

Fiestas Fit for a King: Contested Symbolic Regimes of Power in New Spain

NICOLE T. HUGHES , *Stanford University*

After Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco died in 1564, royal officials watched with trepidation as the conquistadores' descendants adopted heraldry, hereditary titles, and royal ceremony, supposedly in jest. Scholars have argued that the royal judges used these over-the-top fiestas to frame powerful settlers for sedition. This article instead argues that the royal judges' obsession with how wealthy settlers adopted royal pomp and circumstance, on the one hand, and refusal to recognize how they imprecisely imitated the Mexica nobility, on the other, helped to consolidate Spanish power—symbolic and literal—in New Spain.

INTRODUCTION

ONE EVENING IN NOVEMBER of 1565, a raucous group of settlers in Mexico City allegedly crowned one of their own king of New Spain.¹ The purported act of sedition took place in an over-the-top fiesta hosted by Alonso de Ávila (ca. 1539–66) in honor of Martín Cortés (ca. 1523–95), son of the infamous conquistador Hernán Cortés (ca. 1485–1547). Little is known about what actually took place at the masquerade and subsequent banquet. Those who participated only agreed on a few common details. Many conceded that

Many thanks to the peer reviewers and *RQ* editorial team; Gibrán Bautista y Lugo and the “Monarquías Comparadas” seminar at UNAM; Jesús Velasco and the Poétique des Archives/MIME community; Giuseppe Marcocci and Jorge Flores and the Art of Dissent in the Iberian World conference at Oxford University; Adrian Daub, Aileen Robinson, Andrei Pesic, and Roland Greene at Stanford University; and my dear colleagues in the MEMIC research collective. This article was supported by a Stanford-Tinker Faculty Research Fund.

¹ The term *settlers* in this article imperfectly refers to those who primarily presented themselves as descendants of the conquistadores who were entitled to privileges. Many, but not all, were born in New Spain, possessed *encomiendas* or petitioned for them, and had been raised by Indigenous women.

Renaissance Quarterly 76 (2023): 980–1026 © The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Renaissance Society of America. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that no alterations are made and the original article is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained prior to any commercial use and/or adaptation of the article.

doi: 10.1017/rqx.2023.409

the organizer's Indigenous subjects prepared the food, dinnerware, and decorations; some of the European settlers dressed as Nahua nobles, led by Ávila, who was dressed as a "rey indio" (Indian king);² and others, in European dress, were armed with harquebuses. The two groups performed a mock skirmish of some sort; afterward, there was a banquet. Martín Cortés was fêted as the king of New Spain and a sumptuous feast was served. Participants made speeches and toasts and caroused in the streets into the night.

A year after this festive banquet, the judges of the Real Audiencia (high court, henceforth referred to as royal judges) in Mexico City accused several of the fiesta's organizers and participants of plotting to overthrow the viceroyalty and swear allegiance to Martín Cortés, citing the masquerade as evidence. This was Hernán Cortés's second son of this name, whose mother was Doña Juana de Zúñiga. The first Martín Cortés, who was the child of Doña Marina, better known as Malintzin or La Malinche, played a smaller role in reconstructions of the plot to rebel. Many of the attendees were *encomenderos*, settlers who had inherited from their conquistador forebears *encomiendas*, or grants of labor and tribute from the Indigenous inhabitants of consigned lands.³ The *encomienda* was a royal favor, and it was rumored that the king would soon prohibit its further inheritance.⁴ Officials were girding themselves for unrest. Fresh on everyone's minds was an uprising in Peru several years earlier, in which a viceroy who had tried to limit the *encomenderos'* powers and privileges had not only been deposed but also decapitated.⁵

In New Spain, the viceroyalty was vulnerable. The Real Audiencia had been ruling without a symbolic head since the last viceroy died two years earlier, in 1564. They were still waiting for the king to replace him.⁶ Shortly before the fiestas, the alderman of Mexico City's city council, which included several *encomenderos*, petitioned the king not to send another viceroy at all. Rather, the council asked to make the current royal inspector (*visitador*) governor and to appoint Martín Cortés captain general, essentially proposing that one

² All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Torquemada, 2:390.

³ See Zavala; Simpson.

⁴ Tensions had run high ever since 1542, when Charles V (1500–58) promulgated the New Laws, which curbed the *encomenderos'* ability to exploit Indigenous peoples for labor. The *encomenderos* of Peru revolted against them, and Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza (1490/93–1552) poorly implemented them in New Spain. In response to unrest, the Crown revoked major components of the laws.

⁵ In 1543, Blasco Núñez de Vela (1495–1546) was named viceroy of Peru and tasked with implementing the New Laws. The Real Audiencia, controlled by local elites, deposed him. When he tried to regain power, he was decapitated. On the rebellion of Francisco Hernández Girón (1510–54), see Salinero, 2017, 241–54.

⁶ Bejarano, 7:211–12.

of their own govern. This proposal would have further fragmented the king's representation overseas, dividing his power not only between the Real Audiencia and the viceroy but also splintering it further with the introduction of a separate captain general.⁷ Moreover, captain general was a particularly fraught position, as it had wielded the power of all three offices together when Hernán Cortés was awarded the title in 1522.⁸ In this climate, the judges scrutinized the fiestas for evidence that would confirm their suspicions of an impending rebellion.

According to an influential argument, the royal judges acted on the Crown's desire to consolidate control by setting up Martín Cortés and his so-called collaborators, coaxing their rivals to provide false testimony against them.⁹ Yet there are dozens of contradictory accounts of what actually took place and who was implicated in the planned unrest. Thousands upon thousands of manuscript folios of testimony are held in Seville, Madrid, and Washington, DC, complicating the study of the conspiracy. Historians have pored through the trial records and adjacent archival documentation to reconstruct the years leading up to the trials. In an extensive study, Gregorio Salinero painstakingly analyzes the most influential participants' testimonies and teases apart what they likely did from what they later told judges they had done.¹⁰ Multiple articles deal with the sheer volume of material by focusing on one key player or town that was supposedly involved.¹¹

The question of what really happened the night in 1565 that Martín Cortés was fêted as king might ultimately be unknowable and perhaps of limited relevance. It is arguable that the fact that so many testimonies conflict with one another, while others appear filled with fabrications, more accurately captures the struggles among competing political groups: viceregal officials and *encomenderos*, the Cortés family's faction and their rivals, the mendicants and the secular clergy, and Nahua nobles and their unruly subjects.¹² Furthermore, prosecutors, defendants, witnesses, and, later, chroniclers interpret the fiestas in ways that

⁷ Previously, Don Luis de Velasco served as both viceroy and captain general.

⁸ On 11 October 1522, Cortés was named commander in chief (*adelantado*), distributor (*repartidor*) of Indians, governor, and captain general.

⁹ See Cushing Flint.

¹⁰ Salinero, 2013 and 2017.

¹¹ See Ruiz Medrano; Jiménez Abollado.

¹² While many historians have labored to disentangle the divergent accounts, some scholars of performance and literature have taken the multiplicity of actors, objects, signs, and symbols described as revelatory of the essential nature of the fiestas. The latter often approach the chronicles and testimonies as reasonably reliable reconstructions of those events. Cabranes-Grant considers the plethora of signs and symbols as symptomatic of "intercultural scenarios" and "semiotic miscegenation" (Cabranes-Grant, 2016; Cabranes-Grant, 2011, 518). Other literary scholars have taken up the ways in which poets, novelists, and intellectuals in subsequent

reveal divergent understandings of the inner workings of authority in New Spain. Their accounts express different theories of power's relation to signs, symbols, and ceremonies a generation after Tenochtitlan fell.

Scholarship centering on whether a conspiracy actually existed or whether the Crown framed New Spain's most powerful settlers overlooks the fact that the trials themselves—regardless of their sincerity—enabled the Crown to consolidate the authority of Spanish royal symbols. By prosecuting select symbols as usurpations of the king's power and ignoring others, the royal judges simultaneously constructed the symbolic power of the king and his overseas representatives and disempowered other forms of power that were thriving in New Spain.

A REBELLION IN THE KING'S IMAGE

Looking back with the clarity of hindsight decades after the cases against Martín Cortés and Alonso de Ávila had been closed, apologetic chroniclers attributed the convictions to the settlers' excessive pomp and ceremony. They admit, in lamenting tones, that the fiestas honoring Cortés made him into the mirror image of a king. The festivities held in and around 1565, they claim, were fit for royalty. "Better suited for a king than a marquis," Juan de Torquemada (ca. 1557–1624) stated succinctly in his *Monarquía indiana* (Indian monarchy, 1615).¹³ In his *Tratado del descubrimiento de las Indias y su conquista* (Treatise on the discovery of the Indies and their conquest, 1589), Juan Suárez de Peralta (1541–1613) recalled that the royal treatment began the day Martín Cortés stepped foot in New Spain. When the marquis arrived with his wife, Doña Ana Ramírez de Arellano, in Coyoacán, "he was received in the same way that the royal person could have been received," Suárez de Peralta writes.¹⁴ Such descriptions echo and naturalize the royal judges' conclusions, decades earlier, that Cortés usurped the king's power by enacting rituals that were the exclusive domain of royalty.

The trial records reveal a far more ambiguous situation. The royal judges' verdicts were anything but natural, instead resulting from a prolonged investigation detailing how Cortés imitated royalty. The royal judges turned a suspicious eye to the pomp and circumstance surrounding Martín Cortés's person. For instance, they drew up a questionnaire that addressed the symbolic infractions that Cortés allegedly committed. By scrutinizing Cortés's every action, royal officials emphasized that the descendants of conquistadores

centuries anachronistically portrayed the deposed settlers as the first Mexicans to fight for independence.

¹³ Torquemada, 2:390.

¹⁴ Suárez de Peralta, 1990a, 174.

could not become viceroys, likely with an eye toward suppressing those *encomenderos* who argued that they should be made nobles.

In a written request to the king to pursue this line of investigation, the main prosecutor portrayed the daily life of Martín Cortés as the illicit wielding of royal authority. He explained that Cortés “came to these regions of the Indies for the purpose of rebelling, denying to your royal person the obedience and fidelity which he owes you as a loyal vassal”—and that, in order to better carry it off, he “attempted to attribute to himself many preeminences of the kind that pertain to your royal person, and he endeavored that his vassals and servants should observe them and treat him as though he were in effect the universal lord of this land, being esteemed as a very powerful person, trying to enforce obedience by fear, and doing other things which only the kings and lords are accustomed to do in their own realms and lands.”¹⁵ What chroniclers later described as festivities worthy of a king, the royal judges presented as evidence of the crime of *laesae majestatis*—literally, injured sovereignty—that is, offense and disloyalty to the king of Spain and conspiracy to rebel against him.¹⁶

Martín Cortés was the proprietor of a massive marquise known as the Valle de Oaxaca, a rare, entailed estate or *mayorazgo*—exactly the kind of seigniorial, inheritable domain the *encomenderos* wished they had—in a land where most descendants of conquistadores had been rewarded with the ephemeral and unassured *encomienda*.¹⁷ Cortés’s exceptional landholding was one of the last remnants of the great powers his father held after the fall of Mexica Tenochtitlan in 1521. Initially, Hernán Cortés was recognized as the king’s representative in the capacity of governor and captain general of New Spain. Yet after a few years, the Crown began judiciously tightening its grip on the territory. They parceled out Cortés’s enormous powers, first by introducing the *audiencia* to take over his judicial duties in 1527. In 1529, an angered Cortés appeared before the king, who tried to placate him with the title of marquis, a coat of arms, and his *mayorazgo*. Nevertheless, the king stripped Cortés of his governorship and installed a viceroy in New Spain just a few years later, in 1535. No longer the most powerful man in the land he had conquered, despite his titles of marquis and captain general—the latter a primarily honorific post at this point—a bitter Hernán Cortés remained convinced that he should still be governor. Despite his resentment, Hernán Cortés’s hereditary privileges were greater than those bestowed upon his conquistador counterparts. Still, the *mayorazgo* had only been awarded to the Cortés family on the

¹⁵ Warren, 263.

¹⁶ On the origins of this crime, see Thomas.

¹⁷ Lesley Byrd Simpson describes it as an “anachronism and an anomaly” that the Council of the Indies considered a “mistake.” Simpson, 164.

condition of their loyalty to the Crown, and Martín Cortés would push that condition to its limit.¹⁸

With the king's approval of the additional questions, the royal judges proceeded to interrogate Martín Cortés and other witnesses about the former's alleged adoption of royal symbols and rituals. The royal judges asked witnesses and Cortés himself "whether they know that every time the Marqués left his house he took along a page on horseback with a tall lance raised . . . and with the butt end of it placed in a leather sheath which was hanging from the saddlebow and on the bare part of it there appeared to be a royal standard."¹⁹ The judges further alleged that, bearing what "appeared to be a royal standard," he comported himself like the king's representative in New Spain, daring to overtake the actual viceroy, Don Luis de Velasco (1511–64), to greet the royal inspector Jerónimo de Valderrama as he traveled to Mexico City after arriving from Spain: "Thus he went out to receive the inspector, Licentiate Valderrama, at the time when he entered this city"; "the Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco sent him a command that he should remove said standard in consideration of the fact that the Viceroy was carrying the standard of His Majesty."²⁰

During his examination, Cortés excused himself, claiming that he either did not perform the acts mentioned or that he did so for practical rather than symbolic motivations. In response to this particular accusation, he made a partial confession: yes, when he left his home he typically brought with him a page who carried a lance. But, he insisted, he did so in the same manner that he did in Castile, to no scandal. He firmly denied that his lance bore a royal standard, or any other standard for that matter, and insisted that there was merely a cover on its iron head similar to a sack, the closure of which had silk tassels. He did not deny, however, that he had overtaken Viceroy Velasco's entourage and welcomed the royal inspector Valderrama first—a move that many, not least the viceroy himself, interpreted as a direct challenge to the viceroy's precedence over him in New Spain. At other times, however, Cortés vehemently defended himself and declared that his rivals were falsely accusing him of comporting himself like a king. Regarding his so-called bearing of a royal standard, he retorted: "It is understood how different a royal standard is from a sack and that no man, no matter how ignorant, could have confused the two unless he was blinded by enmity."²¹

Cortés could not get off so easily, however. When Cortés was not busy appropriating "preeminences" of the kind that pertained to kings and lords—

¹⁸ Cortés, 1915, 151–70.

¹⁹ Warren, 263.

²⁰ Warren, 263.

²¹ Orozco y Berra, 128. Unless otherwise indicated, all page-number citations to this work come from the "Documentos" section.

like bearing the royal standard and welcoming official visitors on behalf of the vicerealty—witnesses said he touted his own coat of arms in excessive fashion. That is, how he displayed his royally sanctioned heraldic symbols problematically resembled “the things which only the kings and lords are accustomed to do in their own realm and lands.”²² In that light, the royal judges scrutinized the fanfare of the baptismal ceremonies that Cortés hosted for his twin sons, implying that they resembled the baptisms of princes. They asked witnesses and Cortés himself “whether they know that for the baptism of his son the said Marqués had a scaffold built from the door of his house to the cathedral, higher than a man, so that one had to go up on it by stairs and to descend by others in the church . . . and [that the scaffold] was completely surrounded with banners and standards of his [the Marqués’s] coat of arms and of his towns from his house to the cathedral.”²³ Cortés admitted that, yes, some platforms had been constructed, but in his defense, this was intended to prevent the ladies from having to walk through the mud. He explained that the baptism occurred during Mexico City’s rainy season, when torrential downpours fell on the city. Other platforms, he confessed, were erected so that the Indigenous inhabitants of his marquisate could watch the apparently spectacular baptismal procession, but these were not decorated with banners of his coat of arms as others claimed.²⁴

Over and over, the royal judges sought to confirm through their questioning that Cortés was as the main prosecutors had already depicted him: a son of a conquistador who carried himself as “kings and lords” do and forcefully coerced the inhabitants of New Spain into treating him as their king. Did he bring a seat of honor with velvet canopies and cushions, “in the same way that royal persons and their Viceroys are accustomed to do,” when he and his wife, the marchioness, went to Mass?²⁵ Did he threaten to beat and kill anyone who did not accompany him in a procession when they met him in the street? Was it true that he traveled with servants who carried clubs beneath their capes? Cortés denied it all.

Still, there was one accusation that led to a great admission on Cortés’s behalf. The judges asked Cortés and other witnesses: “Whether they know, and it is thus public, that the said Marqués had a silver seal made of the same size as that of His Majesty, with his arms and a Crown engraved on it, and in the inscription which was placed around the said coat of arms he entitled himself duke although he was not such, and he made it in order to seal and send

²² Warren, 263.

²³ Warren, 265.

²⁴ Orozco y Berra, 134.

²⁵ Warren, 265.

with his affairs; and he would have done so if . . . the Viceroy at that time had not commanded that it be kept back from him and His Majesty by his royal decree commanded that he should not use it.”²⁶ Cortés acknowledged that the seal in question had been confiscated from the silversmith who was making it for him, but affirmed that he never used it, and that officials had already delivered it to the Royal Council of the Indies in Seville.²⁷

Cortés’s rivals—including the son of the deceased viceroy, Don Luis Velasco—testified that the marquis offended the king with his seal. Velasco declared that “it was excessive and contemptible for him [Cortés] to want to use a seal of that size and fashioned in the same manner as the king’s.”²⁸ The only seal of the same size and fashion as the king’s was the viceroy’s. As an extension of the king’s body, that seal was received from Spain—from the seat of royal power—with great ritual and ceremony. Alejandro Cañeque, focusing on the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, explains that the viceroy’s seal in New Spain was treated “in the same way as the king”—mounted on its own horse and accompanied in procession to the capital.²⁹ The viceregal seal made the king present in New Spain, not unlike the Eucharist made the body of Christ present during Mass, and reactivated his powers in the viceroy, who ruled New Spain as the mirror image of the king.³⁰

Worse still for his defense, Cortés’s seal contained irrefutable evidence that he had attempted to bestow upon himself privileges that were only within the king’s power to grant. The oversized seal had a large crown on it, and, around the crown, a motto in Latin. Velasco testified that it read: “martinus cortesus primus hujus nominis Dux marchio secundus” (Martín Cortés, the first duke of this name and second marquis).³¹ Arguably, “Dux” could have referred to Martín Cortés’s actual post as captain general.³² Yet the specification that he was the “first” of his family ruled out this interpretation, since his father had been captain general as well. This left hard proof that Martín Cortés had in fact claimed to be a duke when the king had not given him this hereditary title. This was particularly audacious, as the title of duke was often reserved for members of the royal family.

Martín Cortés’s seal was the smoking gun, seeming proof that the disgruntled settlers intended to rebel, declare their independence from Spain,

²⁶ Warren, 265.

²⁷ Orozco y Berra, 131.

²⁸ Orozco y Berra, 79. Velasco complained that Cortés carried a standard: “pareciéndole al dicho virrey su padre” (Orozco y Berra, 80).

²⁹ Cañeque, 120.

³⁰ Cañeque, 120.

³¹ Orozco y Berra, 79.

³² On the possibility that Cortés’s words were altered, see Orozco y Berra, 79n13.

and take Martín Cortés as their king. Whatever Cortés's true intentions, the manufacture of the seal lent credibility to some witnesses' claims that he intended to grant his coconspirators nobiliary titles, naming them dukes and marquis in his future capacity as king of New Spain.³³

The royal judges interpreted the decorative program of the fiestas through this paradigm of armorial bearings, whose origin dated back to the European nobility's adoption of seals in the twelfth century. If coats of arms initially served as self-markers of identification and achievement on the battlefield and in tournaments, by the sixteenth century they were highly regulated symbols expected to accurately identify one's titles and family pedigree. The king's bestowal of titles on his subjects often coincided with the conferral of new heraldry as well. Martín Cortés's own coat of arms dated back to 1529, when King Charles V (1500–58) granted them to Hernán Cortés along with the title of marquis and his *mayorazgo*. The granting of these heraldic symbols to the Cortésian patrilineal line coincided with the bestowal of royal privileges, demonstrating that the usurpation of the former was fair game for prosecution.

But what of the ornamental trappings of a rowdy masquerade and banquet among the settlers of Mexico City, thousands of miles from the king? Could the sixteenth-century equivalent of what one might purchase today at a party store really be scrutinized with the same intensity as coats of arms, standards or banners, and seals? The royal judges put this possibility to the test. They approached the 1565 fiestas through the paradigm of a symbolic regime of power, asking witnesses and Martín Cortés: "Whether they know that after the said business of rebellion had been discussed between the said Marqués del Valle and the said Alonso de Ávila, on a day of fiesta there was a party in the house of the said Marqués after nightfall, and the said Alonso de Ávila was the one who principally organized the said fiesta . . . and the whole fiesta was dedicated to the fact that the said Marqués was to be the king of this land."³⁴ If the fiesta was indeed dedicated to the crowning of the marquis, it was not irrational to scrutinize every element of that celebration for hints of rebellion. In ways that might seem ridiculous to the modern reader, each aspect of the celebration became overdetermined and suspect—even the tableware.

The evidence cited by royal judges included the clay pitchers used in the banquet following the masquerade. One witness claimed that the pitchers bore a figure containing the enigmatic text "REIAS." According to him, two accent marks indicated that it should be read "Reinarás" ("you will reign") and, in a nod to Cortés's future kingship, it was adorned with a crown on top.

³³ Salinero, 2017.

³⁴ Warren, 251.

A scribe drew it in the margin of the recorded testimony, labeling it “las letras de la jarra” (“the writing on the pitchers”) (fig. 1). The royal judges examined this figure as if it were on par with the incriminating motto on Cortés’s seal. If Cortés had already proclaimed himself duke, did not texts and images such as this one prove that he had plans to make himself king? The prosecution would read the designs on the banquet’s dinnerware as if they were heraldry.

For the skeptical chroniclers who reflected on the whole affair decades after the fact, the judges exaggerated the meaning of symbols that had been incorporated into the banquet in jest. In his *Tratado*, Suárez de Peralta insisted that Ávila ordered the image of a crown painted on the dinnerware to playfully honor the marchioness—not to announce the impending coronation of Martín Cortés.³⁵ It was painted “for show,” he wrote.³⁶ Suárez de Peralta hardly considered the fiestas and their playful decorative program as hard evidence of an impending rebellion.³⁷

Further, Suárez de Peralta insinuated that the royal judges framed the settlers. According to him, paranoid royal judges infiltrated the banquet, searching for any possible sign of a political disturbance. “I don’t think the food had even been served when one of the judges had a pitcher in his hand and said that the figure meant, ‘you will reign’ and confiscated it,” he stated flatly.³⁸ For Suárez de Peralta, the judges’ desire to catch the settlers red-handed led them to deny the farcical flattery behind the image. Such an interpretation is not surprising coming from a settler who, according to one scholar, wrote at the time of great “nostalgia” for the *encomienda* among those who had been denied one under the restrictive policies that followed the convictions of Martín Cortés, Ávila, and their so-called coconspirators.³⁹

Suárez de Peralta described a simpler figure than the one that appeared in the testimony above. According to him, the pitchers were adorned with “an ‘R’ with a crown on top of it.”⁴⁰ He included a different drawing in the margin of his treatise (fig. 2). The royal judges’ and Suárez de Peralta’s divergent figures result from their desires either to affirm its meaning as immanent or to dramatize the royal judges’ misguided interpretations. Whereas the first figure is incriminatingly explicit, the second drawing is more open to interpretation. The first supports the argument that the settlers appropriated the king’s visual repertoire to “better carry

³⁵ Suárez de Peralta, 1990a, 186.

³⁶ “Por gala” (Suárez de Peralta, 1990a, 185).

³⁷ Suárez de Peralta’s family had a tense relationship with the Cortés family; however, they lost an *encomienda* to the Crown’s new policies. Suárez de Peralta thus had reason to lament the accused settlers’ fate, which came to symbolize the decline of the *encomendero* class in New Spain. See González González.

³⁸ Suárez de Peralta, 1990a, 186.

³⁹ See González González.

⁴⁰ Suárez de Peralta, 1990a, 186.

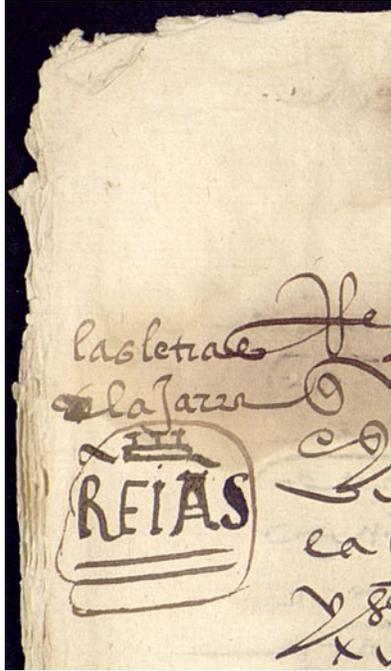


Figure 1. Sketch of the symbol on the pitchers. Seville, Archivo General de Indias, Patronato 203, Ramo 6, fol. 197^v (imagen 48) (detail). Courtesy of España, Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, Archivo General de Indias.

off [their rebellion].”⁴¹ The second promotes the theory, echoed by scholars today, that royal officials used the powerful settlers’ carefree carousing to frame them for conspiring to rebel and thereby strip them of their privileges. Even more sardonically, the chronicler Diego Muñoz Camargo (1529–99), son of a conquistador and a Tlaxcalan woman, openly doubted the very existence of the rebellion in his *Historia de Tlaxcala* (History of Tlaxcala, ca. 1592), writing, “It was at this time that they say a rebellion took place in Mexico.”⁴²

Yet Cortés may have been aware of the danger of wielding such symbols, farcical or not. According to witnesses, when the marquis discovered that the

⁴¹ Warren, 263.

⁴² “En este tiempo sucedió la rebelión que dicen de México” (Muñoz Camargo, 289), *dicen* being an early precursor to the phrase *dizque* (so-called) uttered today to sarcastically express skepticism. Serge Gruzinski argues that Camargo’s circumspection reveals his aspiration to political and religious orthodoxy, noting that Camargo dubs the Martín Cortés affair a “rebellion.” See Gruzinski, 2021, 168; Muñoz Camargo, 289.

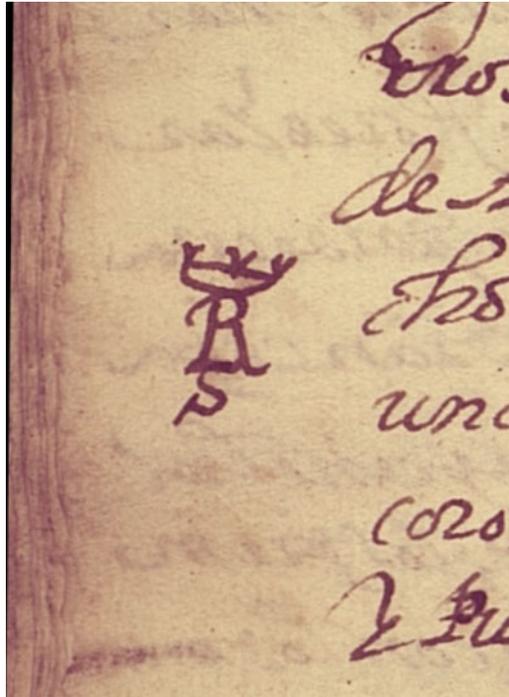


Figure 2. Drawing from the margins of the manuscript of Suárez de Peralta, *Tratado del descubrimiento*. Toledo, Biblioteca de Castilla-La Mancha / Biblioteca Pública del Estado, Toledo, MS 302, fol. 121^v (detail).

flower garland placed on his head had a wax sign (*lebrero*) that was inscribed, “Do not fear the fall, for you shall rise to greater heights,” he had it immediately destroyed.⁴³ He would have done well to have also destroyed the dinnerware. The debates over the pitchers’ meaning stemmed from different conceptions of the semiotics of power. The fight for control over the viceroy’s symbols of power, and by extension Martín Cortés’s fate, would drag on for years.

The royal judges’ initial accusations, which Cortés completely denied, date to July 1566. They included a call for Cortés’s execution and the confiscation of his property. In March of the following year, the judges launched their investigation into his symbolic infractions. Shortly thereafter, he was obliged

⁴³ Pedro de Aguilar confessed to fabricating the wax *lebrero* following Ávila’s orders. Orozco y Berra, 198. Ávila claimed that Augustin de Sotomayor made them but said he could not remember who destroyed this one (Orozco y Berra, 8–9). On Cortés destroying them, see Salinero, 2017, 372.

to pledge an oath of loyalty (*pleito de homenaje*) to proceed to Spain and present himself before the king.⁴⁴ There, he was held prisoner in the Castillo de Terrojón de Velasco in Madrid. In September of 1571, he was sentenced to perpetual exile from New Spain, armed service, and the embargo of his property. Cortés's appeal was denied in 1572, but his punishment was revised numerous times until a royal order confirmed it shortly before his release in April 1573.

That final punishment and its implementation were strikingly lenient, especially compared with the fate of his *encomendero* conspirators. Even though he was found guilty of the crime of *laesae majestatis* and conspiracy to rebel, Cortés ultimately retained his title of marquis and recovered his *mayorazgo* from embargo. He was forced to lease out the administration of his domains in New Spain, but he continued to benefit financially from them.⁴⁵ Like so much of his trial, his punishment was more of a symbolic than a material nature. It is possible that the Crown was more inclined to recognize and even respect Cortés' power than the royal judges in Mexico City were, since, after all, the king had given Cortés's father the title of marquis, and the Crown knew firsthand the panic that unseating nobles could unleash.

Of particular symbolic importance was keeping Cortés away from New Spain. On numerous occasions, royal officials forced him to promise to never return. It was as if the Crown believed that Cortés's mere presence there would inspire the *encomenderos* to aspire to similar heights. From the Crown's perspective, the *encomenderos*, especially those of low stock, were lucky to have inherited *encomiendas* from their conquistador forebears at all. They could not expect the institution to be made perpetual, putting it on par with Cortés's *mayorazgo*, which he had gained along with his nobiliary title.

The drawn-out discussions regarding Cortés's appropriation of royal symbols differed greatly from the trials of many of these *encomenderos* who were present at the 1565 fiestas. After a two-week-long investigation, Ávila—who was accused of dressing as an “Indian cacique” at the masquerade—and his brother Gil (d. 1566) were sentenced to death in August 1566.⁴⁶ On that very day, they were publicly beheaded in the central plaza of Mexico City; afterward, their heads were displayed on pikes. Alonso de Ávila's symbolic infractions were not litigated in detail, stopping the modern researcher short and throwing into sharp relief the thousands upon thousands of pages specifying precisely how Cortés rebelled in the king's image.

⁴⁴ Warren, 14.

⁴⁵ His estate was under embargo until 1574. See Brockington, 33, 99.

⁴⁶ Orozco y Berra, 6–7.

The disparate treatment of Ávila and Cortés, and the different symbols of power they had appropriated, extended to their properties. The Crown confiscated the Ávilas' vast wealth. Almost as dramatic as Alonso de Ávila's beheading, his houses were razed to the ground and the land on which they stood was salted. Officials were killing two birds with one stone: his residences stood on top of the former *Templo Mayor*, the ceremonial center of the Mexica Empire prior to the conquest.⁴⁷ The simultaneous destruction of both echoed the new tendency in New Spain to suppress the memory of Mexica dominion (and so-called pre-Hispanic superstitions), in contrast with the earlier settlers' proclivity for modeling their newly acquired powers on it. Nearby, officials erected a plaque that still stands today. It declares: "These houses were the property of Alonso de Ávila Alvarado, *vecino* of Mexico City, who was sentenced to death as a traitor" (fig. 3).⁴⁸

This plaque is within a stone's throw of the viceregal palace (now the *Palacio nacional* [National Palace]), the seat of viceregal power that was originally the residence of Hernán Cortés. Although Martín Cortés inherited it from his father, the Spanish Crown bought it in 1562. If the judges used Martín Cortés's trial to affirm the exclusive privileges of the viceroy, those who knew the history of this building also knew that royal officials took cues from the Cortés family. If officially Cortés was accused of imitating the king, unofficially the viceroy had imitated Martín and his father.

The disparate sentences of Martín Cortés and the Ávila brothers show that by prosecuting Cortés for acting like a king, the Crown was also codifying a particular symbolic regime. Over the course of a scandalous amount of paperwork, the royal judges underlined how the Crown understood viceregal power in New Spain as embodied only by Spanish signs, symbols, and ceremonies. By equating Cortés's subversion of royal symbols to rebellion, they were also showing local officials how to consolidate viceregal power under the symbolic aegis of Spanish royalty. That is, they were codifying the viceregal position as the mirror image of the king at the time that they needed to consolidate power under one semiotic visual regime. Through their prosecution, the judges defined what the trappings of legitimate power in New Spain would look like for the foreseeable future. Without a doubt, they would not look like the "Indian king," Alonso de Ávila.

⁴⁷ In this article, *Mexica Empire* is shorthand for what is more precisely called the Mexica tributary empire.

⁴⁸ See Sánchez Reyes; Moctezuma Matos. The plaque's full text reads, in translation, "These houses belonged to Alonso de Ávila Alvarado, once of this city of Mexico, who was sentenced to death as a traitor. The sentence of the execution of his person carried out in the public square of this city. The demolishing was ordered of these houses, which comprised his principal residence. Year of 1566." *Vecino* indicated a status of residency with accompanying privileges and obligations.

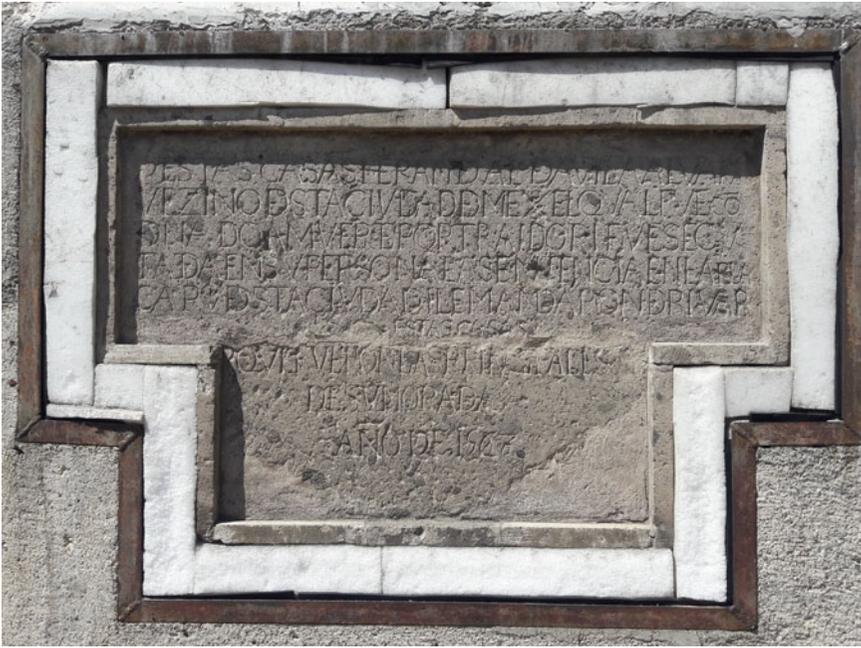


Figure 3. Plaque raised at the site of Alonso de Ávila's former residence. The inscription reads, "Estas casas eran de Al[on]so de Ávila Alvarado, vezino desta ciudad de Mexico, el qual fue condenado a muerte por traidor; fue secutado [ejecutada] en su persona la sentencia en la plaza pública desta ciudad; le mandaron deribar estas casas, que fueron las principales de su morada. Año de 15[66]." Photo by Nicole T. Hughes.

IMITATING THE WRONG KING

Years earlier, the royal judges launched an investigation into Ávila's symbolic infractions that began similarly to the later investigations of Martín Cortés. During Ávila's trial, they sought evidence that his late-night soirées were actually clandestine meetings in which he and his conspirators planned the uprising.⁴⁹ "They asked [Ávila . . . whether he] communicated with different persons . . . that His Majesty does not have a legitimate claim to this land and that they could justly take it away from him and take it for themselves."⁵⁰ They then questioned his motives for organizing the fiesta during which Cortés had been fêted as king of New Spain. They asked whether, after having disseminated his seditious plans, Ávila "ordered that a masquerade be arranged in this city at the house of the Marquis del Valle," to which he arrived "in the habit of an Indian cacique with many other people on horseback in the same costume

⁴⁹ Orozco y Berra, 5.

⁵⁰ Orozco y Berra, 6.

carrying Indian masks.”⁵¹ Where Cortés imitated the king of Spain, Ávila imitated an Indigenous sovereign. The judges took the former as evidence of Cortés’s intent to declare himself king of New Spain and began investigating the latter in connection with Ávila’s so-called plot to steal the land from the Spanish Crown.

The initial symmetry of these two cases, each involving the accused having imitated a different sovereign, soon ceased. All things being equal, it would have been logical for the royal judges to take Ávila’s imitation of an “Indian cacique” as evidence of his intention to declare himself king of New Spain, albeit in a different mold. Yet the royal judges quickly turned their focus away from Ávila’s symbolic infractions and toward material evidence like firearms and gunpowder, in contrast with their juridical obsession with Cortés’s adoption of the royal trappings of power.

By the end of Ávila’s trial, the royal judges had made his costume at the banquet a parenthetical in his conviction for plotting to rebel. They focused on the fact that several settlers who participated in the masquerade—those who dressed as Europeans—were equipped with harquebuses. They argued that festivities like the masquerade were rehearsals for a planned rebellion that would take place during a future commemoration of St. Hippolytus’s feast day, the day that marked the anniversary of the fall of Tenochtitlan. In the middle of the festivities, the royal judges concluded, the *encomenderos* and other settlers would turn on the royal officials and kill them with their firearms.

The available evidence suggests two complementary explanations for the judges’ actions: first, when the judges sidestepped Ávila’s imitation of an Indigenous sovereign, they (knowingly or unknowingly) took part in a larger, long-term strategy to downplay and infantilize Indigenous power, while simultaneously cracking down on the *encomenderos*. Second, by all appearances, the royal judges did not convict Ávila for his imitation of an “Indian cacique,” even as extant historical evidence suggests that this imitation was by no means nonthreatening.

What the royal judges paid attention to limns the limits of what might be called the Spanish Crown’s juridical imagination. That is, the royal judges were constricted by the laws and codes of Spain, and all symbolic authority within those laws stemmed from the Spanish monarch. It stands to reason that the judges could not prosecute symbolic infractions that the legal system they were tasked to enforce was not capable of naming. In a legal system designed to trace all authority back to the body of the king, only illicit imitation of the Spanish monarch could animate costumes with deadly political significance.

⁵¹ Orozco y Berra, 6–7.

This explains why the royal judges tried their hand at translating attributes of Indigenous insignia of rank into Spanish terms. Witnesses reported the suspicious incorporation into the masquerade of what they called *suchiles* (the Hispanicized plural of *xochitl*, which means flower in Nahuatl), which were powerful symbols associated with the *tlatoani* (ruler; literally, he who speaks) and upper echelons of Nahua society. In response, the judges inquired if they somehow featured heraldry. They asked Ávila whether the settlers who carried the *suchiles* also carried standards with Ávila's coat of arms, or if they carried such a standard in another moment of the masquerade, and if the standard bore the motto "Do not fear the fall, for you shall rise to greater heights," or any other suspicious phrase.⁵² The royal judges would only interpret the flowers as legitimate threats if they were combined with Spanish heraldic symbols or otherwise made legible through mottos attached to them, revealing that their meaning needed to be put into Peninsular terms in order to be prosecuted.

Ávila took full advantage of this blind spot in the Spanish legal system and defended himself by highlighting his imitation of the "Indian cacique" as a simple costume, emptied of symbolic meaning. He claimed that he and his party all "wore Indian garb as costumes and masks imitating their faces."⁵³ Ávila's description of his own costume is threadbare, yet the royal judges accused him of playing the role of an Indigenous sovereign. Later accounts, like that contained in Torquemada's *Monarquía indiana*, imagined that Ávila, one of the wealthiest *encomenderos*, donned sumptuous attire. Torquemada wrote that Ávila had dressed "in the style of the Indians and pretended to be the person of the Indian king, with a string of flowers with many valuable treasures (*joyas*) in it."⁵⁴ During the actual trials, the royal judges expressed limited concern about Ávila's role, instead asking him repeatedly about the "person who was to be elected the new king of the kingdom of New Spain," as if it could not possibly have been him.⁵⁵

Even if the royal judges' primary goal was to incriminate Cortés, who was presumably the "person" in question, they made little of Ávila's testimony that the powerful Cortés had shared in his adoption of Indigenous regalia. The royal judges asked Ávila if he had placed a "crown in the manner of a garland" on the head of the marchioness—Martín Cortés's wife—and if a rowdy conspirator who was present had publicly said, "Take this crown."⁵⁶ As if anticipating the royal judges' own biases, Ávila deflected by claiming

⁵² Warren, 250.

⁵³ Orozco y Berra, 7.

⁵⁴ Torquemada, 2:390.

⁵⁵ Orozco y Berra, 14.

⁵⁶ Orozco y Berra, 8.

that he merely fêted the marchioness in the manner of the “Indians”—the “crown” was merely dress-up to amuse the ladies, empty of any symbolic danger. He confessed, “It was true that that night he had put a garland of feathers on the marchioness’s head, but he did it in the way of the Indians and denies that it was a crown.”⁵⁷ Ávila cleverly insinuated that adorning the marchioness with a garland of feathers was harmless and did not injure the sovereignty of the Spanish king and his overseas representation. But the fact that this was an effective excuse to use with the royal judges did not mean his costume carried no serious implications in its local context, nor that Ávila himself believed it innocent fun.

Feather headdresses were among the most prestigious insignia worn by the upper ranks of Nahua society. The range of feather hair-binders known as *tlalpiloni* were noted in the pictographic codices as the defining head adornment of rulers, in addition to being royal gifts to Nahua nobles and status symbols awarded to accomplished warriors. In his Nahuatl dictionary, Friar Alonso de Molina (1513/14–79/85) used language like Ávila’s when he defined as a “feather garland for the head” the *icpacxochitl*, which he also describes as the dance attire of rulers. Those made with valuable quetzal feathers, such as the *quetzalquacuahuítl* (quetzal feather horn insignia; fig. 4) worn by rulers in dances, often contained gold baubles as well, recalling Torquemada’s claim that there were “treasures” in the string of flowers worn by Ávila.⁵⁸

Ávila need not have been deeply versed in Indigenous customs to know that feather headpieces were symbols of Nahua political power. The *quetzalquacuahuítl* would appear in a section of Friar Bernardino de Sahagún’s (ca. 1499–1590) *Primeros memoriales* (First memorials, 1559–61) dedicated to warrior costumes next to another, the *quetzalquatlamoyaoalli* (the quetzal [feather] bestrewn head [insignia]; fig. 5), and matches other accounts of the war regalia of rulers and insignia of noble warriors.⁵⁹ The feather garland worn as a headpiece in Ávila’s fiesta and vaguely described in his testimony may not have been a crown in the fashion of those worn by the kings of Spain, but it was nonetheless a powerful garment associated with Indigenous rulership and nobility.⁶⁰

There was more to this ambiguous crowning than feathers: Ávila also reportedly gifted the marquis and the marchioness flowers. Ávila’s brother Gil, who was put on trial along with him, confessed that he saw Alonso bring garlands

⁵⁷ Orozco y Berra, 8.

⁵⁸ Hair binders made of quetzal feathers could be decorated with golden flint knives and pendants. See Olko, 63, who cites the Florentine Codex.

⁵⁹ Sahagún, 1997, 3–14, 265.

⁶⁰ Olko, 62–68. Indeed, Diego Muñoz Camargo’s *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala* (ca. 1584–85) depicts a victorious Cortés crowned with a feather headdress after the fall of Tenochtitlan; see Camargo, fol. 275^v.

and “suchiles” to the masquerade. He said that Alonso “gave the said flowers to the marques and the marchioness.”⁶¹ Alonso de Ávila had also testified that the settlers who dressed “in Indian garb” carried roses that the native population called “suchiles.”⁶² Flowers, which the Florentine Codex refers to as “exclusively the ruler’s,” historically functioned as attributes of rank among lords and *tlatoque* (pl. *tlatoani*).⁶³ They appear in numerous pictographic codices alongside nobles and rulers, and are cited as gifts of greeting among the upper ranks.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the royal judges, who likely understood Indigenous customs less than the average *encomendero* and Franciscan, dismissed such trappings of the Nahua nobility as mere props in a costume party.

For those who were familiar with local Indigenous customs, flowers were associated with nobility and rulership. Decades later, Torquemada would take vague references to an exchange of flowers between Ávila and the Cortéses as an indicator that these men were imitating powerful figures. Torquemada understood the “string of flowers with many valuable jewels in it” as a central component of Ávila’s “Indian king” regalia.⁶⁵ He imagined that when Ávila placed the garland around the marquis’s neck he referenced what “happened before between Indians and Castilians.”⁶⁶ This meant that Ávila did not play a generic “rey indio” but rather Moteuczoma Xocoyotzin (ca. 1467–1520), *tlatoani* of Tenochtitlan and *hueli tlatoani* (great ruler) of the Mexica Empire, and Martín Cortés played his father, Hernán. Torquemada concluded, “They performed a *sarao* [soirée] in which they represented the reception that the emperor Moteuczoma, with his entire court, made for his [Martín Cortés’s] father, the captain don Fernando.”⁶⁷

However much an act of creative license it might have been, Torquemada’s account serves as a reminder that anyone who had read Hernán Cortés’s wildly popular second letter to Charles V would recall the claim that Moteuczoma “gave” the Mexica Empire to the conquistador by placing a necklace around his neck. Hernán Cortés reported that one of Moteuczoma’s servants had placed a necklace, this time made from red snail shells and gold shrimp instead of flowers, around Cortés’s neck at the time that he supposedly submitted to the king, with Cortés as his representative.⁶⁸ Hernán Cortés reported that

⁶¹ Orozco y Berra, 35–36.

⁶² Orozco y Berra, 7.

⁶³ Sahagún, 1950–82, 8:29.

⁶⁴ See Olko, 140–42.

⁶⁵ Torquemada, 2:390. See Lamar Prieto.

⁶⁶ Torquemada, 2:390.

⁶⁷ Torquemada, 2:390.

⁶⁸ A *teocuitlaquatecciztli* (shell-shaped headpiece of gold) is mentioned in the *Anales de Tlatelolco* as a gift from Moteuczoma to Cortés and appears in the Florentine Codex; for this, see Olko, 64.



Figure 4. *Quetzalquacuabuitl*. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 9-5524 [1], “Historia Universal de las cosas de la Nueva España: repartida en doze libros: en lengua mexicana y espaçola,” fol. 73^v (detail).

Moteuczoma told his subjects, “From now on you should obey this great king, for he is your rightful lord, and as his representative acknowledge this his captain [Cortés].”⁶⁹

Torquemada claimed that the *sarao* referenced this well-known episode. For him, Ávila, dressed as Moteuczoma, removed the string of flowers from his own neck and placed them around the neck of Martín Cortés in the role of his father, signifying the transfer of power. For Torquemada, the donning and gifting of a flower necklace was an unmistakable reference to the courtly rituals of the former Mexica Empire. His assumptions around flower garlands, nobility, and the transfer of power support the conclusion that while the royal judges might have been unable to name this vernacular language of sovereignty, grounded in a conquest merely four decades old, those more familiar with New Spain would have been able to decode the message. Ávila deployed these Indigenous symbols as part of the language of power in New Spain.

One might object that the real reason the Crown prolonged their investigation of Martín Cortés by focusing on his symbolic appropriations, on the one hand,

⁶⁹ Cortés, 1971, 99.



Figure 5. *Quetzalquatlamoyaoalli*. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 9-5524 [1], “Historia Universal de las cosas de la Nueva España: repartida en doze libros: en lengua mexicana y espaçola,” fol. 73^v (detail).

and summarily executed the Ávila brothers in exemplary fashion, on the other, stemmed solely from realpolitik. Alonso and Gil Ávila were the nephews and not the sons of Alonso de Ávila, a conquistador of middling importance. Martín Cortés was the son of the conquistador of the great Mexica Empire, not to mention a nobleman who had married a powerful count’s daughter and been the childhood friend of King Philip II.⁷⁰ If the repressive power of the royal judges was exerted without mercy on the Ávila brothers but spared Martín Cortés, it was likely not because the judges thought that Cortés was not guilty, but because they did not dare execute him. This certainly would not have been an expedient strategy to dispel unrest. By sending Cortés back to Spain, they left that decision to the king himself, who, as it turned out, did not execute him either. While focusing on the symbolic realm allowed the judges to prolong Cortés’s trials, and leave him intact, focusing on the harquebuses allowed them to swiftly execute the Ávila brothers. The likelihood that such practical considerations tipped the balance suggests that Nahua symbols of power were not central to the conspiracy.

⁷⁰ See Martínez Martínez.

Broader consideration of the symbolic lives and afterlives of non-Iberian sovereignty in the Americas tells a different story, however. Over and over, royal officials persecuted and suppressed the festive display of other symbols of sovereign power. Crackdowns were particularly severe in the tumultuous period that preceded the independence movements. One famous example is the massive uprising led by José Gabriel Condorcanqui (1738–81), better known as Tupac Amaru II, against the tax known as the *alcabala* and other abuses in Peru in the late 1780s. According to the royal inspector (*visitador*) José Antonio de Areche in his sentencing, Condorcanqui manipulated the Indigenous masses by claiming to be “from the principal line of the Incas . . . and therefore absolute and natural ruler of these dominions and their vassals.”⁷¹ He adopted the name of Tupac Amaru II after the last Sapa Inka (only Inka, or ruler), whom the Spanish executed in 1572, and had a portrait painted of himself with “the royal insignias.”⁷² Though the royal inspector calls his pretensions “dubious,” he readily admits that “[the Indians] believe him” and address him “with the utmost submission and respect, treating him as their Lord, Excellency, Royal Highness or Majesty.”⁷³

In order to prevent future uprisings, the royal inspector announced a series of prohibitions, which included banning attire associated with the Inka nobility. It should be forbidden, he wrote, “that the Indians wear pagan clothes, especially those who belong to the nobility, since it only serves to represent those worn by their Inca ancestors, reminding them of memories which serve no other end than to reconcile them more and more in their hatred toward the dominant nation [i.e., Spaniards]; outside their looking ridiculous and not in keeping with the purity of our religion.”⁷⁴ He added that it was especially important to eliminate all clothing that “directly represent the clothing of their pagan kings through insignia.”⁷⁵ By implying that noble attire was idolatrous, the royal inspector justified taking steps to stamp out any trace of Inka rulership, which had proven to be a threat to viceregal control.⁷⁶

In Brazil, festive coronation ceremonies were banned after they reportedly disturbed the codification of social hierarchy in daily life. Enslaved and free Black members of the Black Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary regularly

⁷¹ Stavig and Schmidt, 131. Whereas historical documents such as this one use the Hispanicized form, Inca, the standard spelling according to modern Quechua grammar from Cuzco is Inka.

⁷² Stavig and Schmidt, 132.

⁷³ Stavig and Schmidt, 132.

⁷⁴ Stavig and Schmidt, 134.

⁷⁵ Stavig and Schmidt, 134.

⁷⁶ On the earlier practice of “festive Andeanizing of the Spanish king,” see Dean, 56.

practiced the festive coronation and procession of African sovereigns. The ceremonies were sometimes deliberately performed in a monarchically benevolent fashion and, in some cases, the Jesuits deemed them “honest.”⁷⁷ Lisa Voigt argues that the distance between signifier and signified, “between mock African king[s] and real black sovereignty,” determined the perceived level of threat.⁷⁸ In the centers of power, Lisbon and Bahia, the Crown and viceroy prohibited its performance; in Minas Gerais, priests petitioned governors to outlaw it as well.

The latter complained that the festivals’ kings and queens were perceived as, and comported themselves as, actual kings and queens. One priest wrote, “The blacks recognize the reelected king as the true king [. . .] [they] treat him as their king even outside of the church.”⁷⁹ In the words of another, “All that feigned ostentation did not produce any effect other than persuading the same blacks and some of the populace that the one who was called king was a real king.”⁸⁰ As Voigt uncovers, these petitions reported disturbances such as demands that whites remove their hats in the presence of the king and his court, and orders for “distinguished men” to give up their seats in church for the Black king and his officials.⁸¹ This raises the question, at issue in the sentence against Tupac Amaru II and so relevant to the Martín Cortés trials, of how festivals perceived to mimic royal ceremony actually produced power.

The repressive measures taken in the above examples illuminate how the Spanish Crown took a different approach in New Spain: they surreptitiously suppressed pre-Hispanic symbols of power under the pretext of eradicating idolatry while they executed *encomenderos*. The underrepresentation of Nahua symbols of power in the *encomenderos*’ convictions anticipated King Philip II’s decision to put an end to the collection and circulation of certain kinds of Indigenous knowledge. In 1577, he issued a royal edict prohibiting the circulation and publication of Bernardino de Sahagún’s *Historia universal de las cosas de la Nueva España*, described as “a very copious computation of all the rites, and ceremonies, and idolatries that the Indians used in their infidelity, divided into twelve books and in the Mexican language.”⁸²

In addition to calling for the seizure of Sahagún’s work and its remittance to the Council of Indies, the edict unequivocally proscribed any further investigation: “You are warned absolutely not to allow any person to write concerning the superstitions and ways of life of these Indians in any language, for this is not

⁷⁷ Voigt, 2019, 78.

⁷⁸ Voigt, 2019, 78. See also Voigt, 2016; Valerio, 2019.

⁷⁹ English translation from Voigt, 2019, 79.

⁸⁰ English translation from Voigt, 2019, 78.

⁸¹ Voigt, 2019, 78.

⁸² García Icazbalceta, 1941, 2:249–50.

proper to God's service and to ours."⁸³ For many contemporary historians, this was the beginning of a silent war waged by the Crown against native religion and society.⁸⁴ It coincided with arguments that persuasion was more effective than force in evangelizing native peoples; by contrast, force had been deemed the only way to deal with the *encomendero* class.

The royal judges' asymmetrical convictions in the trials of the 1560s foreshadowed the separation of native and nonnative peoples into different jurisdictions, and the official reservation of violent repression for the latter, in the second half of the sixteenth century. The Crown separated Indigenous and non-Indigenous people into different Inquisitorial jurisdictions in 1570, under the pretext that total orthodoxy could only be expected from Europeans. Special knowledge was needed to prosecute Indigenous peoples and—from the Crown's perspective—their harsh punishment produced more harm than good. The native population, increasingly referred to by patronizing epithets such as "gentle saplings," was considered too new to the faith for inquisitorial methods.⁸⁵ Undoubtedly, the Crown recalled that the Apostolic Inquisition had caused rioting and unrest when they burned a prominent Tetzcocha noble at the stake in 1539. The separation of jurisdictions would be further cemented in 1590, when the viceroy came to preside over a newly created General Indian Court, where he acted as an independent counterpart to the *audiencia*. The harsh repression of non-Indigenous peoples brought on by the Inquisition echoed the reign of terror unleashed by the royal judges and, later, royal commissioners, against the *encomenderos*—publicly executing and exiling them and confiscating and destroying their property.

On another front, royal officials increasingly painted a picture for the king of the native population as weak, obedient, and submissive. In this way, they dissipated the specter of Indigenous revolt that, as will be seen, the *encomenderos* touted to justify their political power. The *encomenderos'* and royal officials' struggle to influence the Crown turned on their respective claims about the credibility of Indigenous revolt. Following a riot in Mexico City in 1564, royal inspector Valderrama insisted to King Philip II that the native peoples must have been incited to riot because, as he wrote, "they are naturally so obedient."⁸⁶ Claims of Indigenous submissiveness benefited royal officials like him.

⁸³ León-Portilla et al., 38.

⁸⁴ Georges Baudot noted that the Crown likely acted out of fear of Franciscan millenarian hopes for autonomy and their ability to steer an Indigenous rebellion and, with this edict, sought to recenter authority over Indigenous matters in Madrid (Baudot, 516–18).

⁸⁵ For example, they are called "planticas tiernas de los naturales": see Mariscal Hay, 4.

⁸⁶ Townsend, 2019, 171.

Such claims suggested that the Indigenous population was easy for them to govern and pacify. At the same time, they attributed the greatest risk of an Indigenous revolt to the presence of those who could lead them astray—the *encomenderos*, and to some extent the Franciscans, who should therefore be restrained. A highly paternalistic attitude toward native peoples proliferated, as seen in the case of the Inquisition. The consolidation of viceregal power thus entailed not only politically undermining the Indigenous nobility through the suppression of alleged idolatry, but also peddling propagandistic portrayals of supposedly weak and malleable Indians in a new phase of what Serge Gruzinski called a “war of images.”⁸⁷ The Crown undermined the Nahua nobles in a veiled manner while they very publicly executed the *encomenderos*. Soon, those who were denied inheritance of *encomiendas* were portraying themselves as poor souls abandoned by their motherland, in an evolution of the conquered conquistador trope.⁸⁸

The Crown’s master plan to transfer the *encomiendas* from the conquistadores’ heirs back to the king would also strengthen its symbolic power over Indigenous commoners. The anonymous author (*tlacuilo*, or native scribe/painter) of the *Anales de Juan Bautista* (Annals of Juan Bautista) documents how the embargo of Martín Cortés’s property, and the temporary transfer of his Indigenous subjects to the Crown, was communicated by means of replacing the marquis’s coat of arms with those of the Spanish monarch, writing: “On this day, Tuesday, November 18 of the year 1567 . . . they took down the coats of arms of the marquis, which were in all locations where his *macehuales* [Indigenous subjects; literally, commoners] lived, Coyohuacan, Atlacuihuayan, etc. This is the time when they became *macehuales* of the *tlatoani*, emperor of the whole world [king of Spain]. And in all parts it was done thus, his arms were destroyed and from then on the marquis left his *macehuales*, etc.”⁸⁹ Phasing out the institution by transferring individual *encomiendas* to the Crown ended the *encomenderos*’ dream of becoming feudal lords with economic as well as symbolic power over their Indigenous subjects—precisely the kind of power that had produced Ávila’s fiesta.

IMAGINED LEGACIES OF MEXICA POWER

The trials that began with the rapid sentencing and execution of the Ávila brothers, and dragged on for years in the meticulous litigation of Martín Cortés, ensnared many of New Spain’s most powerful and wealthy

⁸⁷ See Gruzinski, 1990.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Sandoval Zapata, 81–94.

⁸⁹ Reyes García, 163. English translation in Ruiz Medrano, 51.

encomenderos. This is the group that scholars have argued the Crown sought to strip of their outsized power, using the conspiracy accusations as a pretext.⁹⁰ In his late retelling, Torquemada imagined that the men who accompanied Ávila in “Indian garb” and masks imitating their faces represented the “entire court” of the “Indian king.”⁹¹ But these costumes reflected the *encomenderos*’ claim to be the only legitimate governing class because of their ties—closer than those of Peninsular bureaucrats—to the Indigenous population. According to witness testimonies, their costumes were also intended to envision a different future for New Spain. In this imagined polity, the *encomenderos* would ally with the aggrieved Mexica nobility and no longer draw their legitimacy from Spain, where the king had refused to raise them to the stature of nobles, but rather from Mexica dominion.

The process by which Spaniards imprecisely appropriated Mexica symbols of rank, and then claimed native informant status and rights to those symbols, I call *Indianizing*. This is a term with a modern lineage: scholars have used the term *Indianism* to describe how intellectuals in the late colonial period looked to the pre-Hispanic past for an alternative foundation to Spain, making it possible to argue that Mexican independence was a form of political restitution.⁹² This explains why a tradition of scholarship sees the Martín Cortés rebellion as an early precursor to Mexican independence movements.⁹³

The *encomenderos*’ festivities in the mid-sixteenth century undoubtedly echo in how two priests plotting to establish a so-called mestizo monarchy in the early nineteenth century sought out the twelve closest descendants of Moteuczoma to form a council and elect a new emperor.⁹⁴ The *encomenderos*, following their conquistador forefathers, saw in their proximity to the Indigenous population, and especially to the Nahua nobles, an alternative source of power to that of the Spanish king. By loosely adopting Mexica noble attire in their fiestas, they were defending their political privileges and imagining how they might Indianize themselves even further.

Dressing and acting as Mexica nobles in Mexico City at the time of the masquerade was highly charged. After the conquest, the conquistadores and their Franciscan collaborators, followed even more fervently by their heirs and disciples, argued that an Indigenous revolt would result if they were removed from power. They claimed that their knowledge of Indigenous customs, and especially pre-Hispanic tribute practices, was crucial to effectively

⁹⁰ See especially Cushing Flint.

⁹¹ Torquemada, 2:390.

⁹² See Tarica. On Indianization in the broad sense of how Spaniards adopted Indigenous languages and customs, see Parodi.

⁹³ See Riva Palacio; González Obregón, 1906; Arenas Frutos and Pérez Zarandiera.

⁹⁴ Basave Benítez, 22.

evangelize and govern the native population. Shortly before the masquerade, the Crown implemented a new tribute policy in México-Tenochtitlán that broke with pre-Hispanic precedents and, as if proving the *encomenderos*' and Franciscans' warnings true, a revolt broke out.

The *encomenderos*' costumes must be read in the context of this conflict, which affected the Mexica nobility. In July of 1564, after learning that they would soon have to pay tribute like most of the Indigenous peoples of central Mexico, Mexica commoners poured into the streets of Mexico City, wreaking havoc. Based on pre-Hispanic precedent, the *altepetl* (city-state) of México-Tenochtitlán had thus far collectively paid tribute to the Crown in the form of public works and goods. In the 1560s, royal officials individualized taxes and reduced acceptable forms of tribute to cash and maize.⁹⁵ The new tax policy was draconian, and Mexica commoners rebelled against the governor-judge then presiding over the Indigenous *cabildo*, Don Luis Santa María Cipac (Nanacacipactzin) (r. 1563–65), for not negotiating a better policy.

Since the reign of Viceroy Antonio Mendoza, Mexica nobles had served on the Indigenous *cabildo* and were presided over by a governor-judge who belonged to the Mexica Tenochca dynastic line, providing some continuity with the pre-Hispanic Mexica Empire. The new tribute policy spelled the loss of Mexica commoners' subordination to their authority.⁹⁶ Indigenous dependents would likely no longer be able to afford to pay tribute to Mexica nobles on top of taxes they now owed to the Spanish Crown. By design, the new policy would erode the Mexica nobles' political power and re-channel their traditional economic privileges to the Spanish treasury. Thus, when, on top of all of this, Don Luis Cipac's subjects rebelled against him for not negotiating a better tribute policy, the legacy of the Mexica polity in New Spain was at stake.⁹⁷

The sudden eruption of violence caught viceregal authorities off guard, alarming the Crown. Royal inspector Valderrama, who had implemented the new tax, was flabbergasted and tried to downplay the unrest to King Philip II: "One can't believe that this riot by a few Indians could have happened if they hadn't been incited to it, because . . . the tax has been of great benefit to them . . . I have made a great effort to understand them, and the situation has not become clear."⁹⁸ Others disagreed: Valderrama earned the nickname of "Afflicter of the Indians," a play on the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las

⁹⁵ See Gibson.

⁹⁶ Indigenous artisans, who had recently become more financially independent, were also accused of seeking to damage the ancestral Nahua nobility's political influence by obstructing their election to governing positions. See Chávez de Orozco.

⁹⁷ On how this political crisis manifested in the Beinecke Map, see Mundy.

⁹⁸ English translation from Townsend, 2019, 171.

Casas's title as their "protector."⁹⁹ As more reports of the riots reached the king, Valderrama increasingly found himself on the defensive, looking for someone to blame: "I have told the truth in everything that I have written. Your majesty had been badly served here before I came."¹⁰⁰ Viceregal authorities took in some fifty rioters and jailed several Mexica nobles, including the governor-judge Don Luis Santa María Cipac, for failing to keep the peace and to effectively collect the tribute.¹⁰¹ Without a doubt, the riots gave an edge to the *encomenderos'* argument that they deserved special status due to their own expertise in Indigenous populations and concerns.

Numerous scholars, most notably Camilla Townsend and Ethelia Ruiz Medrano, have argued that some of the aggrieved Mexica nobility were involved in the *encomenderos'* plot to rebel.¹⁰² For Townsend, judges went after the *encomenderos* at least in part because they wanted to suppress potential allies with whom Mexica nobles could again rebel and successfully resist the new tribute policy. While building compelling cases, both scholars admit the difficulty of confirming the existence of collaboration between the Mexica nobility and the *encomenderos*. For Townsend, there is no "genuine evidence" of collaboration, only accusations that amount to "rumors."¹⁰³ For Ruiz Medrano, the existing evidence merely establishes "a probable link" between the besieged Mexica nobility and the disgruntled *encomenderos*.¹⁰⁴ Yet again, the question of who exactly conspired to separate from Spain and how they planned to govern remains unknowable. What is clear, as Townsend puts it, is that "what the Spaniards were afraid of was, ironically, the Indians."¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ See Ruiz Medrano, 45–77.

¹⁰⁰ Townsend, 2019, 177.

¹⁰¹ See Gibson, 390.

¹⁰² Townsend has argued that the royal judges of the *audiencia* who prosecuted the Ávila brothers and initiated the trials against Martín Cortés collaborated with the royal inspector Valderrama to undermine the Mexica nobility and the governor-judge Don Luis Cipac. She argues that the royal judges directed popular outrage over the new tribute away from themselves and toward the Mexica nobility. For Ruiz Medrano, Mexica nobles, *encomenderos*, and mendicant friars, especially the Franciscans—the old guard of power in New Spain—had cause to conspire together to cut their losses. Ruiz Medrano takes seriously accusations that the Franciscans who defended the Mexica nobles against tribute hikes tried to convince Martín Cortés that there was theological justification for rebelling against the king for acting like a tyrant. She considers a key connection the fact that the marquis Martín Cortés's mestizo brother of the same name, who was chief constable, was charged with subduing the tumult that followed the tribute hikes.

¹⁰³ Townsend, 2019, 178.

¹⁰⁴ Ruiz Medrano, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Townsend, 2019, 161.

This fear makes the symbolic realm, and the *encomenderos*' decision to dress as Mexica nobles, all the more valuable. In light of the Mexica riots of 1564, two possible interpretations of their attire emerge. In a first possibility, the *encomenderos* were yet again brandishing their supposed knowledge of Indigenous customs to further argue that they were the only ones knowledgeable enough to properly govern New Spain and prevent large-scale Indigenous revolts. In a second possibility, the *encomenderos*, as witnesses claimed, were courting the besieged Mexica nobles and planning to rebel against Spain and form a new Indianized government, in which they would both govern. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive: unlike Spanish symbols of royal power, Nahua attire as coopted by *encomenderos* was unpinned from a single source of symbolic authority. Thus, it became subject to overlapping, overdetermined readings.

The first possibility is plausible given that familiarity with Indigenous practices was one of the *encomenderos*' favorite arguments in favor of deserving great political rewards from the king. As seen above, this was the case made by the aldermen of the municipal council (several of whom, including Ávila, were *encomenderos*) when they petitioned the king of Spain not to send another viceroy after the sitting one died in 1564. They explained that it was inconvenient for the king to send viceroys from Spain because they brought large entourages of relatives and dependents who then filled local governing positions, foreshadowing Torquemada's claim that the *encomenderos* dressed as Mexica nobles were Ávila's (the "Indian king's") court. The governance of these Peninsular bureaucrats had "drawbacks," the aldermen argued, because they did not know the land and its people like the conquistadores, longtime settlers (*antiguos pobladores*), and their children did.¹⁰⁶ Only those who were born in New Spain and had greater contacts with the Indigenous population, their argument went, could govern effectively.

Similar arguments appear in other, later writings, including those that defended the *encomenderos* and cast doubt on the existence of a conspiracy to rebel. Suárez de Peralta went so far as to claim that the Indigenous populations considered those of European descent who were born in New Spain "natives." He wrote, "Among the Indians there are very great secrets that they would not reveal to any Spaniard even if he tore them to pieces; they [the Indians] consider those who were born [in New Spain] the children and natives (*naturales*) of the land and they communicate many things to us. What's more, since we know their language, they have communion and friendship

¹⁰⁶ Bejarano, 7:211. The Franciscans similarly argued that the secular clergy were ill-equipped to administer the church in New Spain because they did not know the people of the land or their customs. See Salinero, 2017, 301–07; González Obregón, 1906, 140.

with us.”¹⁰⁷ In light of this, boisterous claims of Indigenous knowledge such as the masquerade can be read as *encomendero* propaganda, supporting their claims to superior entitlement over Peninsular bureaucrats who were ignorant of Indigenous customs and languages.

In the trial records, Ávila admitted that, in addition to ornamentation and entertainment, the participants in the masquerade wanted to initiate the Cortéses, and particularly the marchioness, to the local culture. In testimony, he even explained that “at the time the marchioness had only recently arrived to New Spain, and since she was an important lady, he wanted to show her the customs that the Indians had of holding fiestas.”¹⁰⁸ The marchioness, of course, was not the only one who may have been unfamiliar with Indigenous customs. Although born in New Spain, Martín Cortés had traveled to Spain with his father in 1540 and spent much of his life in the Old World before returning to claim his inheritance in 1563. If the *encomenderos* were eager to remake themselves in his image, as a descendant of a conquistador who had risen to the ranks of the nobility, they in turn also wanted to remake him in theirs: a political constituency whose unique qualification was their self-proclaimed knowledge of Indigenous ways.

The *encomenderos* who dressed, however imprecisely, as the upper ranks of Mexica society likely did so to stage a defense of their political and economic standing. In this reading, the *encomenderos*' costumes were symbolic not merely of Mexica rulership but also of the political legitimacy that the *encomenderos*, like the Franciscans, claimed to have over men arriving from the Peninsula because they were more Indianized. Such reasoning complemented the *encomenderos*' defense that they deserved their political privileges because their conquistador forefathers had done all the work of conquering the Mexica Empire for Charles V. That generation touted their military triumph by adopting Mexica symbols as well, as when the *encomendero* and relation of the Cortés family Juan Gutiérrez de Altamirano unearthed a sculpture of the Mexica deity Quetzalcoatl from the Templo Mayor and attached it to one corner of his palace.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ He adds that most of them were nursed by native women. See Suárez de Peralta, 1990b, 25 (which cites Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS 4225, Juan Suárez de Peralta, *Libro de albeitería*, chapter 1).

¹⁰⁸ Orozco y Berra, 7.

¹⁰⁹ See González-Polo, 28. Polo argues that a “monolith” is all that remains of the original structure, which was rebuilt in the eighteenth century. On how Hernán Cortés himself helped design objects that he sent to Europe and presented as gifts from local *caciques* (rulers), and his political motivations for doing so, see Russo.

A far more damning interpretation of the *encomenderos'* roles as Mexica nobles in the masquerade also surfaced. One key informer, Baltasar de Quesada, testified that, "for conspirators like him, that fiesta was a representation of what they would do in the said uprising."¹¹⁰ He urged the judges to open their eyes, because the participants in the masquerade had shown how their planned rebellion would play out. Quesada's claim implied that two powerful but threatened groups—the *encomenderos* and the Mexica nobility—would rise up together, which was why they had organized themselves into these two character groups.¹¹¹ Other witnesses corroborated his testimony when they claimed that following a successful uprising, the conspirators planned to form a new royal council from which *encomenderos* and Indigenous nobles would jointly assist the new king.

The *encomenderos* were accused of using the masquerade to court the Indigenous nobility to this end. Several testimonies confirm that members of the Nahuatl nobility were present at the festivities. According to one witness, a certain Pedro Ruíz gave a speech during the masquerade in which he detailed Alonso de Ávila's plan to rebel. He gave this speech first in "the language of the Indians" before a soldier then delivered its translation in Castilian.¹¹² Such claims opened up the possibility that the *encomenderos* imitated the Mexica nobles as a way of inviting them to join their planned rebellion and showing them how such collaboration might unfold. In Quesada's wording, they were representing "what they would do" in the proposed takeover.¹¹³

Despite these accusations, the royal judges did not scrutinize the ways in which the *encomenderos* imitated the Mexica nobility, even as they condemned Martín Cortés for presenting himself as a duke when he was merely a marquis. There is limited evidence that this was deliberate. In the aftermath of the Mexica riot, these same judges, as Townsend has shown in detail, helped Indigenous commoners accuse the governor-judge and the Mexica nobles of ruling in ways that were insufficiently Hispanized.¹¹⁴ Two commoners issued statements that the current governor-judge and Indigenous *cabildo* should not

¹¹⁰ Orozco y Berra, 239.

¹¹¹ This possibility further complicates what Navarrete Linares has called "colonialist" narratives that support myths of both European superiority and the irreversible decline of Indigenous political power during and after the conquest. Navarrete Linares, 25.

¹¹² Salinero writes that Pedro Ruíz, acting as a mediator, delivered a speech with the ideas of Alonso de Ávila in the "language of the Indians" and that Vitoria de Alvarado, a soldier who had arrived from Peru, transmitted the Castilian version aloud. This pairing was, according to Salinero, both for the Indigenous peoples present and to illustrate "the common destiny of settlers and Indians." Salinero, 2017, 372.

¹¹³ Orozco y Berra, 239.

¹¹⁴ Townsend, 2019, 167.

be allowed to rule because, among other reasons, they “were not literate in Spanish letters” and “loved to celebrate feast days with old-style dancing and even the wearing of feathers,” implying that they were idolatrous.¹¹⁵ Whereas the royal judges accepted such claims in the drummed-up case against the governor-judge and the Mexica nobles, they acted as if the *encomenderos* who put feathers on their heads and donned Indigenous habits and masks were merely “playing Indian,” as it were.

It is nevertheless hard to imagine that the *encomenderos*' imitation of the Mexica nobility was considered entirely harmless. The Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474/84–1566) had recently waged notorious campaigns in defense of native sovereignty. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Las Casas rejected the theory that after Christ's resurrection, “infidel” kings and lords lost all legitimate claims to sovereignty.¹¹⁶ In the Americas, he instead argued that Indigenous and Castilian sovereignty should coexist without the latter supplanting the former.¹¹⁷ In Las Casas's vision of Christian empire, the Castilian monarchs served as universal lords over the “ancient kings and lords of the Indians,” whom neither they nor the pope could dispossess of their “lordship, royal preeminence, jurisdiction, and public or private properties without legitimate cause.”¹¹⁸ Like the free cities of Europe who recognized the Spanish king as their universal lord, the kingdoms of the Americas must freely consent to Spanish jurisdiction and could not be forced to do so.

In contrast with Indigenous lords, conquistadores, colonizers, *encomenderos*, and, to an extent, royal officials in the Americas were considered illegitimate middlemen according to Las Casas. Whereas native sovereignty was “primary and natural” in Las Casas's opinion, and Spanish lordship, “natural and divine,” the conquering and dividing up of land thus far was “violent and unnatural” and had “no value or force of law.”¹¹⁹ By his account, this class of men should be removed from the Americas since Indigenous peoples were free vassals over whom the Crown should hold direct jurisdiction. As always, Las Casas did not mince his words: “The other and third lordship, the one that the Spaniards demand and enforce, is so unbearable and hard that it surpasses all the tyrannies of the world and is like that of the devils.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Townsend, 2019, 167.

¹¹⁶ Rivera, 27. This was expounded by the cardinal of Ostia, Enrique de Segusa.

¹¹⁷ Las Casas, 1965, 2:733.

¹¹⁸ Las Casas, 1998, 10:442; Las Casas, 1957–61, 5:501–04. See Orique, 146–92.

¹¹⁹ Las Casas, 1965, 1:499.

¹²⁰ Las Casas, 1965, 2:733.

Not surprisingly, Las Casas's opponents—especially those who stood to lose *encomiendas*—misconstrued his arguments to more easily refute them. The chroniclers Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa and the author of the anonymous *Parecer de Yucay* (Yucay opinion) enthusiastically participated in a targeted anti-Las Casas campaign.¹²¹ They argued that Las Casas had called for the complete restoration of Indigenous political dominion and total abandonment of the Indies by the Spanish monarch, which would have returned these lands to the hands of Indigenous sovereigns they alleged were tyrants. It helped their case that Las Casas had defended the Taíno cacique Enriquillo for declaring war against Spanish colonizers and argued for a certain restoration of Inka sovereignty in the wake of the Inka Atahualpa's murder. Nevertheless, it would be mistaken to uncritically adopt the interpretations of Las Casas's opponents as his own.¹²²

Complex political sparring aside, the case had been made for the complete restoration of Indigenous sovereignty. The *encomenderos* who vociferously attacked Las Casas's proposals knew them well and could have found in them reason to consider cutting out a different middleman. Witnesses in the 1560s trials accused the conspirators of enlisting the Franciscan Luis Cal to identify theological grounds for disavowing the Spanish king, who, they argued, had acted like a tyrant by denying them their just rewards. Cal was accused of seeking the pope's approval to appoint their own king.

If the *encomenderos* were losing all hope that they could one day become Spanish nobles, perhaps they imagined themselves as Indianized nobles in a polity separate from Spain. This would have been compatible with their alleged plan to form a council of *encomenderos* and Indigenous nobles to govern alongside their new king. The frustrated descendants of the conquistadores must have noticed in years past that the very few recipients of *encomiendas* in perpetuity that they so desired, in addition to Cortés's heirs, were Moteuczoma's heirs, whom royal officials granted this exceptional privilege in recognition of their dynastic lineage. If Las Casas's opponents imagined that he was advocating for the full political restoration of Indigenous empires, couldn't the

¹²¹ The *Parecer de Yucay* was a theological justification of Spain's right to the Americas ordered by the Peruvian viceroy Francisco de Toledo and attributed by some scholars to the Dominican García de Toledo. See *El anónimo de Yucay frente a Bartolomé de Las Casas*.

¹²² According to Rivera, Las Casas's adversaries' claims that the Dominican friar absolutely rejected Spanish dominion in the Americas led Las Casas to clarify how Castilian and Indigenous sovereignty should coexist in his "Treinta proposiciones muy jurídicas." Rivera, 66. Despite his arguments, Las Casas also admitted that full restitution was not possible. See Orique, 175.

encomenderos have pictured how they might benefit from such a new social order, perhaps even as part of a new nobility?

PURIFYING THE BODY POLITIC IN NEW SPAIN

More than the Ávilas' heads tumbled when the Spanish viceroyalty decided to decapitate the brothers less than two weeks after their arrest. The systematic disempowerment of the Mexica nobility already underway was the key backdrop to the royal judges' decision to dismiss the Indigenous symbols espoused by Ávila and other *encomenderos* as what today might be called folkloric—as if they were empty, even quaint signifiers. The Ávilas' execution coincided with the severing of the Mexica royal dynasty from the body politic.

The masquerade was also not the first festive occasion on which Mexica nobles and powerful *encomenderos* brought together Spanish and Mexica symbols into new, potentially threatening constellations. The anonymous author (*tlacuilo*) of the *Anales de Juan Bautista* describes how men came from the four quarters of Tenochtitlan, gathered together with their “chimalli” (shields that indicated their users' rank and status, meaning they were Mexica nobles), in order to “receive the marchioness.”¹²³ Even more damning, he wrote that when Martín Cortés and his wife returned from a stay in Toluca, they were received “ynic quinamique yhuin reyme” (“as they usually receive kings”), using the Spanish loan word *rey* with the Nahuatl plural suffix *meh*.¹²⁴ The Mexica nobility and the *encomenderos* were both starting to run out of options. Festive gatherings and symbolic exchanges between the two groups could have signaled a budding collaboration.

Other Indigenous groups also took interest in the *encomenderos'* revolt. Numerous witnesses testified that prominent Tetzcoaca and Tlaxcalans had recently communicated with the implicated *encomenderos*; furthermore, native subjects of *encomiendas* had prepared the festival.¹²⁵ Scholars have pored over the records from individual towns to investigate claims of Indigenous involvement. Ávila's trial records, unfortunately, often only vaguely allude to groups of “Indians.”

Although further research remains to be done, several *xiuhpohualli* (roughly, annals) that adopt Mexica and Tetzcoaca perspectives indicate that the trials caught the attention of Indigenous towns. Camilla Townsend and others have maintained that the *xiuhpohualli* is one of the rare genres of extant codices that was created for Indigenous audiences and not viceregal officials, the Crown,

¹²³ Reyes García, 308–09.

¹²⁴ Reyes García, 306–07.

¹²⁵ See studies by Jiménez Abollado; Ruiz Medrano.

or the pope.¹²⁶ The inclusion of the Ávila brothers' executions likely indicates that they were deemed in some way relevant to these communities. Indeed, the anonymous author of the *Anales of Juan Bautista* details the brothers' arrests and executions. The entry for 16 July 1566 states that "Martín Cortés, Don Luis Cortés, Don Luis de Castilla, Bernardino Bocanegra, Alonso [and Gil] Davila were arrested because they were talking of taking arms and they were remitted to the Court."¹²⁷ On 3 August 1566, he reports, "they decapitated Alonso Dávila, and his younger brother Gil González Dávila, and at the exact time of the Ave María they were put to death," adding that the *encomenderos'* heads remained on top of lances for six days.¹²⁸

A handful of *xiuhpohualli* even feature pictograms of the Ávila brothers' severed heads. These include the Codex Aubin (ca. 1576; fig. 6), the Codex Mexicanus (ca. 1578–83; figs. 7 and 8), and the *Tira de Tepechpan* (painted *tira*, a narrow strip of *amate* [bark] paper, of Tepechpan, ca. 1596; fig. 9).¹²⁹ In particular, it is remarkable that the *Tira de Tepechpan*, otherwise tightly focused on the local affairs of Tepechpan, a minor *altepetl* in Central Mexico, chooses to depict the execution of these two powerful *encomenderos*.¹³⁰ In each of these manuscripts, the Ávila brothers' heads are shown severed or covered in blood, in contrast to Cortés, whose head is shown whole and intact.¹³¹ If the judges hoped to send a message to Indigenous leaders who considered collaborating with the *encomenderos* by harshly punishing the Ávila brothers, the entries in these annals indicate that they were successful.

This was around the time that Don Luis Cipac, of the Mexica Tenochca dynastic line that dated back to Acamapichtli, died after his subjects, with viceregal support, turned on him.¹³² Thereafter, the viceroyalty would choose outsiders to lead the Indigenous *cabildo* as governor-judge, and even commoners to serve on the *cabildo*, ending their previous policy of providing continuity

¹²⁶ See Townsend, 2017, 1–15, esp. 8.

¹²⁷ Reyes García, 148–49. English translation in Ruiz Medrano, 51.

¹²⁸ Reyes García, 150–51. English translation in Ruiz Medrano, 61.

¹²⁹ See also Quauhtlehuāniztīn, 2:233–35. For references in the *Anales de Juan Miguel* and *Unos anales coloniales de Tlatelolco*, see Monjarás-Ruiz, Limón, and de la Cruz Pillés, 2:256, 2:240.

¹³⁰ For speculation that this had to do with similarities to pre-Hispanic sacrifice, see Diel, 106.

¹³¹ Others found guilty of partaking in the rebellion were "declared ignoble and vile persons to be stripped of all insignia of arms." See the trials of the Quesadas in 1567: Orozco y Berra, 329–45.

¹³² They even released rioters from jail who would, in an apparent plea deal, subsequently bring lawsuits against governor-judge Don Luis Cipac and the Indigenous *cabildo*. See Connell; Townsend, 2019.

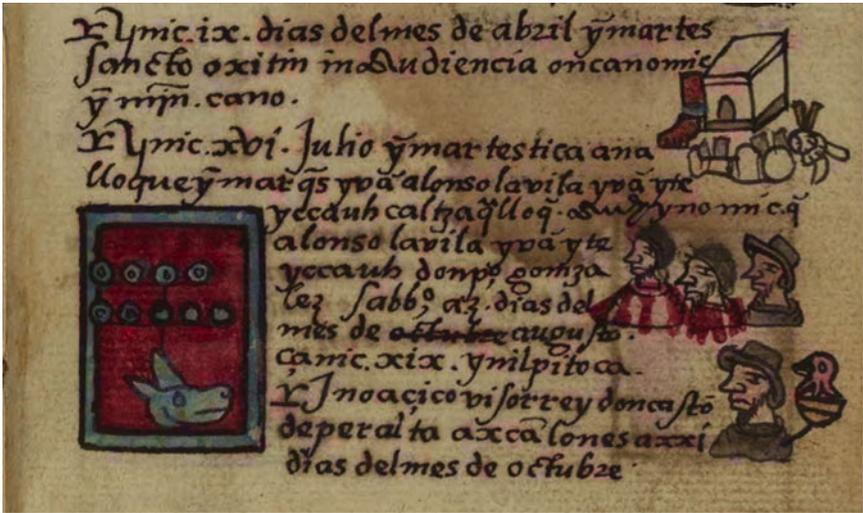


Figure 6. Alonso and Gil de Ávila's bloody heads next to Martín Cortés's clean head, London, Am2006, Drg.31219, Codex Aubin, ca. 1576, fol. 55^r. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 7. Alonso and Gil de Ávila's bloody heads next to Martín Cortés's clean head, Paris, Mexicain 23–25, Codex Mexicanus, ca. 1578–83, plate 43, page 85. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

with the Mexica royal lineage and nobility. In the second half of the sixteenth century, outsiders and commoners, equipped with pre-Hispanic documents, the Spanish court system, and the economic means acquired in the new colonial



Figure 8. Alonso and Gil de Ávila's bloody heads next to Martín Cortés's clean head, Paris, Mexicain 23–25, Codex Mexicanus, ca. 1578–83, plate 43, page 85 (detail). Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

economy, increasingly found their way into governing posts in a pattern that Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra argues formed a new *ancien régime*.¹³³ With the death of Don Luis Cipac, the Chalca historian Chimalpahin wrote, “It came to an end that descendants of the Mexica and Tenochca rulers should govern in Tenochtitlan anymore,” dramatically declaring that “their governing as rulers was cut off forever.”¹³⁴

While in Peru the *encomenderos* cut off the head of the viceroy, in New Spain, the Crown decapitated Ávila, who had dressed as the Mexica figurehead and allegedly tried to tempt the Mexica nobles to rebel. Camilla Townsend has suggested that the Real Audiencia came down so hard on the *encomenderos* precisely because they feared that the latter would provoke and support another Indigenous uprising. Just because the royal judges, who represented the Crown's interests, ignored possible Indigenous involvement either in the conspiracy to rebel or in the plan to

¹³³ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra made this argument in a lecture titled “Conquest? Collapse and Rise of Ancien Régime in 16th Century Spanish America and the Role of Paper Archives,” delivered at the Stanford Humanities Center at Stanford University on 23 September 2020. See his collaborator, Masters.

¹³⁴ Chimalpahin, 2006, 139.



Figure 9. Alonso and Gil de Ávila's bloody heads, Paris, Mexicain 13–14, *Tira de Tepechpan*, ca. 1596, screenfold. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

found an independent New Spain, this does not mean that scholars should follow suit and effectively cut them out of the story.

The downfall of the last of the Mexica *tlatoani* was entangled with the spectacular crackdown on the *encomenderos*. These repressive acts simultaneously squashed the *encomenderos'* bid to become nobles or feudal lords, and shut the door on the possibility, clearly articulated by Las Casas and his critics, of the restitution of the Mexica Empire. Royal officials had underhandedly helped turn Don Luis Cipac's subjects against him, slowly stripped the Nahua nobility of their privileges, and publicly beheaded the *encomenderos* who felt entitled to retain their *encomiendas* in perpetuity. Officials were aware, as the *encomenderos* had been telling them all along, that the power of the conquistadores and their descendants depended on their influence over the Indigenous population. They had reason to believe that the besieged Mexica *tlatoani* and nobles might be tempted to take up an invitation from the *encomenderos* to try and form a new polity where they could both retain their privileges. The suppression of each group undermined the other's potential to successfully rebel.

In the 1560s, some urged the king to strengthen the viceroy's power just as the *encomendero* aldermen of Mexico City implored Philip II not to send another viceroy. In 1565, the Franciscan friar Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525–1604) wrote that New Spain is “a divided kingdom with many heads.” Mendieta wrote that the threat of rebellion lay with the Indigenous population. The nature of the “Indians,” he argued, requires that they be led by “a supreme and absolute ruler.” To effectively govern them, he wrote, New Spain must have “only one and not many heads.”¹³⁵

In contrast to this assessment, the royal judges who investigated the conspiracy to rebel focused their efforts on prosecuting the *encomenderos*. Scholars have largely followed suit and interpreted the unrest of the 1560s as the result of the *encomenderos'* desire for more power and resentment toward Spanish nobles and Peninsular bureaucrats, on the one hand, and the Crown's desire to undercut them, on the other. For Mendieta, they were only part of the problem. He told the king that “in a world like this,” the royal person “can only be represented properly by an illustrious person”—that is, Spanish nobles and not *encomenderos* whose conquistador forebears had only tenuously earned their way into higher ranks.

Mendieta had expressed such ideas three years earlier in even stronger terms when he wrote to the Franciscan commissary general. He insisted then that the king's absence was provoking unrest and that this lack could only be solved by installing a viceroy who truly represented him: “Since His Majesty is absent [from New Spain], which is what causes its agitation, he should at least have here a person representing him.”¹³⁶ Mendieta implored Philip II to restore the earlier balance of powers by strengthening the viceroy's mandate. He clarified his position: “What I mean is that his viceroy must become a de facto viceroy, for this name and title denote that he is the king's image.”¹³⁷

The trials for conspiracy in the 1560s, and the investigations of the *encomenderos'* symbolic appropriations, belonged to a larger social transformation aimed at strengthening the viceroy's power.¹³⁸ In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, viceroys came to be living images of the king of Spain, as Alejandro Cañeque has shown.¹³⁹ King Philip II of Spain sent Martín

¹³⁵ This and all quotations in this paragraph from García Icazbalceta, 1886, 41. English translation in Cañeque, 214.

¹³⁶ García Icazbalceta, 1886, 18. English translation in Cañeque, 215.

¹³⁷ García Icazbalceta, 1886, 18. English translation in Cañeque, 215.

¹³⁸ Cañeque describes the 1560s as “a time of transition . . . when the political-administrative structure was not yet completely defined” (216).

¹³⁹ See Cañeque. The classic works on royal power and the semiosis of absolutism are Kantorowicz; Marin.

Enríquez (1508/11–83, r. 1568–80) to New Spain and Francisco de Toledo (1515–82) to Peru with the explicit mission of strengthening royal authority in his American vicerealties and defining once and for all their political, administrative, and ecclesiastic structure.¹⁴⁰ The consolidation of viceregal power as the mirror image of royal power was a direct response to the supposed conspiracy to rebel in New Spain and the outright rebellion in Peru that culminated in the beheading of the viceroy.¹⁴¹ Enríquez was installed directly after the vicerealty repressed the *encomenderos* and undermined Nahua nobles, and Toledo assumed the position of viceroy just a few years before Tupac Amaru I (1545–72) was executed. On a symbolic level, royal officials in New Spain also cut off the Mexica nobility from the body politic in the 1560s. In doing so, they recalled how Hernán Cortés consolidated his own power during an expedition to Las Hibueras (Honduras) when he assassinated Cuahemec, former *tlatoani* of Tenochtitlan and *huetlatoani* of the Mexica Empire, along with several other Indigenous nobles, under the pretext of discovering their plot to rebel.¹⁴² The viceregal position was noticeably different after Enríquez's reign. Torquemada wrote that Enríquez "had raised much the dignity of the office of viceroy, which up to his time had been a bit more informal."¹⁴³

Strengthening the position of the viceroy entailed codifying Spanish symbols as the only symbolic power in New Spain, and the king of Spain as the viceroy's source of power. The enthusiasm that Martín Cortés's arrival in New Spain awakened spurred royal officials to divorce the *encomenderos* and more gradually remove the Indigenous nobility from the body politic, thus making room for greatly empowering the viceroy. Their treatment of Ávila's masquerade and banquet was part of this longer process. Indeed, the absence of Nahua symbols from Ávila's conviction is not an indicator that they had no power at the time, but rather, quite the opposite. If witness testimonies provide some indication of actual unrest, modern scholars should in turn take seriously the multiple forms of power wielded by the *encomenderos* in their fiestas, as well as the future that they, at the very least, imagined.

¹⁴⁰ See Cañeque, 15.

¹⁴¹ See Rubio Mañé.

¹⁴² Conflicting accounts of this expedition appear in Fernando Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Décima Tercia Relación* (Thirteenth relation), Cortés's fifth *Carta de relación* (Letters of relation), Francisco López de Gómara's *Crónica de la Nueva España* (Chronicle of New Spain), and Chimalpahin's account based on the latter. See Chimalpahin, 2010; Voigt, 2006.

¹⁴³ Torquemada, 1:414. English translation in Cañeque, 216.

RESTORING THE KING'S BODY

The Cortés family, the *encomenderos*, the dynastic Mexica nobility, and the Franciscans represented the ghosts of sovereignty past by the 1560s, and the Crown now wanted to secure the king's presence, as if to restore his body, to New Spain. Hernán Cortés had drawn his power from a different source than the line of viceroys that began with Enríquez, who closely reflected the king of Spain. Cortés rose within the ranks of nobility by claiming that the Mexica *huei tlatoani* Moteuczoma recognized him as the king's legitimate representative.¹⁴⁴ Remarkably, Charles V accepted Cortés as governor and captain general of New Spain, for a time.

When the Crown subsequently decided to strip Cortés of his powers, royal representation overseas splintered. First, a high court was established and took over Cortés's judicial powers. Then a viceroy was installed to take over his governing powers. Cortés was left with the symbolic title of captain general in largely pacified lands. The king's body in the form of viceregal governance was left in fragments, a condition that worsened as viceregal officials—not to mention the regular and secular clergy—came into conflict. Meanwhile, Cortés and his descendants, along with their allies, were cut off from the body politic yet still hanging around, like a phantom limb.

The Indigenous customs woven into Ávila's masquerade were subject to overlapping, overdetermined interpretations. For Ávila and the *encomenderos*, they displayed the tendency of prominent individuals in New Spain to claim to be more familiar with some Indigenous customs and Nahuatl than recently arrived Spanish bureaucrats. For Quesada and others, the masquerade and ensuing banquet revealed the *encomenderos'* devious plan to align with the aggrieved Mexica nobles, rebel against Spain, and form a joint council to govern an independent New Spain. Las Casas's contemporaneous arguments even raised the possibility that what looked like rebellion could have been the desire to return to the not-so-distant past of Mexica dominion. For Torquemada, Ávila imitated Moteuczoma in the moment that he recognized Cortés's father as the king's representative in a piece of harmless political theater. The royal judges examined, and to some extent tolerated, the multiple interpretations of the Nahua elements of the masquerade in the trials.

In contrast, they insisted, against many dissenters, that there was only one way to interpret the symbolic language of the king of Spain. If the viceroyalty's stability depended on making the viceroys into de facto viceroys, the latter's power must emanate exclusively from the king of Spain and be modeled after him, without any mediation through the Mexica *tlatoani*. In this context, the

¹⁴⁴ Cortés, 1971, 99.

royal judges told the king that Martín Cortés had “attempted to attribute to himself many preeminences of the kind that pertain to your royal person” and did things that “only the kings and lords are accustomed to do in their own realms and lands.”¹⁴⁵ The royal judges demonstrated that there was no room for irony when it came to the king’s image, no room for imitating him without appropriating his power. From then on, the viceroy was the king’s living image.¹⁴⁶

With cynicism and regret, sympathetic chroniclers acknowledged that to dress and act like the king of Spain could only amount to an attack on his sovereignty. Martín Cortés’s and the others’ intentions in the masquerade were irrelevant—even though modern scholarship has obsessively tried to resolve them. Torquemada wrote that Cortés, Ávila, and the *encomenderos* “sinned like boys, who in their tender age choose to play kings, but they paid as men for the daring words they spoke and that outraged the king.”¹⁴⁷ Suárez de Peralta also defends two settlers who were convicted of conspiring to rebel in the 1540s in ways that defend Martín Cortés, Alonso de Ávila, and the revelers who faced similar charges in the 1560s: “Their drinking caused them to say certain words, that it would be good to rise up against the land, that they should kill the viceroy and royal judges, and that that would put an end to the poverty that persecuted them so much. But this was very much [said] in rejoicing and laughter.”¹⁴⁸ He laments, “There was no shortage of those who heard these words, who did not hesitate to denounce them and give notice to the viceroy, who did not take it as a joke but rather admitted the complaint . . . They paid for their jokes with utmost severity.”¹⁴⁹ The consolidation of royal power in New Spain entailed the affirmation that the viceroy’s power—and his alone—was iconic. Only others’ signs of sovereign power could be taken as unclear, or even empty, signifiers.

Yet, the *encomenderos*’ accusers and Mendieta’s own claims suggest that the Crown had more reason to worry about the references to Mexica power than they wanted to let on. At the end of the sixteenth century, the Crown reassured itself that the memory of Mexica dominion was gone—revealing that this had previously been a major concern. In Spain in 1598, the *arbitrista* (reformist concerned with Spain’s ailing economy) Baltasar Alamos de Barrientos (1555–1640) assured the recently proclaimed King Philip III (1578–1621) of New Spain: “There is little to fear from the native Indians because they have neither weapons nor leaders . . . they do not have any determination, nor

¹⁴⁵ Warren, 263.

¹⁴⁶ See Marin, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Torquemada, 2:392.

¹⁴⁸ Suárez de Peralta, 1990b, 152.

¹⁴⁹ Suárez de Peralta, 1990b, 152.

any memory of their former state and dominion.”¹⁵⁰ By the end of the sixteenth century, Enríquez’s long reign as viceroy had supposedly erased the threat posed by the *encomenderos* and Mexica nobles in the 1560s. In fact, at the end of his reign, Enríquez told his successor that that mulattos, free and enslaved Black people, and mestizos were now the populations most at risk of sedition in New Spain, and not the Indigenous peoples, nor the remaining conquistadores’ heirs.¹⁵¹

In perfect contrast with Mendieta’s characterization of New Spain as “a divided kingdom with many heads,” Enríquez wrote to his successor in 1580 that the position of viceroy now entailed acting as single head over two bodies. The Indigenous body remained, albeit in the “sorry state” Alamos de Barrientos described, and the viceroyalty treated it with paternalism.¹⁵² Enríquez continued: “In this land there are two republics to govern, one of Indians, and one of Spaniards. And his majesty sent us here mainly [to take care of] all that concerns the Indians and their protection.”¹⁵³ When the Crown made a public example of punishing the *encomenderos*, they squashed a symbolic language of power that incorporated Nahuatl customs, languages, and peoples while simultaneously suppressing the memory of Mexica dominion. The trials of Martín Cortés and Alonso de Ávila were part of the Crown’s strategy to unify the viceroyalty under one symbolic head, that of the king of Spain, whose living image would be found in the figure of the viceroy for more than two hundred years thereafter.

Nicole T. Hughes is assistant professor of Iberian and Latin American Cultures at Stanford University, where she researches the early modern world with a special focus on New Spain and Brazil in the sixteenth century. Her first book project analyzes festivals in which missionaries, conquistadors, and Indigenous elites superimposed depictions of distant and proximate conflicts. She argues that by envisioning battles and disputes in other corners of the world and relating those images back to the Americas, participants created foundational narratives of New Spain and Brazil. She works with texts in Spanish, Portuguese, Classical Nahuatl, Tupi Antigo, French, and Latin, as well as visual and material culture. Her academic articles have appeared in *Representations*, *Colonial Latin American Review*, and here in *Renaissance Quarterly*.

¹⁵⁰ Alamos de Barrientos, 15. English translation Cañeque, 223.

¹⁵¹ Enríquez warned the king of the possibility of this population rebelling in 1574. See Cañeque, 222–30; and Valerio, 2021.

¹⁵² Alamos de Barrientos, 15. English translation in Cañeque, 223. He likely had in mind the steep demographic decline suffered by the Indigenous population after the plague of 1576.

¹⁵³ Hanke, 204. English translation in Cañeque, 213.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas*. Ed. Cécile Fromont. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019.
- Alamos de Barrientos, Baltasar. *Discurso político al rey Felipe III al comienzo de su reinado (1598)*. Ed. Modesto Santos. Barcelona: Anthropos, 1990.
- Arenas Frutos, Isabel and Purificación Pérez Zarandíeta. "El primer criollismo en la conspiración de Martín Cortés." In *Felipe II y el oficio de rey: La fragua de un imperio*, ed. José Román Gutiérrez, Enrique Martínez Ruiz, and Jaime González Rodríguez, 305–21. Puertollano: Ediciones Puertollano, 2001.
- Basave Benítez, Agustín. *México mestizo: Análisis del nacionalismo mexicano en torno a la mestizofilia de Andrés Molina Enríquez*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992.
- Baudot, Georges. *Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chroniclers of Mexican Civilization (1520–1569)*. Trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano. Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995.
- Bejarano, Ignacio, ed. *Actas del cabildo de la ciudad de México*. 51 vols. Mexico City: Municipio Libre, 1889–1911.
- Brockington, Lolita Gutiérrez. *The Leverage of Labor: Managing the Cortés Haciendas of Tehuantepec, 1588–1688*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989.
- Cabranes-Grant, Leo. "From Scenarios to Networks: Performing the Intercultural in Colonial Mexico." *Theatre Journal* 63.4 (2011): 499–520.
- Cabranes-Grant, Leo. *From Scenarios to Networks: Performing the Intercultural in Colonial Mexico*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016.
- Camargo, Diego Muñoz. *Historia de Tlaxcala*. Ca. 1584–85. University of Glasgow Library, Glasgow, MS Hunter 242.
- Cañeque, Alejandro. *The King's Living Image: The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Chávez de Orozco, Luis. *Códice Osuna*. Mexico City: Ediciones del Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1947.
- Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo de San Antón Muñón. *Annals of His Time*. Ed. James Lockhart, Susan Schroeder, and Doris Namala. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo de San Antón Muñón. *Chimalpahin's Conquest: A Nahuatl Historian's Rewriting of Francisco López de Gómara's "La conquista de México"*. Ed. and trans. Susan Schroeder, Anne J. Cruz, Cristián Roa-de-la-Carrera, and David E. Tavárez. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Connell, William F. *After Moctezuma: Indigenous Politics and Self-Government in Mexico City, 1524–1730*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011.
- Cortés, Hernán. *Cartas y otros documentos de Hernán Cortés*. Ed. Mariano Cuevas. Seville: F. Díaz, 1915.
- Cortés, Hernán. *Letters from Mexico*. Ed. and trans. Anthony Pagden. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971.
- Cushing Flint, Shirley. "Treason or Travesty: The Martín Cortés Conspiracy Reexamined." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 39.1 (2008): 23–44.

- Dean, Carolyn. *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ: Corpus Christi in Colonial Cuzco, Peru*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Diel, Lori Boornazian. *The Tira de Tepechpan: Negotiating Place under Aztec and Spanish Rule*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.
- El anónimo de Yucay frente a Bartolomé de Las Casas: Estudio y edición crítica de Parecer de Yucay, anónimo (Valle de Yucay, 16 de marzo de 1571)*. Cuzco: Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos “Bartolomé de Las Casas,” 1995.
- García Icazbalceta, Joaquín, ed. *Cartas de religiosos de Nueva España*. Mexico City, 1886.
- García Icazbalceta, Joaquín, ed. *Nueva colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de México*. 5 vols. Mexico City: Editorial Salvador Chávez Hayhoe, 1941.
- Gibson, Charles. *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964.
- González González, Enrique. “Nostalgia de la encomienda: Releer el *Tratado del Descubrimiento*, de Juan Suárez de Peralta.” *Historia Mexicana* 59.2 (2009): 533–603.
- González Obregón, Luis. *Los precursores de la Independencia mexicana en el siglo XVI*. Mexico City: Widow of Charles Bouret, 1906.
- González-Polo, Ignacio. *Palacio de los Condes de Santiago Calimaya (Museo de la Ciudad de México)*. Mexico City: Departamento del Distrito Federal, 1983.
- Gruzinski, Serge. *La guerre des images: De Christophe Colomb à “Blade runner” (1492–2019)*. Paris: Fayard, 1990.
- Gruzinski, Serge. *Conversation avec un métis de la Nouvelle-Espagne*. Paris: Fayard, 2021.
- Hanke, Lewis, ed. *México*. Vol. 1 of *Los virreyes españoles en América durante el gobierno de la Casa de Austria: México*. Madrid: Editorial Atlas, 1976.
- Jiménez Abollado, Francisco Luis. “Señorío versus Corona: La lucha por la perpetuidad de la encomienda en Tulancingo.” In *Aspiraciones señoriales: Encomenderos y caciques indígenas al norte del Valle de México, siglo XVI*, ed. Francisco Luis Jiménez Abollado, 129–48. Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, 2009.
- Kantorowicz, Ernst. *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Lamar Prieto, Covadonga. “La conjuración de Martín Cortés en la monarquía indiana de Fray Juan de Torquemada.” *Archivum: Revista de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* 57 (2007): 91–122.
- Las Casas, Bartolomé de. *Obras escogidas de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*. Ed. Juan Pérez de Tudela Bueso and Emilio López Oto. 5 vols. Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1957–61.
- Las Casas, Bartolomé de. *Tratados*. Trans. Agustín Millares Carlo and Rafael Moreno. 2 vols. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965.
- Las Casas, Bartolomé de. *Obras completas*. Ed. Álvaro Hueriga. 14 vols. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1998.
- León-Portilla, Miguel, J. O. Arthur Anderson, Charles E. Dibble, and Munro S. Edmonson, ed. and trans. *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality: Ancient Myths, Discourses, Stories, Doctrines, Hymns, Poems from the Aztec, Yucatec, Quiche-Maya and Other Sacred Traditions*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980.
- Marin, Louis. *Portrait of the King*. Trans. Martha M. Houle. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

- Mariscal Hay, Beatriz, ed. *Carta del Padre Pedro de Morales*. Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2000.
- Martínez Martínez, María del Carmen. *Martín Cortés: Pasos recuperados (1532–1562)*. León: Universidad de León, 2018.
- Masters, Adrian. “A Thousand Invisible Architects: Vassals, the Petition-and-Response System, and the Creation of Spanish Imperial Caste Legislation.” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 98.3 (2018): 177–406.
- Moctezuma Matos, Eduardo. “Una esquina con historia.” *Arqueología Mexicana* 26.155 (2019): 90–91.
- Monjarás-Ruiz, Jesús, Elena Limón, and Maria de la Cruz Pillés, eds. *Obras de Robert H. Barlow*. 5 vols. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia/Universidad de las Américas, 1987–94.
- Mundy, Barbara E. “Crown and Tlatoque: The Iconography of Rulership in the Beinecke Map.” In *Painting a Map of Sixteenth-Century Mexico City: Land, Writing and Native Rule*, ed. Mary Ellen Miller and Barbara E. Mundy, 111–36. New Haven, CT: Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, 2012.
- Muñoz Camargo, Diego. *Historia de Tlaxcala*. Ed. Alfredo Chavero. Mexico City: Ateneo Nacional de Ciencias y Artes de México, 1947.
- Navarrete Linares, Federico. *¿Quién conquistó México?* Mexico City: Debate, 2019.
- Olko, Justyna. *Insignia of Rank in the Nahuatl World: From the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014.
- Oriq, David T. *The Unheard Voice of Law in Bartolomé de Las Casas’s “Brevisima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias.”* New York: Routledge, 2021.
- Orozco y Berra, D. Manuel, ed. *Noticia histórica de la conjuración del Marqués del Valle: Años de 1565–1568; Formada de nuevos documentos originales y seguida de un extracto de los mismos documentos*. Mexico City: Edición del Universal, 1853.
- Parodi, Claudia. “The Indianization of Spaniards in New Spain.” In *Mexican Indigenous Languages at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Margarita Hidalgo, 29–52. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006.
- Reyes García, Luis, ed. and trans. *¿Cómo te confundes? ¿Acaso no somos conquistados? Anales de Juan Bautista*. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2001.
- Riva Palacio, Vicente y Manuel Payno. *El libro rojo, 1520–1867*. Mexico City: Díaz León y White, 1870.
- Rivera, Luis N. *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.
- Rubio Mañé, Jorge Ignacio. *El Virreinato II: Expansión y defensa: Primera parte*. Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1983.
- Ruiz Medrano, Ethelia. “Fighting Destiny: Nahuatl Nobles and Friars in the Sixteenth-Century Revolt of the Encomenderos against the King.” In *Negotiation within Domination: New Spain’s Pueblos Confront the Spanish State*, ed. Ethelia Ruiz Medrano and Susan Kellogg, 45–77. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2010.
- Russo, Alessandra. “Cortés’s Objects and the Idea of New Spain: Inventories as Spatial Narratives.” *Journal of the History of Collections* 23.2 (2011): 230–52.

- Sahagún, Bernardino de. *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*. Trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles Dibble. 12 vols. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research/University of Utah, 1950–82.
- Sahagún, Bernardino de. *Primeros memoriales*. Ed. H. B. Nicholson. Trans. Thelma D. Sullivan. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.
- Salinero, Gregorio. *La Trahison de Cortés: Désobéissances, procès politiques et gouvernement des Indes de Castille, seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013.
- Salinero, Gregorio. *Hombres de mala corte: Desobediencias, procesos políticos y gobierno de Indias en la segunda mitad del siglo XVI*. Trans. Manuela Águeda García Garrido. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2017.
- Sánchez Reyes, Gabriela. “El padrón de Alonso de Ávila Alvarado de 1567 y el templo de Huitzilopochtli.” *Boletín de Monumentos Históricos* 41 (2017): 4–18.
- Sandoval Zapata, Luis de. *Obras*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012.
- Simpson, Lesley B. *The Encomienda in New Spain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.
- Stavig, Ward and Ella Schmidt, eds. *The Tupac Amaru and Catarista Rebellions: An Anthology of Sources*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2008.
- Suárez de Peralta, Juan. *Tratado del descubrimiento de las Indias (Noticias históricas de la Nueva España)*. Ed. Teresa Silva Tena. Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990a.
- Suárez de Peralta, Juan. *Tratado del descubrimiento de las Yndias y su conquista (Transcripción del manuscrito de 1589)*. Ed. Giorgio Perissinotto. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1990b.
- Tarica, Estelle. “Indigenismo.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*. 3 March 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.68>.
- Thomas, Yan. “L’institution de la Majesté.” *Revue de Synthèse* 112.3–4 (1991): 331–86.
- Torquemada, Juan de. *Monarquía indiana*. Ed. Miguel León-Portilla. 7 vols. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1975–83.
- Townsend, Camilla. *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Townsend, Camilla. *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Valerio, Miguel A. “A Mexican *Sangamento*? The First Afro-Christian Performance in the Americas.” In *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas* (2019), 59–72.
- Valerio, Miguel A. “‘That there by no black brotherhood’: The Failed Suppression of Afro-Mexican Confraternities, 1568–1612.” *Slavery & Abolition* 42.2 (2021): 293–314.
- Voigt, Lisa. “Peregrine Peregrinations: Rewriting Travel and Discovery in Mestizo Chronicles of New Spain.” *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 40.1 (2006): 3–24.
- Voigt, Lisa. *Spectacular Wealth: The Festivals of Colonial South American Mining Towns*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016.
- Voigt, Lisa. “Representing an African King in Brazil.” In *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas* (2019), 75–91.
- Warren, J. Benedict, ed. *The Harkness Collection in the Library of Congress: Manuscripts Concerning Mexico, a Guide*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1974.
- Zavala, Silvio. *La encomienda indiana*. Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1973.