

## The Nahuatl Testaments of San Esteban de Nueva Tlaxcala (Saltillo)

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MY THINKING about the northern thrust of settlement in New Spain was first guided by the scholarship of Peter Bakewell and David Brading, who through their studies of great silver mining districts began to make the north look more complex, economically rational, and integrated with the center. My work on Hispanic Saltillo clearly fits into that vein of scholarship, looking as it does at the increasingly complex social, economic, and political landscape of the Mexican northeast at the close of the eighteenth century, and the manner in which Saltillo responded to economic forces both from the center and from areas yet farther to the north.

But as I settled into the world of the Hispanic north, sketching the outlines of that world on the basis of archival work begun in 1977, I discovered a rich new vein to mine. Evidence of it cropped up in bits and pieces. As I moved through the various files of notarial materials from the latter decades of the eighteenth century in my initial foray into Saltillo's municipal archive—wills, inventories, court cases, censuses—here and there a rogue document appeared, sometimes serving as a cover for a bundle of Spanish-language documents, sometimes filed randomly with materials completely unrelated by genre. These were the documentary traces of a lost world—the world of the Nahuatl-speaking community of San Esteban de Nueva Tlaxcala, one of six Tlaxcalan colonies founded in 1591 by order of Viceroy don Luis de Velasco to establish nuclei of sedentary agriculturalists that the mobile groups of the north might emulate. That world was still thriving in the late eighteenth century, but it disappeared as a separate municipal entity in the 1820s, and today its remains are to be found in Saltillo only in certain street names and parishes.<sup>1</sup>

While carrying out my explorations, since my research focus was temporally on a fairly narrowly defined slice of the late colonial era and topically on the world of merchants and landowners, I had no clear sense of the significance of those documents scattered among the Spanish-language materials from the 1790s that constituted the corpus with which I worked. I mentioned them to Jim Lockhart when I returned from that research trip; he was interested, to be sure, as one might expect, but didn't press me to rush back immediately to the archive to locate more. In fact, if I recall correctly (my memory *may* be clouded by time) his response was something to the effect of "work on your own stuff, get your dissertation under way, *then* we'll talk about teaching you Nahuatl."

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<sup>1</sup>San Esteban de Nueva Tlaxcala was not exactly "lost," it must be admitted; David B. Adams, in his 1971 University of Texas doctoral dissertation ("The Tlaxcalan Colonies of Spanish Coahuila and Nuevo León: An Aspect of the Settlement of Northern Mexico") had examined San Esteban and the other colonies that had begun to be established by the late sixteenth century. As rich as Adams' work was, it drew exclusively on Spanish-language documentation; the Nahuatl materials in the Archivo Municipal de Saltillo were virtually untouched.

My Nahuatl studies began shortly after I returned to UCLA in the fall of 1979, and by the summer of 1980 I was back in the archive transcribing by hand the few wills that I had uncovered among the materials from the 1790s. Subsequent visits yielded additional scattered wills; a summer's microfilming project yielded the treasure trove that I'll proceed to speak about.

San Esteban possessed a well developed tradition of will making, with that tradition clearly having taken hold in the first generation after the founding of the town; San Esteban residents seem to have embraced the custom of making testaments as fully as Cline has noted for late sixteenth-century Culhuacan and Lockhart for central Mexico more generally.<sup>2</sup>

The known San Esteban corpus consists of 277 Nahuatl wills, the earliest dating from 1611, a scant twenty years after the founding of San Esteban, and the latest dating from 1776. They are housed in the Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, in the ramo Inventarios y Testamentos, carpetas 1–14, 1617–1807. All but one decade (the 1630s) of that 165-year period is represented; 56 wills date from the seventeenth century, 215 from the eighteenth. A few Nahuatl wills are scattered among other collections in the municipal archive; Eustaquio Celestino Solís has published several Nahuatl documents, including six testaments, from the ramo Protocolos.<sup>3</sup> The Nahuatl wills found in Testamentos y inventarios appear in no strict chronological order (unlike Spanish wills found in the same files); rather, eighteenth-century wills are as likely to be filed in the first volume, which ostensibly spans the years 1617–1708, as they are in folders specifically labeled as containing eighteenth-century materials. Seven of the seventeen Nahuatl wills from Carpeta 1 of Testamentos y inventarios, for example, are eighteenth-century productions, five dating from the 1750s and one from the 1760s. Twenty-seven of the fifty-six testaments included in Carpeta 2, ostensibly spanning the years 1709–1726, date from the seventeenth century, and eleven of the 29 in that bundle that *do* date from the eighteenth century are post-1726 productions.

The haphazard distribution of these Nahuatl wills in volumes dominated by Spanish-language testaments suggests that whoever organized the materials had no knowledge of Nahuatl, and likely little regard for the value of the documents. Their serendipitous survival, then, allows us little ground to speculate on how frequently San Esteban residents left testaments. While we know that a wealth of wills has survived, it is impossible to know how many more might have been recorded over the more than one and a half centuries that the corpus represents. On the other hand, the corpus is more than sufficient to establish that the issuing of Nahuatl testaments was a deeply rooted, long-lasting local tradition.

The collection is notable first of all for the location of San Esteban itself, the northernmost of the six original Tlaxcalan colonies established in 1591, and the only one for which substantial documentary evidence survives in Nahuatl. San Esteban remained the largest of these colonies; along with Tlaxcalilla near San

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<sup>2</sup>For testamentary traditions in central Mexico see Cline and León Portilla 1984; Cline 1986, especially Ch. 3; Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhart 1976; and Lockhart 1992, pp. 251–54, 367–73, 468–74.

<sup>3</sup>Celestino Solís 1991.

Luis Potosí, it retained its municipal independence into the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The external forces that shaped San Esteban, by virtue of its location in the far north, distinguished it from Nahuatl communities of central Mexico. Its residents were cast in the role of defenders and sustainers of the Spanish frontier against the *indios bárbaros* who so frequently descended upon the conjoined communities of San Esteban and Saltillo, but at the same time San Esteban faced ongoing efforts by both Saltillo residents and the municipality of Saltillo itself to lay claim to lands belonging to San Esteban. Though integral participants in a larger colonial enterprise, San Esteban nonetheless frequently had to defend its integrity as a community against its supposed partners. This defense surfaces periodically in the Spanish-language documentation of the period. Did these conflicts emerge at a more intimate level as well, as testators ordered their affairs in the hours before death? How might the San Esteban testaments reveal the ways that residents of the community thought about themselves as members of that community?

The San Esteban collection is notable as well for its sheer size; it is larger, for example, than Matthew Restall's sample for the Yucatecan Maya (110 testaments drawn from three separate towns in the period 1646–1813), and comparable to the corpus from the whole Toluca Valley collected in a broad effort by Stephanie Wood and Caterina Pizzigoni.<sup>5</sup> It is both deep and temporally broad. Its depth is particularly noticeable in the post-1730 period (a decade-by-decade breakdown shows 22 wills from the 1730s, 10 from the 1740s, 68 from the 1760s, and 50 from the 1770s), but depth is evident as well in certain decades of the seventeenth century, notably the 1670s (10 wills) and 1680s (15 wills).

Such resources suggest possibilities for a “thick” study such as Cline has done for late sixteenth-century Culhuacan,<sup>6</sup> in which one might not only establish trends and common traits but explore actual interpersonal connections in the context of family, politics, and commerce. Elsewhere I have argued that residents of San Esteban maintained a keen sense of the importance of the community in the face of periodic challenges to its integrity.<sup>7</sup> What might a close examination of the elements of everyday life as found in the testaments add to what is suggested by litigation between San Esteban residents and Hispanic citizens of Saltillo about the willingness of San Esteban citizens to articulate their community identity quite clearly?

The broad temporal frame offers the opportunity to examine the evolution of this community on the northern edge of the Spanish presence. Of particular interest is the manner in which the two worlds—Hispanic and indigenous or Tlaxcalan—interpenetrated increasingly over the course of the nearly 170 years

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<sup>4</sup>Sego 1990.

<sup>5</sup>It is of course much larger than the Testaments of Culhuacan (65 wills), but that collection remains the most concentrated sizable corpus, not only from one community as with San Esteban, but mainly written in a period of two years, with many of the testators related to one another, and existing as a collection from the beginning. For the Toluca materials see Pizzigoni 2007 and Wood 1991, 1994, and 1997.

<sup>6</sup>Cline 1986.

<sup>7</sup>Leslie S. Offutt, “Variants of Cultural Contact on New Spain’s Northern Frontier: The Case of Saltillo and San Esteban de Nueva Tlaxcala,” unpublished ms.

that the testaments span—in a word the degree of “interculturalization” (as Matthew Restall calls it) that one can discern from the materials we have at our disposal. To date I have done a bit of this type of investigation, analyzing wills from different points in time, examining the increasing intrusion of Spanish elements, particularly Spanish loanwords and idioms, but also the articles from the material world often named by those loanwords.<sup>8</sup> My findings are suggestive of a process of ever growing Spanish influence such as studies of central Mexican Nahuatl reveal,<sup>9</sup> but never to the point of completely losing a distinctive Tlaxcalan flavor. San Esteban testaments from the 1760s and 1770s, though revealing a far greater number of Hispanisms than their equivalents a century earlier, are still grounded firmly in a Tlaxcalan Nahuatl fully consonant with contemporary Nahuatl documentation from areas closer to the center.

The broad temporal frame allows one to speculate as well about ways of thinking about community within San Esteban. Both Lockhart and Restall have shown that indigenous-language testaments are community documents, and that the body of witnesses assembled to attest to wills in both Nahua and Maya worlds, and in particular the cabildo officers themselves, are there to confirm community assent to the content of the documents.<sup>10</sup> Cline also notes the involvement of municipal officials as witnesses and executors of estates in late sixteenth-century Culhuacan.<sup>11</sup> To what extent do San Esteban testaments reveal practices similar to those found in other areas? Throughout the seventeenth century San Esteban testaments are almost universally witnessed by cabildo officers, with a frequent additional notation that the document was made “in the presence of all those in charge of justice.”<sup>12</sup> But by the middle years of the eighteenth century there is nary a cabildo officer to be found in his official capacity, beyond the notary who is recording the last wishes of the testator.

Where has the cabildo gone? Can one think of this lessening of the role of the cabildo as a deinstitutionalization of testamentary traditions? What did it augur? On one level this shift from public to private realms might indicate a growing separation between the individual and the larger community, although it is difficult to see who or what might have given impetus to such a shift. Ample evidence beyond the testaments indicates that San Esteban maintained a clear sense of the importance of community throughout the eighteenth century and was willing to defend its tradition of corporate autonomy in court if necessary.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Offutt 1991, 1992.

<sup>9</sup>See Lockhart 1992, Ch. 7.

<sup>10</sup>See Lockhart 1992, pp. 367, 370–71, and Restall 1997, pp. 57–58.

<sup>11</sup>Cline 1986, pp. 44–45. In the testaments of Culhuacan, however, as in many documents of the sixteenth century, officials do not dominate the witness list, which includes a broader selection from the whole community, women as well as men.

<sup>12</sup>“ymixpan in mochi justisiapixque,” testament of Juana Isabel, 1659, in AMS, *Inventarios y testamentos*, 1, 1617–1708; “yxpantzinco justicia omichiuh ic muchi imixpantzinco cauildo reg[. . .],” testament of Matías Juan, 1665, in *ibid.*, 2, 1709–26; “omo-chiuh ymixpatzinco pipiltzin Jusapixque,” in *ibid.*, will of Francisco Botello, 1693.

<sup>13</sup>See for example the various boundary disputes that occupied San Esteban and Saltillo over the course of the century, necessitating resurveys of that boundary in 1704, the 1760s, and 1782. AMS, PM, 6, exp. 41, 1704; 34, exp. 23, 1782; 35/1, exp. 41, 1783.

Individuals as well asserted a community identity; as I have shown elsewhere in an examination of late eighteenth-century women, San Esteban residents were deeply aware of the rights and privileges that they had been granted as colonists in 1591, and again and again they affirmed those rights as individual members of the larger community.<sup>14</sup> The shift from corporate production, whatever else it might signal, seems not to correspond to a general lessening of corporate self-consciousness.

To this point I've spoken in very general terms of "San Esteban testators." Who were these people the traces of whose lives we have before us? The colonists who founded San Esteban in 1591 were drawn from the sub-altepetl of Tizatla and were reputedly descendants of Xicotencatl, a famous ruler of that entity at the time of conquest.<sup>15</sup> Among the privileges granted them and their descendants by Viceroy Velasco was that they were to be "hidalgos, free from tributes and personal service."<sup>16</sup> Free from tribute and personal service they remained, but if hidalgo status is construed to include wealth, the San Esteban testators seem to have come up short. An observer asserted that the community was made up primarily of agriculturalists, and a late census shows minimal occupational differentiation.<sup>17</sup> That said, the testamentary record does contain certain markers of status, revealing to us important as well as ordinary people. I will now identify some of those markers and suggest what they can tell us about life in San Esteban over the course of the period under review.

The most obvious markers of status—the honorific titles "don" and "doña"—appear in testaments from the earliest period, initially with the names of cabildo officers acting as witnesses, and then with increasing frequency after the 1660s attached to a broader selection of names mentioned in the testaments, and names of testators themselves. From the 1720s on, well over a quarter of the testators whose wills survive bore the honorific title.<sup>18</sup> The testaments suggest that this was not a closed elite; those who bore a title are as likely as not to have a spouse without one and to have dealings far beyond those within the community who bore the honorific. Further, usage was growing inconsistent in some cases; the honorific might come and go even *within* documents, as in 1776 with the wife of don Félix Martín Ramos, who upon first appearance in his testament is referred to merely as "my legitimate spouse, named Matiana Francisca" ("tehuioztin no-

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<sup>14</sup>Offutt 1997. Further examination may show that the corporation is represented in the later years more by church officials than officers of the cabildo, a trend very much in evidence in central Mexico.

<sup>15</sup>Gibson 1967 [1952], pp. 185–87; for Xicotencatl, see n. 90, p. 186.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 183–84.

<sup>17</sup>Morfi 1935, pp. 245–46. In the 1791 manuscript census for San Esteban, *labradores* (agriculturalists) are by far the most numerous segment of society. AMA, PM, 43, exp. 1, 1791. We all understand, of course, the deficiencies of censuses in identifying occupations.

<sup>18</sup>For the 1720s, 5 of the 14 testators bear the don, representing 37.7% of testators for that decade; for the 1730s, there are 6 dones and 2 doñas of 22, representing 36.3%; for the 1740s, 4 dones and 2 doñas of 10, representing 60%; for the 1750s, 6 dones and six doñas of 27, representing 44.4%; for the 1760s, 15 dones and 4 doñas of 68, representing 27.9%; for the 1770s, 8 dones and 9 doñas of 50, representing 34%.

namictzin ytocha Mathiana Fran<sup>a</sup>”), then in two subsequent references is labeled doña.<sup>19</sup> In 1775 the husband of doña María Rosa initially appears simply as “my legitimate spouse named Josef Matías” (“tehuyotica nonamictzin ytocha Joseph Mathias”), then in a subsequent mention acquires the don.<sup>20</sup> Is this inconsistency simply a reflection of the looser application of such honorifics that one sees more generally in the Hispanic world of the late eighteenth century? Is it reflective of something specific to San Esteban?<sup>21</sup>

The honorifics don and doña are thus ambivalent status markers under the circumstances, variable in usage and saying little about the wealth of the individual, at least toward the end of the time under consideration. What else in the San Esteban testaments might reveal something of one’s standing in the community? We need to remember that these are testaments, not inventories; while the testators are sometimes quite specific as to what they are bequeathing and to whom, they rarely leave us with any valuation of the bequests, and they felt no need to list every last item that they possessed. But the testaments are not completely lacking in other markers of standing, though they must be used with care. Virtually every testament includes within it certain standard elements, and an examination of those elements yields clues about how a testator “stood” in San Esteban.

Three areas in particular might illuminate a testator’s status in San Esteban. A standard part of virtually every testament is the testator’s instructions on how he was to be buried—what kind of mass, whether vigils were to be held, where one was to be buried within the church. While we do not have a listing of the fees charged for various burial services, on occasion details emerge suggesting a certain level of pomp that might be commensurate with status. At his death in 1765, Bernardino de Sena asked that a low mass be said for him, and that he be buried before the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary in the church of San Francisco, San Esteban’s parish church. Even this fairly modest request was not inexpensive; the testator ordered that a musket with its sheath and shot pouch, a bridle, a pair of little saddle pads, a hammer, a small saddle with its stirrups, a harness and packsaddle with its gear, a lathe with all its equipment, a plumb, two mason’s trowels, and a cultivated field on which a third of a fanega of wheat could be sown, all be sold to pay for his burial and to provide seven reales he had ordered for his obligatory bequests.<sup>22</sup> In 1775 doña María Rosa bequeathed a piece of land of 17½ varas for a high mass with the trimmings, plus a vigil (cruz alta misa cantada vigilia de cuerpo presente).<sup>23</sup> Even more elaborate were the arrangements that Justina Xochicuetzin provided for in her 1627 will. She set aside five pesos for a mass and vigil, and another five pesos for two additional masses. Further,

<sup>19</sup>AMS, Inv. y test., 13, 1789–99, will of don Félix Martín Ramos, 1776.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 10, 1772–77, will of doña María Rosa, 1775.

<sup>21</sup>In central Mexico in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, except for some illustrious lineages it was usual for men to use the don only during and after holding some high office in the local community, and there was much more don than doña. To what extent San Esteban shared this pattern is not yet entirely clear.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 8, 1761–63, will of Bernardino de Sena, 1765.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 10, 1772–77, will of doña María Rosa, 1775.

she had left in the care of another San Esteban resident, Nicolás Temilotzin, a Mexica-style skirt and another skirt, which were to pay for another two masses.<sup>24</sup> One might also consider the performative aspect here—how a citizen of San Esteban acted his role in the community in this, his final appearance. Surely some of what emerges from the pages of the testaments speaks to us of testators conscious of their public stature.

San Esteban testators also standardly made pious bequests to local *cofradías*, but here too their bequests speak less directly to the question of wealth (except insofar as a great accumulation of goods to bequeath says something about a person's command of economic resources) than about the material aspects of everyday life. Bequests to the several *cofradías* that are mentioned in the testaments range between a fairly standard few reales to a few pesos, regardless of whether a testator has in other parts of the testament presented himself as a person of substance or as one of the more humble members of the community. What one does see is variety in the ways that a testator chose to make these bequests. Pious bequests could take the form of donations in kind or in cash. Buenaventura Xochitlanemi made provisions in his 1621 testament for turkeys or chickens worth two pesos to be given to the *Cofradía* of the Most Holy Sacrament “because I have no precious metal (money)” (*yhua ome peso quimacazque ymayordomo santissimo sacramento totoltzintin amo nicpia teocuitlatl*).<sup>25</sup> Don Pedro Clemente left two almudes of wheat to the same *cofradía* upon his death in 1685 (*yhua niquitohua nictlalia limosna ss<sup>mo</sup> ome almud trigo*).<sup>26</sup> Nicolás Asencio simply left cash payments to several *cofradías* at his death in 1764 (*motlaxtlahuas nolicosnas mandas forsasas casa S<sup>ta</sup> yhuan redencion motemacas a dos reales cofradia Smô del Rosario Animas y San Fran<sup>co</sup> motemacas sehsentomin yehuatl D<sup>s</sup> quimotemaquilis*).<sup>27</sup> Matías Juan, making arrangements for the payment of his bequests in 1665, opted for both kind and cash, designating a half fanega of maize from the forthcoming harvest for one *cofradía* and four reales for another (*nicmomaquilia limosna casa Sancta de Jerusalem medianega tlaoltzintli ihcuac mopixcaz yhuan inahuactzinco totlaçomahuiznantzin del Rosario nicmomaquilia limosna nahui tomin*).<sup>28</sup> These are people of modest means; the items of everyday life that figure among their pious bequests bear testimony to that fact, and perhaps the modest amounts of these bequests, though in central Mexico often even the quite wealthy did not give large amounts to *cofradías*.

As goods set aside for pious bequests were modest, so too were bequests more generally. Here there is wider variation in the type and amount of goods bequeathed, but one still operates within a range—there are no truly grand estates

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 1, 1617–1708, will of Justina Xochicuetzin, 1627. Notice the difference between the names of this time and those of later.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 2, 1709–26, will of Buenaventura Xochitlanemi, 1621.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 1, 1617–1708, will of don Pedro Clemente, 1685.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 9, 1764–71, testament of Nicolás Asencio, 1764. My offerings for obligatory bequests are to be paid. Two reales each are to be provided for the Holy House and for the Redemption. One real each is to be provided for the *cofradías* of Rosario, Animas, and San Francisco. God will provide it.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 2, 1709–26, testament of Matías Juan, 1665.

such as one finds among some of the merchants and landowners in the neighboring Hispanic town of Saltillo. Justina Xochicuetzin's estate is one of the most substantial and varied in the documentary corpus. At her death in 1627, in addition to items of clothing and money that she left to pay for masses for her soul, and a chest with its key and five chickens that constituted her pious bequests, she listed two houses with their land, a metate and rolling pin, a large locally-made blanket, a small iron pot, a lathe, two sacks (ome costal) and rabbit skin, several heavy reed baskets, and a censer. Further, several people owed her a variety of items—a skirt, several tom turkeys, a number of lengths of serge, and some money, a few pesos here and there.<sup>29</sup> The bulk of don Cristóbal Ramos's estate was in land. In his 1748 testament he notes the house in which he lived, with its land and fruit trees, an image of Our Precious Mother, another piece of land with a corral, yet another piece located next to one owned by his older sister, and additional cultivated land that he had inherited, some to be distributed to his wife, some to his godson, some to another San Esteban resident, some to be sold to pay his debts.<sup>30</sup> More typical is the estate of doña Ana Jesusa. At her death in 1776 she left a piece of land with an exit toward lands belonging to the heirs of the deceased don Josef Antonio; a door and eleven rafters (morillos) that her deceased husband had been favored with, ten varas of land on which were a house and fruit trees, two blouses and a woven skirt, a blanket, a small chest, and an earthen jug. Her heirs were her son, the only one of her three children to survive, his wife, and her grandson.<sup>31</sup> Any collection of testaments is skewed to reflect the more substantial members of a given society; those who have nothing to bequeath have less reason to make a testament.

Acknowledging then that our sample likely does not reflect the full range of San Esteban residents, nonetheless we might assume that it is representative of all but the lower socioeconomic strata of the community. And what we see is a fairly modest group, status markers notwithstanding. Fray Juan Agustín de Morfi described San Esteban residents in 1777 as industrious, abhorring laziness and applying themselves enthusiastically to their agricultural labors, and responsible for producing the bulk of vegetables and fruits consumed in neighboring Saltillo.<sup>32</sup> That picture of a bustling agrarian community is consonant with what the San Esteban testaments reveal. Yet wills are rarely unambiguous about occupations. We have already seen evidence of ownership and use of horses, pack animals, and craftsman's tools, so we must not make up our minds prematurely.

The San Esteban testaments cannot tell us everything we might wish to know about the community over its first two centuries of existence. They do not, for example, allow us to see familial continuity over the generations. The same few first names repeat, Spanish surnames are rarely used, and those that are used seem not to be carried over the generations.<sup>33</sup> Much as Cline and Lockhart have found

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 1, 1617–1708, will of Justina Xochicuetzin, 1627.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., will of don Cristóbal Ramos, 1763.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 13, 1789–99, will of doña Ana Jesusa, 1776.

<sup>32</sup>Morfi 1935, pp. 245–46.

<sup>33</sup>The example drawn from the 1776 will of doña Ana Jesusa, in which her husband don Antonio Hernández and her son don Marcos Hernández share a common [*cont'd*]



for central Mexico, so too in San Esteban testators seem to have only partially appropriated Spanish naming patterns. Lockhart in particular comments on the lack of “generational depth” among indigenous names which “by themselves did not suffice to distinguish one person from another, at least in a larger community.”<sup>34</sup> For much of the period in question there is insufficient supplementary documentation in either Nahuatl or Spanish to fill in these gaps. Records of several seventeenth-century cabildo elections survive, as well as census materials from the latter decades of the eighteenth century (especially the censuses of 1777 and 1791), but even in combination with testaments from those periods, these do not suffice to allow us to trace many individuals or families over time. Nonetheless, as I’ve noted earlier in this paper, we are able to examine the varying fortunes of the *community* over time. I have noted that *don* and *doña* become more widespread; it will be seen from the examples given above that indigenous second names are still commonly seen in the first half of the seventeenth century, but not often if at all thereafter. We have seen that the direct role of the indigenous municipal government fades out in the late period. Establishing such trends, the list of which can doubtless be indefinitely extended, is a critical contribution in filling out the larger picture of life among such a population.

Actually, many of the approaches I have been illustrating can be used with any comparably constituted body of indigenous testaments. Indeed they can be used with any corpus of testaments at all, though indigenous testaments in Mesoamerican languages are especially crucial because of the relative lack of other kinds of first-hand documentation concerning the population involved, and especially informative because of the remnants of oral tradition and spontaneity that they retain. Another whole aspect of the San Esteban corpus is that it concerns Nahua speakers who lived surrounded by Spanish speakers and at a great distance from their counterparts in central Mexico and Tlaxcala. Thus one can ask of virtually all the data in the wills the question of how much the language and the phenomena mentioned resemble those of central Mexico in nature and in chronology. We have here formidable evidence to show to what extent this apparently isolated population retained its original tradition, to what extent it was replaced by Spanish or hybrid elements, and perhaps even to what extent the citizens of San Esteban remained in touch with their homeland.

I intend to investigate such topics much more fully and systematically in the course of future research. For now we can already make some observations. All in all, the wills themselves, the customs observed, the types of property mentioned are very similar to what is found in Nahuatl wills of central Mexico of the same time, and trends such as the growing frequency of *don* are also shared. At the same time, we find hints of the long retention of traits not only from central Mexico but specifically from the motherland of Tlaxcala. In the Valley of Mexi-

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surname, is a rare exception. Far more common are such seemingly randomly applied second names as in the case of the children of Pascuala de Aquino in 1648. AMS, Inv. y test. 13, 1789–99, will of *doña* Ana Jesus, 1776; *ibid.*, 1, 1617–1708, will of Pascuala de Aquino, 1648.

<sup>34</sup>Cline 1986, pp. 117–18; Lockhart 1992, p. 127.

co, the first person reflexive prefix of verbs was *-no-*, assimilated to the first person subject prefix *ni-*, but many peripheral areas, and Tlaxcala in particular, retained an earlier *-mo-*, which is still found in the language of the San Esteban testament corpus, as in “*nicmomaquilia*,” “I give it to him/her,” seen in one of our examples above, instead of *nicnomaquilia* as it would be in Valley of Mexico Nahuatl. On the other hand, some of the San Esteban wills from the eighteenth century show an extraordinary strength and density of Spanish influence on the language, as in the phrase also seen in an example above, “a dos reales,” “two reales each,” as opposed to the indigenous distributive so universally preserved elsewhere (and occurring also in this very document, “*sehsentomin*,” “one real each.”) Here the writer seems to have relapsed into Spanish for a three-word phrase in the midst of a Nahuatl text. A thorough survey of Tlaxcalanisms and language contact phenomena throughout the San Esteban corpus can no doubt define the trends and mechanisms more precisely and sort out an apparently contradictory situation in which the Nahuatl of San Esteban was at once archaic and highly Hispanized.

Although the citizens of San Esteban had possessions broadly comparable with those of Nahuas in central Mexico, some differences leap to the eye. In San Esteban wills one sees references to guns—muskets or *harquebuses*—that will simply not be found further south. And though in central Mexico a few of the wealthier indigenous inhabitants and some traders owned a horse, in the San Esteban corpus horses and all of their trappings are common, testimony to a lifestyle peculiar to the region. And compared with the vast majority of Nahuatl wills of the center, the San Esteban wills are generous in their mention of material possessions generally speaking. One can read a great many testaments of central Mexico, at least outside Mexico City and Puebla, without every seeing mention of anything like the lathe or the trowel that appeared in an example above. The general rule for testaments is that an item is mentioned only when it has substantial monetary value. What is the situation here? Did the citizens of San Esteban have more in the way of valuable tools, carefully dressed wooden house parts such as doors and rafters, valuable clothing, and animals of all kinds, than central Mexican indigenous people, or did they merely write more about them? Do they reflect a special value, or are they drawn upon for lack of anything else of value? A full compilation of all the details, at the same time considering the subtleties of each individual case, can probably go far toward answering such questions.

To sum up, this unusually placed and unusually large corpus of Nahuatl documents, spanning an unusually long period of time, allows us the opportunity to look more closely at the manner in which people who were by origin Tlaxcalans functioned in areas distant from the center of the country. The testaments, taken on their own, represent a rich vein to exploit. They offer an intimate look at the manner in which the residents of this community moved through their world—their place in their community, their connections with other residents, the degree of interculturalization that the community experienced over the nearly two centuries that the testaments span. This corpus forms part of a documentary base for a larger project, my efforts to inject a new perspective into the dichotomous picture

of “Spaniard/Indian” on the “frontier.” Taken in conjunction with Spanish-language materials, especially census data, land surveys, boundary disputes, and the like, they allow for a more richly textured portrait of life in the northern reaches of the colony.

At the same time that the corpus needs to be brought into connection with other kinds of local materials for a multidimensional picture, such a unique Nahuatl holding cries out for more strictly philological treatment. It ought to be made available in some form to those who study indigenous languages and indigenous people in other areas. The ideal would perhaps be the publication of some volumes with full transcription and translation of all the wills, plus individual commentaries on each one and some general commentary in an introduction, in other words something on the model of *The Testaments of Culhuacan* and *Testaments of Toluca*.<sup>35</sup> But 270 wills present a different challenge than 60 or 70. My provisional plan is to prepare a volume in which a generous selection of interesting or representative wills would receive the full treatment of transcription, translation, and commentary, while the rest would be excerpted and presented in a more skeletal form, much as in the famous and fruitful publication by Millares Carlo with condensations of early Spanish notarial records of Mexico City, perhaps with a number of relevant compilations as well.

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<sup>35</sup>Cline and León-Portilla 1984 and Pizzigoni 2007.

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