THE TLAILOTLAQUE
IN ACOHLUA PICTORIAL HISTORIES:
IMITATORS OR INVENTORS?

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Using « mapas » (particularly the Mapa Quinatzin and Codex Xolotl) now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, along with passages in the works of the historian Alva Ixtlilxochitl, this study explores the mode of historical painting adopted by the Acolhua in the eastern Basin of Mexico. It challenges the conjecture that the art of manuscript painting was introduced to Acolhuaean from the Mixteca and reinterprets the role played by the Tlailotlaque (« those who returned ») in the creation of « Aztec » painted histories.

KEY WORDS: Tlailotlaque, Acolhua, Aztecs, Tetzcoco, manuscripts.

Les Tlailotlaque et les documents pictographiques historiques acohlua : des imitateurs ou des inventeurs ?

À partir de l’analyse de « mapas » (notamment la Mapa Quinatzin et le Codex Xolotl qui appartiennent au fonds mexicain de la Bibliothèque nationale de France) et de celle de plusieurs passages de l’œuvre de l’historien Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, on tentera ici de cerner la manière de peindre l’histoire qui fut celle des Acohlua de l’est du Bassin de Mexico. On révisera en particulier de façon critique l’hypothèse selon laquelle l’art de peindre les manuscrits aurait été introduit dans la zone acolhua à partir de la Mixteca et on réinterprétera le rôle joué par les Tlailotlaque (« ceux qui sont revenus ») dans la création des pictographies historiques « aztéques ».

MOTS CLÉS : Tlailotlaque, Acohlua, Aztéques, Tetzcoco, manuscrits pictographiques.

Los Tlailotlaque y los manuscritos pictográficos históricos acolhuas : ¿imitaron o inventaron ?

Basándose en el estudio de algunos mapas (en particular el Mapa Quinatzín y el Codex Xolotl, ambos en la Bibliothèque nationale de France) así como de ciertas partes de las obras del historiador Alva Ixtilíxóchitl, este artículo explora la forma de pintar la historia que los acolhuas del este de la cuenca de México adoptaron. Impugna al mismo tiempo la hipótesis según la cual el arte de pintar estos manuscritos habría sido introducido en la zona acolhua

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In attempting to reconstruct the story of the Aztec past from the surviving corpus of ethnohistorical documents, consulting the relevant primary (and secondary) data that pertain to a chosen theme or problem is a necessary first step. Mesoamerican scholars have thus turned to those archives that maintain collections of ancient Mexican manuscripts, both pictorial and textual, that have survived from the prehispanic and colonial eras. For this reason, the extensive holdings of the Aubin-Goupil collection, which were donated to the Bibliothèque nationale of Paris in 1898 and make up a predominant part of its fonds mexicain, have made this repository a major destination for scholars of ancient Mexico.

For some regions, the manuscripts of the Aubin-Goupil collection are unique. That is the case, for example, for three pictorial histories — the prevailing prehispanic mode of writing and recording — that survive from the Tetzcoco area or Acolhuacan on the eastern side of Lake Tetzcoco in the central Basin of Mexico. These documents constitute our chief painted sources for Acolhua history, particularly for a critical formative (or migration) period. Still adhering to native style and format despite their postconquest, sixteenth-century date, they are particularly valuable in light of the intentional destruction and inadvertent losses that have befallen the preconquest painted books from the Basin of Mexico. The glosses added to the manuscripts in the native Nahuatl language further increase their usefulness, since they offer guides to identifying and interpreting images whose meanings have become unclear over time.

The three Acolhua cartographic histories are now known as the Mapa Quinatzin, Mapa Tlotzin, and Codex Xolotl, all titled after the names of early Chichimec-Acolhua leaders. The last is somewhat incongruously named since it too consists of a series of place maps rather than a bound book, as the term «codex» would imply. The importance of these documents is enhanced by the fact that the mestizo historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, a native of Tetzcoco and descendant of its former ruling family, once owned them. In the early seventeenth century, when writing his own textual narrative of his homeland’s past, he had invaluable access to a number of primary sources. Conscious of the merit of these documents, he itemized the 320 pre and postconquest works he consulted. He described them as «paintings done at the time, songs, annals, genealogies and tables of descent, paintings of boundaries, lots, and distribution of lands, and books of laws, rites, and ceremonies, as well as of festival and calendars» (quoted and translated in Kubler 1991, pp. 81, 217, n. 192). Unfortunately, all but a handful of them have been lost.

Other surviving pictorial histories that partly incorporate events from the Acolhua area, but with a strong Mexica influence, are the Codex en Cruz and Tira de Tepechpan, which were also part of the Aubin-Goupil collection. The Italian aristocrat Lorenzo Boturini collected all five manuscripts, plus numerous others, in New Spain in the early
eighteenth century. Forced to abandon his extensive collection of documents when he was expelled from New Spain, they passed on to other Mexican owners until J. M. A. Aubin obtained them a century later during his decade-long stay in Mexico (1830-1840) and brought them to France. His lithographs and commentaries on the mapas Quinatzin and Tlotzin were later published, most notably in 1849 and 1885; Eugène Boban’s 1891 catalogue of the Aubin-Goupil collection reproduced the Codex Xolotl and described the document and translated its annotations.

The three cartographic histories, all cast in the form of «mapas» or «maps», were painted by native tlacuiloque (artist-scribes) on roughly square or slightly rectangular panels. They are map-like in that the narrative of historical events is primarily structured by considerations of place and setting. Conventionalized place signs or simply delineated physical features, such as lakes, mountains, caves, and even plants, are distributed about the surface of the panel. While distances are not precise, as one expects of modern maps, the relative location of these natural features is suggested. While the Codex Xolotl does contain a few dates, visual indications of time in the form of year or day signs are generally lacking and must be inferred from the painted contents or from comments in the annotations. In contrast to pictorial histories produced in the Mixteca and other Basin of Mexico areas, these Acolhua maps are distinctive for providing schematized spatial settings, which might be described as simplified landscapes, in which events unfold and protagonists enact their roles. While still highly conceptualized, their compositions differ from other histories in being grounded in a visible, terrestrial actuality.

«AZTEC» HISTORIES AND «AZTEC» MIGRATIONS

Historical syntheses of Aztec history have often tended to focus on one group of the several that made up the people we today denominate somewhat inaccurately as «Aztecs», that is, on the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, or Tenochca. This is understandable, for this particular group of Nahuatl speakers increasingly came to dominate much of Mesoamerica in the century preceding the Spanish invasion of 1519. This primacy was reinforced when after the conquest of 1521 the victorious Spaniards built Mexico City, the viceregal capital of New Spain, over the ruins of the devastated city Tenochca capital. It thus continued to dominate the Basin of Mexico as it had the «Aztec» tribute empire, which had originated in the fifteenth century as a tripartite alliance among the Tepanecs of Tlacopan, the Acolhua of Tetzcoco, and the Tenochca of Tenochtitlan. The cultural as well as political center of New Spain, the bulk of documentary materials that have come down to us from the Basin of Mexico were produced in this city and environs.

Likewise, when the «Aztec migration» is discussed, it is often in terms of the Mexica story. Latecomers to the Basin of Mexico, they had settled on the western side of Lake Tetzcoco on a series of small islands they shared with their fellow Mexica, the Tlatelolca, who established their center in Tlatelolco, to the north of Tenochtitlan. Although certainly not ignored, less attention has been paid to the migration accounts of other Aztec groups, like the Acolhua, whose center was located across the lake at Tetzcoco. The emphasis on Tenochtitlan and the Tenochca obscures the fact that the
entire Basin of Mexico was a well-populated and thriving area, inhabited by a number of distinct ethnic groups. While they shared certain traditions and practices, each group maintained its own cultural identity, as expressed, for example, in local gods and religious practices as well as in the history of the specific community, which encoded its particular point of view. In fact, the partisan nature of these local or ethnic historical accounts, which one assumes were repeatedly revised with the passage of time, the updating of events, and shifting points of view, has been recognized.

The Tenochca cast their historical accounts in a form different from that of the Acolhua and painted them on long pasted-together paper strips called *tiras*, which originally were folded, accordion-like, or rolled. While Acolhua *mapas*, painted on roughly square or rectangular panels, emphasize spatial context and simultaneous presentation, temporal considerations govern the sequential structure of Tenochca histories, such as the surviving historical sections of the *Tira de la Peregrinación* (*Codex Boturini*), *Codex Mendoza*, or *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*. Year signs, arranged year by year, provide the initial framework for the placement of personages, events, and place signs associated with these temporal markers. In his pioneer study of the manuscripts of the early colonial period, the art historian Donald Robertson (1959, p. 64) captured these distinctions in a succinct description of the three dominant types of surviving painted histories. He referred to these documents as the « time-oriented » *tiras* of the Mexica, the « place-oriented » *mapas* of the Acolhua, and, farther afield, the « event-oriented » screenfolds of the Mixtecs from southern Mexico.

Whether one considers the migration tale as history, myth, or legend, it is significant that most Aztec histories begin with a migration account, and an extensive one at that; significantly, this type of event is not generally found in Mixtec genealogical histories. What purpose were the various « Aztec » migration stories intended to serve? Since it was already clear, particularly to the more advanced groups who already lived there, that the nomadic « Aztecs » were outsiders to the Basin of Mexico, what did the migration episode add to the story of their origins and early history? Why did different in-coming groups place such emphasis on this prolonged event? And why did these groups cast their migration stories (and histories) in such different ways?

In his analysis of the differences between historical manuscripts from Tenochtitlan and Tetzcoco, Robertson (1959, p. 135) pointed out that varying modes of artistic expression are reflected in the choice of narrative forms. He characterizes Mexica history as « a history of divine revelation “ for a chosen people whose movements were directed by their god ; it is a story ” overlaid with a religious myth removing it from the area of direct history ». He describes Acolhua history, on the other hand, as more « matter of fact, “ populated with ” historical figures whose behavior is explainable in a rational context. »

I would revise Robertson's observations to say that both the modes of artistic expression and the choice of narrative forms utilized in the painted histories were themselves shaped by conscious underlying intents. The image a particular group wished to project, to themselves and to others, was a prior and even more basic determinant.
Tenochca pictorial devices proclaim a kind of cultural independence as well as cultural indebtedness. By emphasizing that they are outsiders, the Mexica suggest that they are not beholden to the resident culture; rather, they bring something new and different to it, their own particular identity and character. While adapting in many ways to local culture, they convey the assurance that they will make of it something better and more splendid. These rugged, divinely led wanderers submit that they will take the energy infused in them by their gods and tempered by their migratory travels and travails to create new forms of power and achievement. The implication is that they will inject a new spirit that will distinguish what they were then from what they are now.

The Acolhua, while still emphasizing the fact that they came into the Basin of Mexico as outsiders, Chichimecs, proclaim a different vision of themselves, the natural world that surrounded them, and their place in the historical continuum. By giving primacy to the features of the natural world in their histories, they exalt their relationship to the land and the transformative power of place. Townsend (1992, p. 54) calls attention to a section of the Codex Xolotl that depicts the various uses of the land for different segments of the population and the ways that this reflected the social stratification of the older towns. The Acolhua were astute players in the never-ending intrigues that characterized Basin of Mexico politics. Nevertheless, in the early sections of their painted histories they consistently direct attention not to military conquests, like the Tenochca, but to the agricultural and cultural adaptations that connected them to the land and its past — a connection that presages their own cultural achievements.

The time-oriented histories of the Tenochca stress the inexorability of time and the overwhelming sense of purpose that propelled them toward a divinely sanctioned destiny. The place-oriented histories of the Acolhua emphasize how they learned the ways of the place; and in doing so, allied themselves with the great civilizations that had preceded them. It is not insignificant that Alva Ixtlilxochitl (1975-1977, I, p. 28) claims that Tetzoco had originally been founded in Toltec times, implying that the Chichimec settlement of the city was in effect a re-establishment and that Quinatzin’s transfer of the Acolhua capital from Coatlichan to Tetzoco might be seen as a resurgence of the ancestral Toltec order.

The Tlailotlaque and the Creation of Acolhua History

These preliminary considerations now allow us to turn to the central question I wish to consider here: What role did the group known as the Tlailotlaque play in the creation of the history painted in the Acolhua mapas? The Tlailotlaque, or « those who returned », migrated to Tetzoco during the reign of the fourth Chichimeca tecuhtli, Quinatzin. As the group credited with introducing the practice of writing among the Acolhua, they figure prominently in the maps of Quinatzin and Xolotl, as well as in various passages in the work of the historian of Tetzoco, Alva Ixtlilxochitl. Comparison of these images and texts reveals that the Tlailotlaque, described by Alva Ixtlilxochitl as having Toltec ancestry, had preserved the art of manuscript painting and were thus able to tutor the Acolhua when this group began to create their own
historical manuscripts. Whether «historical» or apocryphal, the Tlailotlaque story is significant because of the insistent theme of the Chichimec-Acolhua historical accounts that highlights their adaptation to the cultural traditions of the Basin of Mexico.

**Mapa Quinatzin**

This 3-panel native paper document depicts events that transpired during the time of the fourteenth-century Acolhua ruler Quinatzin and his successor Techotlatlatzin. In the lower left hand corner of the first panel appears the figure of Quinatzin, seated on a small woven reed seat of authority, or icpalli, with a deer name sign behind his head (Figure 1). The animal-skin garb he wears, his disheveled hair, and the arrows and large bow at his side typify the rustic character of the nomadic migrants. These details express the status of Quinatzin and his people as Chichimecs who survived primarily by hunting rather than by utilizing the agricultural techniques developed by the sedentary peoples already occupying the Basin of Mexico. Facing Quinatzin are two seated figures, whose careful grooming and the woven cotton mantles communicate their more evolved cultural stature. Quinatzin’s extended arm and the speech volutes that emerge from the mouths of all three individuals signal the interaction going on among them. Name signs indicate that the two figures represent two other migrant groups seeking entry into Tetzcoco. The name sign of the upper figure, comprising the emblem for a road with footsteps inside it but shown in a U-shaped form, identifies the upper male figure as one of the Tlailotlaque or « those who returned ». A shield name sign identifies the lower figure as one of the Chimalpanecas. A gloss on the upper section of the panel states, «In the time of Quinatzin the Tlailotlaques and the Chimalpanecas arrived, 172 years ago » (cited and translated in Robertson 1959, pp. 138-139).

**Codex Xolotl**

A more extensive and detailed document (ten sheets plus two fragments), the numerous paintings of this native paper cartographic manuscript encompass a longer historical period. It ranges from the arrival in the mid-thirteenth century of Chichimecs, led by Xolotl, in the Basin of Mexico to the period of the Tepanec war that began in the late 1420s. The fourth map shows an analogous scene represented near the top left of the panel (Figure 2). Even more descriptive than the Mapa Quinatzin painting, this one shows a large peaked hill with a clay pot atop a stone at its center, set over a quatrefoil representing a schematized cave. These place signs specify the location of the event as the altepetl or community of Tetzcoco. Below this place sign, again seated on an icpalli, is the ruler Quinatzin, paired this time not with the petitioning migrants but with his wife opposite him. His costume also differs from that of the Mapa Quinatzin figure, for here he wears a woven mantle rather than an animal-skin cloak. Seated to the right of the hill place sign, also dressed in a cotton cloak, is one of the Tlailotlaque, identified by the returning road sign beneath him and a written gloss. A day sign symbolizing a native book, the pointed writing instrument he holds, as well as a gloss, identify him as a tlacuilo, an accomplished practitioner of
Fig. 1. — Quinatzin and one of the Tlailotlaque on the upper right, *Mapa Quinatzin*, mex. 11-12 (cliché BNF, copyright BNF).
Fig. 2. - Quinatzin, in the center, one of the Tiahuanecu appears on the right of the hill, Mapa Yaxton, mex. 1-10 (cliche BNF, copyright BNF).
the art of manuscript painting. Clarification of this image is found in the work of Alva Ixtilxochitl (1975-1977, II, p. 32), who describes the Tlailotlaque as consummate practitioners of the art of manuscript painting. In his commentary on the Codex Xolotl Charles Dibble (1980, I, p. 62) proposes that the curved Tlailotlaque name sign indicates the direction from which the group had come, that is, from Chalco.

Alva Ixtilxochitl

The several treatises that make up the work of this chronicler contain several more extensive references to the Tlailotlaque, indicating the important role they played in Acolhua history and in the making of that history. One reference (cited and translated by Robertson 1954, p. 13) appears in a short chapter of the « Historia de la Nación Chichimeca » (1975-1977, II, pp. 32-33).

« When Quinatzin was recently installed in his kingdom [Tetzcoco], two peoples [« naciones »] came from the provinces of the Mixteca; they were called Tlailotlaques and Chimalpanecas, and were likewise of the Toltec lineage. The Tlailotlaques [...] were expert in the art of painting and composing histories, above the other arts; and they brought as their principal idol Tezcatlipoca [...] And having selected the finest ones [...] [Quinatzin] had them settle in the city of Tetzcoco, and the rest he divided up and gave to other cities and towns in wards named Tlailotlacan and Chimalpan, where even today their descendants remain; although these two peoples had formerly resided in the province of Chalco for a long time. »

Alva Ixtilxochitl gives two other versions of this event, suppling interesting details that help to convey the role of the Tlailotlaque in the creation of Acolhua history. The eighth relation of the « Compendio Histórico del Reino de Texcoco » (1975-1977, I, p. 430) reports that when Quinatzin was in his fourth year as Chichimec lord the Tlailotlaque—Toltecs from the Mixteca who arrived with an idol of their god Tezcatlipoca—came to render obedience to him. Quinatzin, who was lord of the region, gave them lands to inhabit, since they were artisans especially proficient in the art of painting. He sent four hundred of the most talented to settle an area in Tetzcoztzingo, where, the chronicler inserts, the ward of Tlailotlacan was then located; the rest he sent to other towns and cities.

The narrative in the « Sumaria Relación de las Cosas de la Nueva España » (1975-1977, I, p. 315) offers a slightly different account. It reiterates that the Tlailotlaque who arrived from the Mixteca were of Toltec lineage. It then adds that when the Tlailotlaque first arrived in Chalco looking for the ruler of the territory, the Chalca told them that Quinatzin resided in Tetzcoco, which was further north. A guide from Chalco led the large group of men and women there, and upon arriving they went to Quinatzin to render obedience and ask for lands they could settle. This text then elaborates on the capabilities of the Tlailotlaque by describing them not only as artisans, but also as wise men, astrologers, and other kinds of artists. This passage emphasizes that the Tlailotlaque possessed knowledge as well as skill, surely a prerequisite for creating the various kinds of manuscripts that the Acolhua (and other Aztecs) would eventually produce. The fact that they are credited with being « astrologers » indicates that they were capable of painting another type of manuscript, a divinatory handbook called a tonalamatl (book of days), although no examples have survived from Tetzcoco.
Although the *Mapa Tlotzin*, a historical and genealogical work painted on an animal hide panel, does not represent the Tlailotlaque episode, it does convey important related information. One detail portrays how the great fifteenth-century «philosopher-king» Nezahualcoyotl gathered together all the craftsmen and settled them in different quarters of Tetzcoco. And it depicts these artists as painters, sculptors, goldsmiths, and sculptors, all of them shown with the instruments of their professions. Like the tale of the Tlailotlaque, this one likewise highlights the presence of a spectrum of skilled artists resident in Tetzcoco and the persistence of the Acolhua in pictorially setting the stage for their cultural credentials.

The Tlailotlaque episode has not been ignored by scholars, but in some respects this critical event has been misinterpreted. Emphasis has been placed on the Mixtec connection rather than the Toltec one. The Tlailotlaque have mistakenly been identified as manuscript painters who learned the art of manuscript painting from the Mixtecs and brought it to the Basin of Mexico, where they passed it on to the inhabitants there. Robertson, in particular, was a proponent of this view, which other scholars have continued to perpetuate, although Nicholson (1982, pp. 234-238) strongly challenged it. Seeking to forge connections between preconquest Mixtec screenfolds and postconquest Nahua manuscripts (the only ones that survive), Robertson (1959, p. 13) cited the Tlailotlaque passage in the *Codex Xolotl* to argue that the art of manuscript painting had been introduced from the Mixteca. But the passage states only that the Tlailotlaque returned from this area; it does not say that they went there to learn this skill or that they learned it there. Also vague and unconvincing is Robertson's scenario for distinguishing Tenochca and Acolhua histories. He proposes that the Acolhua first developed a time-oriented manuscript, which they then taught to the Tenochca; thereafter they developed the place-oriented manuscript, but «for some reason the Mexicans did not adopt this further refinement». Robertson's faulty characterization of the role of the Tlailotlaque in effect credits distant outsiders for the introduction of a skill that apparently was already known and practiced in the Basin of Mexico (although no examples have survived), or that may have been derived from a closer and more likely location.

In all his versions Alva Ixtlilxochitl repeats the crucial detail that the Tlailotlaque were Toltecs or of Toltec descent. He also credits the Tolteca with the making of pictorial histories, and in his citation of sources he claims to have used some of these Toltec documents in his own historical writings. In the third relation of his «Compendio Histórico del Reino de Texcoco» he states,

«These Toltecs were great wise men, philosophers, and artisans, as their histories show, for they understood and knew the movements of the skies [...] they used paintings and characters with which they had painted all the things that happened from the creation of the world until our times; they worked gold and precious stones [...]» (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975-1977, I, p. 420).

It seems unlikely that the Toltecs, who were esteemed as master makers of painted books and peerless craftsmen, would have learned their much lauded artistic skills from outsiders, and distant ones at that, however talented they were.

Also arguing against Robertson's Mixtec hypothesis is the fact that the Acolhua cartographic histories are place-oriented maps, whereas the Mixteca screenfolds are continuous event-oriented documents. Robertson (p. 154) recognized and described
the typical graphic line of the Texcocan manuscripts as a somewhat «delicate», almost cursive one, whereas the Mixtec histories used a strong, even, more angular line. Aside from their reliance on line, the Acolhua maps are notable for their restricted use of color. In contrast, a hallmark of Mixtec painted histories is the variety of intense colors that fill the black framing lines.

It is true that the Tetzcocan mapas date from the early colonial period, whereas the screenfolds Robertson cited from the Mixteca are preconquest, so a direct comparison is not really possible. But the differences between the two types of manuscripts — in format, technique, materials, and style — are so striking as to argue against one manuscript type being derivative of the other. This is not to deny, however, that some influences may have passed from one group of tlacuiloque to the other.

If the Acolhua mapas resemble the style and iconography of other painted histories, they are other mapas from the Puebla-Tlaxcala valley, such as the Mapas de Cuauahtinchan (1981) and the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca (1976). The latter, another manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale, deals with the migration of Tolteca Chichimeca (and Nonohuala) from Tollan to Cuauhtinchan in the present-day state of Puebla. Indeed, the population of the Puebla area has long been markedly diverse, including a concentration of Mixtec speakers in the southern region.

The pictorial style characteristic of the late prehispanic Puebla-Tlaxcala area, which was expressed most strikingly in the pictorial arts of manuscript, mural, and ceramic painting, has a number of parallels with Mixtec style and iconography (see Nicholson 1982; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1994), including its use of vivid polychromy. Widespread throughout central Mexico during the late postclassic period, this «Mixteca-Puebla style» extended far beyond the confines of the Puebla-Tlaxcala-Mixteca «heartland». Despite certain resemblances, however, distinctions between Puebla-Tlaxcala and Mixteca productions are also apparent in form, content, and style. As Marc Thouvenot (personal communication) suggests, corresponding features in manuscript painting may not be at the level of the formation of the documents (or at a technical or stylistic one) but at the level of the functioning of the writing system.

Another critical detail in Alva Ixtlilxochitl's writings about the Tlailotlaque is his comment that they were returning from the Mixteca. But where had the Tlailotlaque originally come from and where were they returning? This historian explicitly states that before going to the Mixteca the Tlailotlaque had resided in Chalco for a long time («mucho tiempo»), and I believe that it was to Chalco that they were returning. I suggest the following scenario. Alva Ixtlilxochitl's texts explicitly describe the Tlailotlaque as Toltecs or of the Toltec lineage. They were thus part of the population dispersion that followed the fall of Tollan, with some of them eventually settling in the southern Basin of Mexico (as well as the present-day Puebla-Tlaxcala region and other areas). In the Basin they passed on Toltec traditions to the settled peoples of towns like Chalco and Colhuacan, which later allowed their rulers to claim Toltec connections. The highly skilled Tlailotlaque then traveled even further southeast to the Mixteca, possibly to seek better outlets and opportunities for their specialized skills. As developments in their former adopted homeland in the Basin of Mexico accelerated under the aegis of the Chichimec-Acolhua rulers, the Tlailotlaque — who had clearly preserved their identity as Toltec descendants — made a decision to return.
Arriving in Chalco and seeking to resettle in the lands they had formerly occupied, they discovered that the political situation had indeed changed. The Chalca directed them to Quinatzin, then presiding over Acolhuacan from Tetzco, to which they then journeyed. Quinatzin astutely selected the most outstanding of the Tlailotlaque artists for Tetzco, evidently intending to utilize their specialized skills at history painting for his own purposes.

In fact, it was to Toltec-connected cities like Colhuacan and Chalco that various migrating Aztec groups turned when they entered the Basin of Mexico. Marrying into ancient lineages was an expedient way to ally themselves with the dominant power and to acquire legitimate political and cultural authority for themselves. The Tenochca requested a ruler from Colhuacan; the Tlatelolca intermarried with the Tepane dynasty; and Xolotl’s son Nopaltzin married a woman from Chalco. The *Mapa Quinatzin*, *Codex Xolotl*, and Alva Ixtlilxochitl all relate that migrants from Colhuacan also settled in Tetzco. The evolution of Tetzco into the dominant cultural capital of the Basin of Mexico seems to have drawn artisans from the surrounding area, and the *tlacuiloque* must have realized that their abilities would be in great demand there. As in many other cosmopolitan urban centers, past and present, Tetzco and Tenochtitlan comprised multiple ethnic and cultural strands and attracted others.

It is also noteworthy that wards named Tlailotlacan and Chimalpan were located in Tetzco as well as in Chalco. According to Chimalpahin, the chronicler of Chalco, the Tlailotlaque migrated into the Chalco area at an unspecified time and settled there (Schroeder 1991, pp. 42-43). They made up one of six *calpulli* into which the Tenanco of Tzaqualtitlan Tenanco (Amaquemecan) were organized, and the Tecpan Tlailotlacan was the highest-ranking district, which served as the « seat of authority » (ibid., pp. 80-81). Another Tlailotlacan was a fifth polity founded in Amaquemecan in the fourteenth century. In addition to the names of groups and places, the term Tlailotlaque was also used as a component of titles of rulership. Interestingly, Chalco and Tetzco appear to be the only centers in the Basin of Mexico to mention the Tlailotlaque.

In his study of the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca* and maps of the Cuauhtinchan (Puebla) region, Luis Reyes García (1988: 60-61) describes a group, called the Colomochca, who were likewise associated with the Chimalpaneca. In a situation analogous to that of the Tlailotlaque, the Colomochca departed from Cuauhtinchan and traveled to Coixtlahuaca in the Mixteca Alta, which according to the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* was ruled by a *tlatoani* descended from Toltecs who migrated there after the fall of Tollan. Based on Ixtlilxochitl’s description of the Tlailotlaque, Reyes García proposes that the Tlailotlaque and Colomochca were closely related or even the same, and that this group should be understood as having gone to and then returned from the Mixteca (ibid., p. 62). Interestingly, *lienzos* (paintings on cloth) from Coixtlahuaca Valley also display cartographic features (see Parmenter 1982). This relationship between the Toltecs, the Tlailotlaque, and the Mixteca thus appears to have been much more complex than Robertson outlined.

A final argument against a Mixteca origin for Acolhua manuscript painting is based on two of the cited passages from Alva Ixtlilxochitl, as well as a third in the « Relación Sucinta en Forma de Memorial » (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975-1977, I, p. 402).
According to these sources, when the Tlailotlaque arrived in Tetzcoco they bore an idol of their chief deity, Tezcatlipoca. This god was not an important supernatural in the Mixteca; he was, however, the chief antagonist in the Toltec tale of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tollan, and as a deity he was especially revered in the Puebla area and the southern Basin of Mexico. Chalco, in fact, was one of the most important centers of his cult. During the annual veintena ceremony of Toxcatl, the impersonator of Tezcatlipoca, who was honored for an entire year, was finally sacrificed in Chalco at a temple called Tlacochcalco (Sahagún 1981, p. 71).

For all these reasons, I believe that Robertson’s contention — unfortunately repeated by a number of later scholars — that the Tlailotlaque brought the art of manuscript painting to Texcoco from the Mixteca misunderstands the situation. Although the circumstances surrounding the creation of Acolhua cartographic histories are admittedly very complex and not fully explicated in the sources, it nevertheless appears that the origin of manuscript painting in the Basin of Mexico has more convincing Toltec antecedents than Mixtec ones. If we recall that the intent of a people precedes their choice of an appropriate venue to realize their intentions, then the development of «place-oriented» mapas appear to have been a personal Acolhua choice. Far from imitating pictorial and historical traditions in the Mixteca, the Acolhua built on local Toltec precedents to develop a distinctive type of historical manuscript as a visible manifestation of their self-defined identity. As can be seen from the surviving documentary evidence, the Acolhua set out to forge a connection to the respected Toltecs, to portray themselves as their cultural descendants, and to highlight the distinctive contributions they provided to the empire of the Triple Alliance.

The «place-oriented maps» of the Acolhua, the «time-oriented tiras» of the Tenochca, and the «event-oriented» manuscripts of the Mixteca thus reflect not just different formats and modes of artistic expression but the different ways their creators viewed themselves and their place within history. The conventions of these historical manuscripts vary not just because they are organized differently but, more basically, because different aims underlie their principles of organization and choice of content. Form, function, and identity, are intertwined. And because of the intensely personal nature of identity construction and image creation, especially at a time of political and cultural realignment in postclassic Central Mexico, it seems more logical to suppose that each group developed its particular type of historical manuscript to express that particular view.

By studying the rare, surviving Acolhua mapas in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in conjunction with Alva Ixtilxochitl’s related works, we are able to glean some insight into the processes that contributed to the invention of the painted histories of Tetzcoco in which the Tlailotlaque played such an pivotal role.

NOTE

1. For a more detailed discussion of the early history of the three documents referred to as well as reproductions, editions, and recent scholarship, see Nicholson, this volume.
REFERENCES


