularly in mind.

Mundane texts from smaller, more remote entities or by writers who had not been much exposed to the orthographic mainstream can look so outrageous from the point of view of more standard texts, and also be so hard to understand, that the temptation to “correct” them can seem overwhelming. But everything points to the advisability of retaining the original letters, diacritics, and abbreviations as closely as they can be reproduced in print.
It has taken some time for scholars to arrive at a practical consensus on this point. In Mexico there had long been a tendency when transcribing Nahuatl texts to write the c cedilla as z before back vowels and simple c before front vowels, as well as putting hu for anything thought to represent [w] and changing qua to cua, in other words following modern Spanish conventions. Capitalization might be standardized and punctuation added as well. This phase had already largely passed when transcriptions of mundane Nahuatl documents began to be published.

Transcriptions of mundane texts starting in the 1970s already did many of the things necessary to allow the reader to gauge certain important variables in a text that not merely help make its meaning intelligible but put it in a particular tradition and phase of evolution; different letters were used for certain sounds in different circles, regions, and times. Writing s instead of c/ç/z for [s] is a crucial hallmark of Stage 3 orthography. Characteristic letter substitutions in Spanish loanwords tell us the degree to which the writer had not yet assimilated the Spanish phonetic repertoire. If a text stands out from its neighbors in these respects we can see it as conservative or advanced, parochial or cosmopolitan.

The traditions begun in the United States with *Beyond the Codices* and in Mexico with various publications associated with Luis Reyes had in common that they generally speaking reproduced all alphabetic letters as in the original and did not attempt to modernize punctuation. This alone went far toward meeting the main need. In some respects the Reyes tradition retained and has often continued to retain certain features of the older transcription style: standard modern capitalization, resolution of abbreviations to the full form, and a certain amount of standardization of spelling including z for ç and regularization of [w], no longer as hu, but as u in the style of the Molina dictionary. As it happens, the use of v, u, or hu for [w] is a very important diagnostic sign, and so is the question of capitals versus lower case.

*Beyond the Codices* and the earlier volumes of the UCLA Latin American Center Nahuatl Studies Series tried to retain the original capitalization and abbreviations and made no changes in alphabetic letters, but they did resolve the overbar of the originals as n or sometimes m. Even this apparently modest alteration was later abandoned in favor of reproducing the overbar in some form. Just how to reproduce it is a question that goes beyond the trivial. Writers of the time in both Nahuatl and Spanish often made no visible distinction between the overbar representing a nasal consonant after a vowel and the tild over a nasal consonant representing its palatalization. In print both a macron and a tilde have been used to represent the overbar; either seems to do, if some explanation is offered.

It is important for more than one reason to retain some equivalent of the overbar. The sign is much more prevalent in earlier writing than in later, fading significantly in Stage 3, and the manner of its use distinguishes some individual writers from others. Writing n versus m before labial consonants is a significant orthographic trait and has to be arbitrarily deduced if the overbar is to be resolved.

The transcriptions of the 1970s did well to stop inserting modern punctuation, but they did not yet recognize and reproduce the different kind of punctuation in the originals. The early volumes of the Nahuatl Studies Series, including *The
Testaments of Culhuacan, omitted the apparently haphazard dots or periods scattered through the text. Later it was recognized that though never applied with full consistency, these dots mark the boundaries between phonological/syntactic phrases and are very useful in understanding the texts (see Lockhart 2001, pp. 109–10). Moreover, use of this kind of punctuation varies meaningfully with place, tradition, and time. Especially it fades drastically in Stage 3. In a recent collection of Stage 3 testaments (Pizzigoni 2007) it was discovered that this style of punctuation characterizes the earlier texts primarily and that later texts featuring it are conservative in all respects, including orthography and vocabulary. Thus whatever traces of punctuation a text contains, in whatever style, should be reproduced, and that has increasingly been the trend.

Styles of abbreviation and nonabbreviation also meaningfully place texts temporally, spatially, and stylistically, so that they too call for as exact a reproduction as can be achieved. (See Lockhart 2001, p. 118.)

The upshot, then, is that in a transcription of mundane texts for scholarly purposes everything about the original that can be conveyed in print should be kept the same, and that policy gains advocates with every new year. The one exception, on which near unanimity reigns, is that the spacing of letters in the original is best ignored and strings of letters created according to modern grammatical principles, dividing words as in the modern Nahuatl dictionaries. No doubt there is meaningful spacing in the originals; even when dot punctuation was not used, there was some tendency to write a phonological phrase as an unbroken string. Also one can detect different styles of spacing which it would be desirable to be able to trace; but in actual examples a supreme arbitrariness will be found. Since the “space” in the sense we know it in modern printed matter, as an absolute division between “words,” did not exist in the minds of the writers, no attempt was made to distinguish clearly between a space and the lack of a space, and in many if not the majority of cases the transcriber must make the decision on criteria foreign to the original.

Facsimiles. The mere manipulation of the spacing and the necessary changes involved in putting a transcription in print, even when every effort is made to reproduce the original exactly in every other respect, make it very desirable that a facsimile be available in some form. And many mundane documents are written in such an idiosyncratic fashion and have suffered so in legibility through various accidents that one often needs to check passages of a transcription against the original. It is our experience that with texts of this kind many if not most apparently insoluble translation problems go back to a transcription problem. Yet it is rarely economically feasible to include a complete set of facsimiles in a philological publication.

One thinks then of making them available separately. And whereas the value of a transcription depends on the skill of the transcriber, that of a facsimile does not. Once some satisfactory facsimile is achieved, it can easily be diffused through electronic means. A formidable barrier to progress in this avenue is that a very large percentage of all mundane Nahuatl documentation is in the Archivo General de la Nación and has been bound in such a way that crucial parts of the verso of each sheet are in the binding, and though through prying and peeking one
can see a good deal of this material when actually present, it cannot be satisfactorily photographed, so that any normal photographic facsimile of most of the things in the AGN will be badly mutilated, at least when it comes to the versos.

Transcription and translation in the overall picture. Returning to transcriptions, it would seem worthwhile to divulge them even without translations and commentary. But the matter is not so simple. Unless the transcriber is an expert with older written Nahuatl, has invested serious effort in the transcription, and has signaled in some fashion parts that are of dubious interpretation, the result will not be trustworthy and usable by others. It is true that veterans can often reconstruct a surprising amount from inferior transcriptions, but even though the guesses are right, they cannot be presumed right and used as evidence without a firmer base. When an expert has put the requisite time, concentration, and effort into producing a proper transcription complete with spacing (which amounts to an analysis of the morphology and syntax), he or she has already mentally produced a translation, and often the most efficient use of one’s time is to go ahead and write it down. The process usually involves study of several texts from the same time and place to get a context, an understanding of conventions. The transcriber/translator generates a great deal of useful lore about these texts that will be lost forever and possibly even forgotten by the transcriber too unless turned into commentary. In other words, one cannot produce adequate transcriptions without doing much more than transcribing; a logic points toward an amalgam of transcription, translation, and commentary.

When a scholar has done all that is necessary to produce a transcription that could be shared with the public, he or she has also produced the core of a valuable publication, and one can hardly expect this person to turn over the intellectual gains before using the material for any publication it might support. Indeed, such activity is usually carried out precisely with a certain publication in mind. After the completion of such a publication, which often does not employ absolutely all of the raw material, then indeed much is to be said for the electronic sharing of transcriptions.

One of the main reasons for electronic versions is their searchability. But facsimiles are not searchable in any case. Alphabetic transcriptions are, in principle, but the increasingly predominant kind, with much formula to represent overbars and abbreviations, is resistant to search; even if that problem is somehow overcome, the morphological transformations of words and the great, unpredictable variety of spellings are an even greater obstacle. One is tempted to use a standardized transcription in addition to the true or diplomatic one, based on standard central Nahuatl forms as in Carochi, but even that, after a huge effort, would not solve the transformations. Our experience is that the best way is to prepare a translation as well as a transcription, maintaining full consistency in translating individual terms, and use it for the primary searching. One can search “house” in the translation and catch everything, even though the transcription has “calli,” “canli,” “cāli,” “cali,” “cahli,” etc., and from the translation one can easily retrieve the relevant Nahuatl form in the facing transcription.

Translation of the documents is of course crucial; it is the only way through which the expertise the editor builds up about the meaning of words and phrases
repeating through a given corpus can be preserved for others. Translation philosophies can legitimately differ, but as we learn more and more, most of us, while maintaining rigor and consistency, are less literal and do more to reflect idiomatic and pragmatic meaning. As time goes on, more and more key terms are being left in Nahuatl in the translation so that those who do not read Nahuatl can trace their use and importance; most people now use altepetl this way, and also tlaxilacalli.

**Spanish translations.** An important question in this respect is the proper role of the contemporary Spanish translations that often accompany mundane documents in the archives. Though contemporary in a broad sense, many are posterior by a generation or more and done in a place remote from where the original was composed. The closer the translation is to the original in time and place, the more accurate it usually is and the more valuable it can be to us. Such translations do not meet scholarly standards, of course; they paraphrase formula, they omit, add, and smooth over, and out-and-out errors are not at all infrequent. Nevertheless, they can tell us things we would never find in a dictionary and can act as a Rosetta stone when we run into difficulties, if we do not trust them implicitly. Translators should and usually do take a good look at the Spanish translations.

Beyond that, the treatment of them has been quite different in Mexico and in the United States. In Mexico they have been and still are frequently used in publications in lieu of a new scholarly translation. Labor is saved, and an important cultural artifact is presented to the world. A new translation is still needed, however. In the United States we get the new translation but not the old one, which is usually referred to but not reproduced. Perhaps the two procedures can complement each other, for it will hardly prove economically feasible to publish two translations of each text simultaneously.

A person or team that laboriously, with loving care, transcribes a corpus of Nahuatl texts will come to know them and the resonances between them very well indeed and will think that they spontaneously speak volumes. The impression is thoroughly false, however. The editors of *Beyond the Codices* expected that everyone would see the coherence and significance of the documents in that varied collection as well as if they were essays, but very few did, even among ethnohistorians and people who knew Nahuatl. Commentary, copious and applied to each text in particular, is necessary if whole situations, striking or typical terminology, or unusual concatenations of things are to be grasped by anyone other than those who have come to a deep understanding of those particular texts through long exposure.

**Commentary.** The first movement toward extensive commentary on each of the items in a corpus was with *The Testaments of Culhuacan* (TC) in 1984. The notion was above all to point out highlights that might escape the reader and to explain difficult terms. That was done and had its full effect. At the same time some of the commentaries grew beyond the original conception to analyze the situation of the testator and refer to others in the collection who were related. The documents of the collection themselves are of seemingly unending interest, but the commentaries have focused, heightened, and retained that interest.

Our domain here is Nahuatl texts, but it should be mentioned that after a
number of years a collection of Yucatecan Maya wills was given much the same treatment (Restall 1995), this time frankly going on to a situational analysis of each text. The possibilities for cross-language and cross-cultural area comparisons are great.

Recently a collection of Nahuatl testaments from the Toluca Valley in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been completed (Pizzigoni 2007), and it carries the evolution another step, perhaps as far as it can be carried. Each and every one of the 98 wills has an introduction which, in addition to highlighting and explaining, reconstructs the situation of the testator and its context and implications as fully as the materials permit, also commenting on the style of the crucial notary who wrote the document, and in this way arriving at insights that would likely escape even an experienced reader who had not been immersed in the corpus.

Scholars’ styles and preferences in the matter of commentary will doubtless continue to vary, but the method of relatively full analysis of the individual texts of a published corpus has proved of the greatest value and deserves to continue to be a part of the scene (a plan exists to republish Beyond the Codices with full commentaries). In the course of this evolution the traditional distinction between a monograph, an independent work of original scholarly analysis, and an edition, the publication of already existing texts, has been transcended. The “editions” are often making the kinds of contributions expected of monographs (something that had already begun to become more familiar in our field with non-mundane, large-scale texts). The Testaments of Culhuacan opened up the Nahua household complex to the scholarly world. The new publication of testaments of Toluca has among other things laid bare a whole unsuspected world of subregional cultural variation in indigenous society.

Types of collections. Ever since mundane Nahuatl texts have been being published, collections of them have sometimes ranged widely over time and space, sometimes focused more narrowly temporally and spatially. A wide range has been perhaps more common (as with the vast Rojas et al. 1999–2004), and the benefits of that approach are manifest, from simple economy of effort, not having to discard interesting items once found, to making the net wide enough that universal traits and larger trends can be detected. The wide approach has served us well. The two collections of testaments we have been discussing, however, make us aware that some kinds of analysis can be carried out only with a corpus which, though of a certain size, is limited enough in time/space that it offers a redundancy of examples of phenomena of interest for a well defined regional/temporal domain. Subtle and in some senses exhaustive comparisons can now be carried out between Culhuacan in 1580 and parts of the Toluca Valley in the eighteenth century. Collections with this density can firmly establish an area’s cultural uniformity or subregional variation.

It must thus be hoped that further such regionally concentrated collections, especially of testaments for their informativeness and easy comparability, will see the light, whether discovered as a unit or assembled by assiduous search. But the broad and the narrow approaches are not inimical or mutually exclusive. Though the corpus of mundane Nahuatl documentation is extensive, it may not be too
large for everything in it in due course to be published in transcription and translation with commentary.

Bibliography


