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978-1-107-12903-0 - Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1500–1800

Peter B. Villella

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**Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico,
1500–1800**

Modern Mexico derives many of its richest symbols of national heritage and identity from the Aztec legacy, even as it remains a predominantly Spanish-speaking, Christian society. This volume argues that the composite, neo-Aztec flavor of Mexican identity was, in part, a consequence of active efforts by indigenous elites after the Spanish conquest to grandfather ancestral rights into the colonial era. By emphasizing the antiquity of their claims before Spanish officials, native leaders extended the historical awareness of the colonial regime into the pre-Hispanic past, and therefore also the themes, emotional contours, and beginning points of what we today understand as “Mexican history.” This emphasis on ancient roots, moreover, resonated with the patriotic longings of many creoles, descendants of Spaniards born in Mexico. Alienated by Spanish scorn, creoles associated with indigenous elites and studied their histories, thereby reinventing themselves as Mexico’s new “native” leadership, and the heirs to its prestigious antiquity.

Peter B. Villella is Assistant Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Abbreviations

- AGN:** Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico
BN: Bienes Nacionales
I: Indios
RC: Reales Cédulas
RCO: Reales Cédulas Originales
TR: Tributos
U: Universidad
VM: Vínculos y Mayorazgos
- AGI:** Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain
ECJ: Escribanía de Cámara de Justicia
I: Indiferente
J: Justicia
MX: Audiencia de México
PR: Patronato Real
- UCB:** Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
HL: Huntington Library, San Marino, CA
LC: Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC
LL: Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN
PRT: *La nobleza indígena del centro de México después de la conquista*
Emma Pérez-Rocha and Rafael Tena, eds. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000).

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Abbreviations

RLI: *Recopilación de las leyes de los reynos de las indias*
Archivo Digital de la Legislación en el Perú, Congreso de la
República del Perú. [www.leyes.congreso.gob.pe/leyes_indias](http://www.leyes.congreso.gob.pe/leyes_indias.htm)
.htm

Acknowledgments

Beyond the pioneering work of many who have gone before, this book reflects the expertise, patience, and generosity of numerous mentors, colleagues, peers, and sponsors, both at home and abroad.

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Nahuatl documents while sharing research, ideas, food, laughter, and perhaps a *mezcalito*.

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Note on language

The texts examined and often excerpted in this volume are highly eclectic, and present problems of spelling and translation. This is magnified in the case of proper names, which vary considerably between authors, and even within the same texts, in both early modern Nahuatl as well as Castilian-Spanish.

When quoted directly, names and words in both Castilian and Nahuatl have been left as they are found in the primary sources. Where necessary, I clarify the most ambiguous or confusing cases in parentheses.

Outside of direct quotations and paraphrases, all Castilian-derived names and places are modernized to match standard contemporary spellings; the same is true for Mexican place names. The spelling of Nahuatl-derived place names that do not match contemporary Mexican usage, meanwhile, has been regularized according to the orthographical system adopted by James Lockhart in *Nahuatl as Written: Lessons in Older Written Nahuatl* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). All other Nahuatl words also follow Lockhart's spelling conventions.

The name of the ninth ruler of Tenochtitlan varies as much today as it did in the sixteenth century. I have chosen "Moctezuma" because it is the most familiar variation in modern usage. The same goes for other well-known Nahua leaders. As regards Nahuatl reverential formulations – the suffix – *tzin* indicating honor or importance – I follow the authors of the texts being analyzed.

As for the colonial-era natural lords, in all cases I address them with *don* or *doña* and a Christian name. This is how they would have expected to be addressed, and how their own compatriots would have done so.

All translations from any language, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.