

Visions, Prophecies and Divinations

*Early Modern Messianism and Millenarianism in
Iberian America, Spain and Portugal*

Edited by

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Amerindian Cosmologies and Histories in New Spain and Peru: Appropriations and Redimensioning of Christian Concepts by the Nahua, Maya, and Andean Elites

Eduardo Natalino dos Santos

The victory of the coalition of the Spanish and dozens of indigenous cities in the central plateau of Mexico over the Mexicas in 1521 opened the door for Christian conceptions to be proffered, immediately and lavishly, for local use and appropriation. This was especially true for the Nahua elites of this region, who considered themselves victorious and participating in a new political sorting, outlined after the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. A similar process, albeit with more limited regional reach and slower pace that resulted in a situation of less political stability for the victorious, occurred in the central Andes during the sixteenth century with the progressive victory of the coalition formed by the Castilians, Inca factions, and other Andean populations like the Chachapoyas and Cañaris over different Inca factions and their allies. An even more limited regional reach and slower pace resulted in a situation of decreased political stability for the victorious, a process similar to that experienced by the Maya people of the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala and the lowlands of Yucatan and Petén throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In these three cases in the initial colonial period,¹ each featuring more or less political autonomy and subordination with regard to the growing power of

1 We call the *initial colonial period* the historical phase that goes to the end of the Castilian-Amerindian conquests of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and Cuzco, a moment in which the Castilians began to participate in a more systematic and effective manner in the local sociopolitical networks, headed by or dependent on the Amerindian elite, until the time at which the same elite did not perform such central roles in regional sociopolitical organization or in the vicekingdoms of New Spain and Peru. In the specific case of the central Mexican highlands and central Andes, we can situate the final moment of the initial colonial period between the 1560s and 1580s. In the case of the Maya region, this final moment comes later, varying between the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala, and it can be situated at the end of the sixteenth century, and the lowlands of Yucatan and Petén, where it can be dated to the end of the seventeenth century. See Eduardo Natalino dos Santos. “Construir a História dos povos ameríndios

the Spanish, the Amerindian elites of the vice-kingdoms of New Spain and Peru interacted with and appropriated Christian concepts, interpreting and redimensioning them in accordance with their own philosophical traditions, political projects, and modalities for engaging with and interpreting the conquest processes and subsequent sociopolitical relations with the Spanish and other Christians, such as missionaries.²

The topic of interethnic relations in Spanish America and that of cultural transformation and the traditional mindset of Amerindian peoples as related to contact with Christians has been widely studied. On this occasion, our approach will examine how the Nahua, Maya, and Andean elites appropriated Christian concepts for themselves to update or generate new forms of understanding of the natural and social world, organizing them in accounts and according to concepts that incorporate the past and present – and, sometimes, the future – i.e., in explanatory works that we can call historical Amerindian cosmologies.

The Nahuas of the Central Mexican Plateau

After the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan on August 13, 1521, most of the Amerindian populations in the central Mexican plateau considered themselves victorious, especially the ruling elites. The defeat of the Mexicas was credited to a coalition formed between the Spanish and about 50 Nahua cities against the isolated Mexicas who maintained only two other cities – Itztapalapan and Malinalco – as allies until they were finally defeated. After that, the Mexica elite, especially the descendant lineages of Moctezuma, also joined the victorious coalition. In this manner, the Nahua elites continued to rule their cities and participate actively in the expansion of the new coalition domains in regions beyond the central plateau, including in areas previously under Mexica dominion as well as in regions outside that domain, such as the highlands of Chiapas

com as fontes coloniais de matriz europeia” In *Cronistas do Caribe* (Campinas: Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas da UNICAMP, 2012), 19–46.

2 To assess the concentration of the Christian missionary effort in the regions of the former Mexica and Inca domain, and how these regions worked to support the dissemination of this effort in areas like the Maya region more refractive politically to the increasing political-religious domain of the Castilians, it is significant to know that out of the 6,000 regular religious men who came to America during the sixteenth century, approximately 2,700 went to New Spain and 1,800 went to Peru. We addressed the missionary company in sixteenth-century New Spain in: Eduardo Natalino dos Santos. *Deuses do México indígena* (São Paulo, Editora Palas Athena, 2002).

and Guatemala and the region designated Gran Chichimeca, which corresponds roughly to the north of New Spain.³

The result of this rapid conquest process, enabled by a broad coalition of Nahuatl political units, provided, among other things, relative legitimacy to the new macro political orientation in the eyes of the Amerindian elites and the interest of these elites in the Europeans' ideas and powerful gods, foreign deities who had contributed decisively to the defeat of the Mexicas. Some examples of this relative political legitimacy and the Nahuatl interest in Christianity are the lack of indigenous rebellions in the center of New Spain and the large-scale introduction of missionaries into the region. These conditions favored the initiation of the rapid Christianization of the Nahuatl elites, in a process that had intelligible dynamics only when analyzed in coordination with the sociopolitical transformations that occurred during the initial colonial period.

In the first two decades after the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the appropriation of devotional objects and Christian rituals by the Nahuats was fundamentally based on Nahuatl concepts and interpretations, as the Castilians did not have enough power to demand any other type of posture from local populations. Thus it was very common for images of the Virgin Mary and the cross to be integrated into scenarios composed of objects related to Nahuatl ceremonies, still practiced by populations that had been baptized collectively. The famous case of Don Carlos de Texcoco, condemned in 1539 to being burned at the stake by the episcopal inquisition as a dogmatizer, and the consequent mitigation of this sentence due to fear of unrest or local rebellion, is emblematic of this moment, which was marked by a high level of mutual incomprehension between two traditional mindsets that conceptualized broadly different elements as being identical or compatible.⁴ Thus, the Nahuatl elite exhibited a type of selective appropriation of objects and practices of Christian origin, which were incorporated, by addition or alleged identification and similarity, into an already existing set of ceremonial objects and practices.

3 See Federico Navarrete Linares, "La conquista europea y el régimen colonial". In *Historia antigua de México. Vol. II* (México: INAH & IIA – UNAM & Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2001), 371–405.

4 A situation that James Lockhart named *doubly mistaken identity*, a concept that for this type of situation seems a lot more clarifying and fruitful than the concept of *cultural miscegenation* – and this does not mean that the first concept should be applied to all the situations in which intercultural contact generated reappropriations, redimensionings, or transformations of the elements that composed the repertoire of practices and ideas from the cultures involved in this type of contact. See James Lockhart, *The Nahuats After the Conquest* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992).

The cosmologies and histories produced by the Nahua people in these first two decades seem to have gone through a similar process, i.e., they maintained the structures and characteristics typical of the moment before the arrival of the Castilians – as in a conception of a world that had passed through several ages or previous eras, during which natural and social cataclysms were inherent to the ordering of the world and their frequency followed certain timetables and cycles in which the indigenous cities and their ruling lineages were the major centers of recent history, and that everything should be measured in units and calendar cycles⁵ – and adapted them to recent events including the defeat of the Mexicas and new historical-cosmological agents like the Castilians and their gods, the Virgin Mary, and the cross.⁶

As in the period from the end of the 1530s to the 1540s, this context was substantially transformed. The combination of the huge investment in evangelization and the sudden and accelerated decline of the Nahua population in the central plateau⁷ – along with the staggering growth of the Spanish population – created determining factors that resulted in the political equation becoming gradually less favorable to the Nahua elite. Therefore the elite found in its effective Christianization a strategy to ensure a higher probability that they could maintain their economic advantages and political privileges. Beyond the appropriation of icons and rites from their Christian allies, it was increasingly necessary to understand this new god thoroughly, along with his accompanying historical and political precepts, in order to maintain or claim favors and privileges.

During this effective Christianization process of the Nahua elites, in the middle of the sixteenth century, a radical new reading and redimensioning of the cosmological and historical explanations of the Mesoamerican matrix can be observed. In general, all of the Nahua cosmology that explained the

5 This topic was broadly addressed in: Eduardo Natalino dos Santos, *Tempo, espaço e passado* (São Paulo: Alameda Casa Editorial, 2009).

6 The *Códice Boturini* and *Códice borbónico*, pictographic manuscripts produced in this period, attest to the continuation of the Nahua historical-cosmological thinking as it addressed the recent past – such as the migration of the Mexicas – and the distant one – such as the action of the creating the gods Oxomoco, Cipactonal, Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl – in a very similar manner to what we find in the manuscripts or inscriptions of pre-Hispanic origin. *Códice borbónico* (Áustria: ADV / México: FCE, 1991); *Códice Boturini – Tira de la peregrinación* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1975).

7 It is estimated that the population of the central Mexican plateau and Oaxaca plummeted from twenty-five million at the moment of contact with the Castilians to one million at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Cf. Sherburne Cook et al., *El pasado de México – aspectos sociodemográficos* (México: FCE, 1996).

formation of the current world as it evolved over the ages and described a natural and human world marked by constant transformation – as seen in the text *Leyenda de los soles*⁸ – begins to be seen as a diabolical fiction by the members of the Nahuatl elite itself. A fiction that arose from an idolatrous past and which, at best, could only contain elements that would ultimately attest to the universal validity of Christian cosmology and history, as in the account of a historic great flood or the arrival of an evangelical preacher in the lands of New Spain – as in the *Códice Vaticano A*.⁹

The local histories had a different destination. They continued to be read and rewritten by the Nahuatl elites as prophetic works, preferentially going through a process that involved the obliteration of the supposed idolatry – for example, suppressing accounts of ceremonial rites, especially those of human sacrifice – and the restriction of historical agents – for example, eliminating gods, godlike humans, and animals that served as allies of human beings in the Mesoamerican historical matrix. In this manner, a Nahuatl history that had previously been populated with a multiplicity of nonhuman beings became a chronicle of the actions of human beings – as in the historical section of *Códice Mendoza*¹⁰ – who obeyed the will of the genuine and monotheistic God.

In spite of these points of contrast and the inclination of cosmology and Nahuatl history towards Christianity, there are important convergences between the two thinking traditions, among which the use of time cycles or chronologies to refer to the past are highlighted. Noticing these convergences, the Nahuatl elite began to undertake close chronological-calendar readings of biblical texts in search of connections between the dates of Nahuatl cosmological episodes – such as that great flood – and the dates of their equivalent Christian episodes, along with maintaining the histories of cities and political confederations marked by the aegis of temporal counting as in annals – as seen in the work of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Domingo Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin.¹¹

8 “Leyenda de los soles”. In *Códice Chimalpopoca* (México: Instituto de Historia – UNAM, 1945) 119–142.

9 *Códice Vaticano A* (Áustria: ADV / México: FCE, 1996).

10 *The essential Codex Mendoza* (Los Angeles and Londres: University of California Press, 1997).

11 See: Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin CUAUHTLEHUANITZIN, *Las ocho relaciones y el memorial de Colhuacan* (México: CONACULTA, 1998); Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras históricas* (México: Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura / IIH – UNAM, 1997). We analyzed the chronological interpretations that Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin makes of the cosmological and Jewish-Christian history texts in: Eduardo

In general, at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, the histories and cosmologies of the Nahua elites were rather orthodox in Christian terms, presenting a markedly Christian historical teleology to explain the distant or recent past, the Castilian conquest, and to refer to the future – though this does not mean that they abandoned elements central to earlier Nahua thinking, such as the precise chronological marking mentioned earlier. These writings are the end-stage products of a political project undertaken by the Nahua elites to remain in power within a context which was progressively unfavorable to them; starting in the 1560s these elites became gradually less important to the Spanish Republic in the rule of the indigenous republic in the Mexican central plateau region and its surroundings. The strategies employed by the Nahua-Christian elite were successful for some time, but a century after the Mexico-Tenochtitlan conquest, their cosmology and historiographical tradition had disappeared. This does not mean that the historical and cosmological traditions of other Nahua social groups suffered the same fate; the so-called *macehualtin* or common people presented particular interaction dynamics with Christian thinking, distinct from those mentioned in the case of the members of the ruling elites, the *pipiltin*.

The Mayas in the Highlands and Lowlands

Soon after the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in 1524, the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala received what the Mayas of these regions saw as a new *bajada* (descent) of conquering forces from the central Mexican plateau, including the Spanish, the Nahuas, and earlier allies the Cakchiqueles Mayas, inhabitants of the region who had been recently dominated by Quichés Mayas. In order to understand the dimension of political complexity present in this region, it is important to know that the Quichés and Cakchiqueles spearheaded the secular coalitions and disputes that involved more than twenty other Maya groups¹²

This *bajada* and the local disputes resulted in a series of conflicts and wars leading to the successive defeat of the Quichés Mayas of Quetzaltenango and Utaatlán. In the beginning, the Cakchiqueles considered themselves to be as triumphant as the Castilians and attributed their success in part to the connection they believed existed between political power and *nahualism*, the ability

Natalino dos Santos, “História e cosmogonia nativo-cristã na Nova Espanha e no Peru” in *Contextos missionários* (São Paulo: Hucitec & FAPESP, 2011), 308–340.

12 Victoria Reifler Bricker, *El cristo indígena, el rey nativo* (México: FCE, 1993).

of some leaders and warriors too transform into an alter ego, or *nahual*, such as a jaguar, eagle, ancestor, lizard, or a series of other beings and nonhuman entities.

However, the Castilians escalating demands to the Cakchiqueles brought about the dissolution of the coalition and a rebellion, which in the context of ongoing local disputes between Mayas, epidemics, and the growth of Castilian power, had little success and suffered a major setback, in 1526, with the defeat of the Cakchiqueles in Iximché, their capital. From the perspective of *nahualism*, the Mayas attributed these episodes, which they called “The New Conquest”, to the defeat of the *nahuales* of leaders like Tucum Umam at the hands of angels, the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Spirit, as described in works like *Títulos de la casa Ixquín-Nehaib*.¹³

After the defeat of the Cakchiqueles in Iximché, the Castilians and their local allies invested in the expansion of their fragile domains towards the north, a region in which the Cakchiqueles and other groups maintained fierce resistance until 1547. Therefore, this region was only incorporated into Castilian networks and tax systems in a very gradual manner, in tandem with or just after the fundamentally peaceful conquest by the Dominicans with the introduction of the missionaries to autonomous Maya territories under the auspices of the local Amerindian leadership.¹⁴

In general, therefore, the most immediate result of the conquering process of the highlands was a fragile Castilian dominion marked by political conflicts, limited territorial control, and surrounded by extended regions of resistance from the Quiché, Cakchiquel, Rabinal, and other Maya groups. Although these groups suffered losses, their population numbers remained healthy, due to the fact that the epidemics of the time had less impact when compared with those in the central Mexican plateau.¹⁵

The historical and cosmological worldviews of these Maya groups, both partially subordinated or relatively autonomous, present deep continuities with regard to models and explanations of the Mesoamerican matrix, especially because the Mayas continued to believe in the validity and likelihood of such explanations. Thus the Mayas continued to divide cosmology into ages and to attribute the configuration of the world and humanity to an extremely long

13 See “Títulos de la casa Ixquín-Nehaib”, in *Crónicas indígenas de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1957).

14 Due to all these conflicts, this region received the name of Tuzulutlán, or the *País das Guerras*, during the beginning of the colonial period, a denomination later changed to Verapaz.

15 See: Victoria Reifler Bricker, *El cristo indígena*.

process of constant transformations. They placed their most recent history in the transition period from the last to the current age, with its migrations, establishments of cities and *pueblos* and, then, experiences with the arrival and conquest of the Castilians and allied indigenous people. In a word, the Mayas adopted and incorporated episodes from the initial colonial period – which continued until the end of the seventeenth century in this region – into their cosmological and historical reports.

Simultaneously, the progressive loss of power by the ruling elites, especially the Quichés and Cakchiqueles, who had been baptized and lived among and increasingly submitted themselves to the Castilian authorities in the *cabeceras*, or principal towns, made these elites manifest an increasing interest in Christian conceptions and precepts, outlining a movement of cosmological and historiographical subordination similar to the one we saw in the center of Mexico, but on a much smaller scale and with less impetus and intensity and, thus, ample space for the continuity of the local precepts mentioned earlier and very heterodox appropriations and interpretations of objects and concepts of Christian origin.

In the *Popol vuh*, for example, there are several initial references to God and the time of the Christians, in which the book is written, but with a basis in ancient pictoglyphic manuscripts.¹⁶ These initial references quickly give way to the long narrative of cosmogony and Quiché history, in which Christian concepts of idolatry and a monotheistic God, for example, did little to suppress or transform reports of the Maya and Mesoamerican matrix as seen in Nahuatl texts produced in the same period as *Popol vuh*, i.e., the mid-sixteenth century. Besides, *Popol vuh* and other Maya cosmologies and histories of the highlands, such as *Anales de los cakchiqueles*, construct a conception of the present as inferior to the past, which, thus, becomes a positive point of reference to be reclaimed, but, as contradictory as it may seem, without abandoning Christianity or what is understood by it.¹⁷

In the case of the lowlands of Yucatan and Petén, these Maya appropriations and interpretations of Christian conceptions were even more autonomous and heterodox. The acute political fragmentation in this region, divided into a large number of Maya confederations, plus the rebuffs or limits to territorial penetration that prompted campaigns and conquering expeditions sent from the Caribbean – three of them led by Montejo family, between 1527 and 1545 – were not able to consolidate broad and stable territories under the dominion of the Spanish, who had very few local allies, who had little power. Added to

16 See *Popol vuh* (México: FCE, 1996).

17 See *Memorial de Sololá / Anales de los Cakchiqueles* (México & Buenos Aires: FCE, 1948).

this context are the contacts that some Yucatec Maya groups from the coast had with the Castilians even before the expedition of Hernán Cortés, in 1519, many of whom were violently repelled. Furthermore, the epidemics that arrived in the region before the first Montejo expedition, in 1527, were associated with the Spanish, as described in *Chilam Balam de Chumayel*.¹⁸

Within this context, marked by limitation and political instability for the Castilians and the existence of autonomous Maya territories, like that of the Itz'ás, until the end of the seventeenth century, the Yucatec Mayas took a great interest in Christian devotional objects, precepts, and deities. The principal priests of each community, the *chilam balam*, or “jaguar prophets”, were the principal interpreters and promoters of very active and original appropriations of Christianity. These appropriations range from the use of Christian artifacts like priestly cassocks and the images of saints, captured or received as gifts from the Castilians, to the identification of the Christian cross with the cosmic trees in Maya cosmology that supported the heavens – an identification that went so far as to inspire the crucifixion of Spaniards captives in 1546 – to declarations that they, the jaguar prophets, were the sons of the Christian God.¹⁹

The several *Libros de Chilam Balam*, texts produced by some of these priests in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, show several sides to this Maya-Yucatecan appropriation of Christianity and, at the same time, the long-standing conceptions of the pre-Hispanic matrix among Amerindian peoples, as well as the creation of novel and unpublished concepts. In terms of cosmological and historical conceptions, these books continue to use pre-Conquest narratives on the origin of the world and mankind without devoting more attention to Jewish-Christian cosmology – or, when it is summarized, no exclusivity is given. Furthermore, they continue to organize the past, present, and future according to the logic of the temporal cycles of the *katunes*, i.e., through successive of sets of twenty years of 360 days each, which served to account for the duration of the several ages or eras of the world as well as to group qualitatively correlated recent events – these groups of events would be denoted by the same sign and denominator: eight *ahau katún*, for example.

According to this logic, the presence of the Castilians, called *dzules*, or “foreign usurpers”, and their new god and religion were included and added to the chronology. This new god and religion were accepted by the Mayas in the first years of coexistence with the Castilians, but, later on, the *dzules* were accused

18 See *Libro de chilam balam de Chumayel* (México: CONACULTA, 2001).

19 See Victoria Reifler Bricker, *El cristo indígena*.

of attempting to take them away from the Mayas and monopolize them.²⁰ The events evoked to support this interpretation of contacts with the Castilians and Christianity – summarized in the expression, “They gave us Christianity and then took it from us” – relate directly to the missionary work and subsequent actions of the episcopal inquisition commanded by Diego de Landa. These actions culminated in 1562 in one of the most significant auto-da-fé ceremonies aimed at indigenous people and culture in Spanish America, which helped curtail the activities of the inquisition in these populations by provoking fear of a generalized Maya-Yucatecan rebellion in these small and unstable Castilian domains. It was exactly the episodes related to the inquisition directed by Landa that provided the most important temporal milestones for the history and prophecy in the books of *Chilam Balam*: the year that gives rise to the first *katún* of the new era, the year of the so-called “Conquest of Landa”.

These episodes and their reverberations seem to have provoked curiosity in the indigenous populations, along with a growing desire to possess the gods and ritual objects of the foreigners. In other words, the Yucatec Mayas, in general, did not accept the tyranny of the *dzules*, characterized as selfish and bad Christians, nor did they accept the attempts of Christian clergy to monopolize religious practices.²¹ Following a disseminated Mesoamerican logic, they believed that the time of the presence and dominion of the Spanish would soon end with the help of the Christian God himself, and on a date determined by the logic of the *katunes* cycle. The age in which this was to happen was characterized as the end of suffering and exploitation at the hands of the *dzules* and the return of the Mayas to power – as in older times – when they would demonstrate how real Christians should act. In summation, this was a Maya attempt to appropriate Christianity as a new foundation from which to exercise political power, historical logic that finds its grounds in concrete cases like the kingdom of the Itzás in Petén, which maintained political autonomy until 1697, and was able to choose the moment it would receive Christian missionaries in its territories.

20 See Nancy Farris, “Indian in Colonial Yucatan: Three Perspectives”, in *Spaniards and Indians in Southeastern Mesoamerica*, ed. Murdo Macleod et al. (Lincoln & Londres: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 1–39.

21 See Federico Navarrete Linares, *La vida cotidiana en tiempo de los mayas* (México: Ediciones Temas de Hoy, 1996).

Incas and Other Amerindian Societies of the Central Andes

In terms of political conquest, the case of the Incas, Quechuas, and Aimaras groups of the central Andes is similar, on the one hand, to the case of the Mexicas and Nahuas and, on the other, to the case of the Mayas. It is similar to the conquest of the Mexicas and Nahuas in the pre-existence of a vast network of politico-tributary domination, called Tahuantinsuyu, commanded by one city, Cuzco, which maintained coalitions or subordinating relations with several other ethnic groups and political confederations, including the Lupacas. It is also similar to the case of the conquest of the Mexicas, in that the Incas of that city received a coalition of Castilians and local allies to negotiate with and condone politically. However, the results of these negotiations and initial conflicts were very distinct from the ones obtained in the case of Mexica and Nahuas. Instead of relatively quick domination with a broad territorial reach, legitimate in local eyes and, perhaps because of this, without great wars or rebellions after the domination of the former tax capital, in the case of the Incas, the establishment of the Spanish in Cuzco, in 1533, and in Lima, in 1535, is followed by a sociopolitical context more similar to the one that predominated in the Maya region, marked by the rebellion of the former allies, such as certain Inca factions,²² wars that lasted decades, conflicts against other Andean peoples, and a dependence on constant negotiations for the maintenance of a Castilian presence in the region. This context resulted, over decades, in circumscribed territorial penetration for the Spanish conquest aside from coastal areas and the Lima-Cuzco-Potosí axis and, consequently, in relatively limited missionary work outside those regions.²³

22 In 1533, Manco Capac, Inca governor of Cuzco, received the Castilians in this city as allies, but in 1536, in the face of increasing demands from the conquistadors, he led a rebellion that expelled them from Cuzco and sent them to Lima. However, this Inca movement was limited and its supporters were expelled from Cuzco; they then formed a parallel Inca government in Vilcabamba that lasted until 1572, with the imprisonment and execution of Tupac Amaru, the last Inca ruler of this city.

23 Until the decade of 1580s, the Castilian presence had been feasible in political and logistical terms outside the region of the coast because it according with Amerindian political interests, i.e., the local elite of different ethnicities – Inca and non-Inca – had political ascension plans and projects tied to the structure of the local and regional hierarchies that appeared after the fall of the Incas, in which the Castilians were the main actors. Cf. Karen Spalding, “The Crises and Transformation of Invaded Societies: Andean Area (1500–1580)”, in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 904–972.

This limited, unstable Castilian presence, which depended on the interests of the Andean elites, was further destabilized by fierce wars and disputes between the conquerors themselves and between the conquerors and the crown of Castile, as well as the epidemics that affected a considerable portion of the central Andean population. The participants in the rebellion dubbed Taki Onqoy, which we will explore later in this text, refer to this period – the mid-sixteenth century – as the time of “a world gone mad”.²⁴

This context will produce at least two types of appropriation of Christian concepts by Andean cosmological and historical thought during the initial colonial period – which in this case, as mentioned, lasts until the 1580s. The first of them, mainly involving the Inca elites and other ethnicities that accepted the Castilians, is characterized by great transformations with regard to previous Andean matrices of thought. On the one hand, these Andean elites converted to Christianity and suppressed most of the former cosmological framework, especially the characters and episodes that had come to be considered idolatrous, like the episodes involving the *huacas* – beings with exceptional powers who transformed the world of the past with their cataclysmic battles and gave it the features it has today. On the other hand, the accounts of these Andean-Christian elites kept a few conceptions that would not be so strange to Christian thought, such as the idea that the world had gone through several previous ages and a great flood. However, the result of this admixture has more of a Jewish-Christian character than Andean. This can be observed in the writings of Titu Cussi Yupanqui, in *Ynstrucción del Ynga*, and Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, in *Nueva Corónica y buen gobierno*, completed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, but first produced in the last decades of the sixteenth century.²⁵

Moreover, these new Andean cosmologies and histories also began to adopt the support of linear chronology to narrate the past, which in the Andean case, as opposed to the Nahua and Maya ones, was a radical novelty. It seems that Andean cosmological and historical thought was based more on categories of a spatial nature than on temporal categories. In other words, its gnoseological structures and classification systems relating to the past were only slightly chronological, or not at all, and very or totally topological – for example, sets of

24 See Luis Millones, *Historia y poder en los Andes Centrales* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987).

25 Don Diego de Castro Titu Cussi Yupanqui. *Ynstrucción del Ynga don Diego de Castro Titu Cusi Yupanqui para el muy ilustre señor... (1570)* (Lima: Ediciones El Virrey, 1985), Felipe Guamán Poma De Ayala, *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (Copenhague: Biblioteca Real da Dinamarca), available at: <<http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/es/frontpage.htm>>.

natural or artificial marks on the landscape were grouped according to spatial links which formed reference constellations serving to remember and link accounts about the past. These radical differences between Andean and Christian thinking did not make chronology or a temporal linearity an easier way to translate or establish bridges between Andean cosmology and history and Christian cosmology and history, as was the case with the Nahuas and Mayas. The great difficulty converting Andean cosmological reports – organized based on spatial grounds – to temporal markers can be seen in *Manuscrito de Huarochirí*, a Quechua text produced between the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, which presents a series of Andean cosmological reports in which the *huacas* play the dominant role.²⁶

Even so, Andean histories and cosmologies of the initial colonial period, as in the work of Guamán Poma de Ayala or Titu Cussi Yupanqui, produced in the Vilcabamba, headquarters of the parallel Incan government until 1572, present Andean historical concepts combined with Christian ones, describing the current age of the presence and increasing dominance of the Castilians as a result of a *pachacuti*, i.e., an inversion of spatial character between the world above and the one below: from *hanan* to *hurin*. In general, as in the case of the Mayas, these reports construct a negative narrative of most of the Spanish as beings who mark the arrival of a world and age marked by injustice, which should therefore be radically changed; the Spanish are identified as sons of Supay, the Lord of the Underworld.

The second type of Andean cosmological-historical explication in conversation with the Christian presence is found outside the setting of the Incas or the local elites allied to the Castilians, in regions in contact with the Spanish, but where there was a lack of total political subordination. This is the case in the region of Huamanga, between Lima and Cuzco, where arose the Taki Onqoy or “Sickness of the Dance”, an open, radical, and violent movement of resistance to the Castilians and their local allies, which after starting in Huamanga, spread to Jauja, to the north, then to Lima, Cuzco, and Charcas, between 1564 and 1567. Its participants, among them many women as well as a few Incas, asserted that the conquest had been a cataclysm, a *pachacuti* that would be reversed soon with the help of the *huacas*, angry at the collaboration of the local people and

26 See *The Huarochirí Manuscript* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991). Frank Salomon called these attempts at rewriting Andean history based on a linear chronology the “chronicle of the impossible”. Frank Salomon, “Testimonies: The Making and Reading of Native South American Historical Sources”, in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 264–349.

their abandonment of traditional ritual offerings.²⁷ For these reasons, the *huacas* took possession of the indigenous people, making them dance continuously and renounce Christianity and everything that came from the Castilians, such as clothes, animals, plants, objects, etc. In this manner, they would gain strength to prepare for the next *pachacuti*, when the *huacas* – led by Titicaca and Pachacámac, not the Incan *huacas* – would kill all the Castilians and their allied Curacas and return things to their rightful places: the Castilians to the world below, or *Supay*, and the Andean elites to power in the world above. The movement ended with persecution, betrayal, and collaboration with Castilian authorities following nearly three years of combat and the condemnation of more than eight thousand indigenous people.²⁸

The case of Taki Onqoy puts us in contact with a form of appropriation of the Christian presence that we have not referenced up to now: the attempt at total rejection of everything that came from Spain and the return to a pre-Hispanic and pre-Inca socio-cosmological order, i.e., where the patrons and powerful *huacas* would be neither Christians nor Incas. In this episode, we are not talking about appropriating concepts of the Christian matrix, even with strong local color, in order to confront increasing Castilian power, as in the case of the Yucatec Mayas. The accounts of people who participated in the Taki Onqoy rebellion seem to point in another direction: the construction of an image of Christianity as a rival power and religion incompatible with those with local origin, which would dominate the Andes for a very brief age or era – *pacha*, in Quechua – before they would be defeated by the Andean *huacas* who governed the world before the Incas. This image of Christianity in the negative – transformed into the religion of the enemy – and its supposed incompatibility with local thought are crucial to help explain the slow and circumscribed penetration of Christian practices and conceptions in the Andean territory during the initial colonial period, and even after. To the extent permitted by their autonomy or political importance, the Andean peoples, especially beyond the coast and the Lima-Cuzco-Potosí region, maintained a very refractory position with regard to the adoption of Christian practices and concepts. In many cases, on adopting some of these practices and concepts, they were isolated from the practices and ideas credited to them, which gradually became

27 The main sources for studying the ideology of this set of rebellions are the accounts of participants recorded by Friar Cristóbal de Albornoz and his translator, Guamán Poma de Ayala. There is also information in the work of Molina, from Cuzco.

28 See Steve J. Stern, *Los pueblos indígenas del Perú y el desafío de la conquista española, Huamanga hasta 1640* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1986).

illegal through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries²⁹ as Christians became stronger politically and acquired means of imposing conversion to Christianity with a certain religious orthodoxy.

To Close and Restart

These brief reflections about how Nahua, Maya, and Andean people appropriated for themselves Christian concepts in distinct ways makes it clear that understanding of these processes requires a regionalized historiographical treatment sensitive to transformations that occurred within a relatively short time frame, as in the case of the initial colonial period. It is necessary to conjugate, in each case, the diversity of forms and the results of military conquests, the Castilian population and institutional establishments, and the intersection of missionary work with the varied and changing actions of the different Amerindian peoples. In other words, it seems that the intelligibility of the action of Amerindian peoples with regard to Christianity, especially how they appropriated for themselves concepts and Christian precepts, depends on not treating the subject as if these people and their historical contexts were identical across the whole American continent, or for the entire colonial period.

In the case of the Nahuas, we saw that their ruling elites participated broadly in the conquest project led by the Castilians, and as they were victorious at first, supported the colonial regime in its early phase. As their power diminished, these elites progressively adopted Christian models and concepts of historical thinking, which resulted in Nahua historical narratives marked by, among other things, the irreversibility of the arrival of the Christian God's religion, acceptance that their own past had been a moment of idolatry, historical providentialism, and the transmutation of Nahua calendar markings to those of the Christians.

In the case of the Mayas, we see the construction of much more conflicted relations with the Spanish and the constitution of a very negative image of Christians. In spite of this, we saw that the Mayas take an interest in Christian ritual objects and concepts and adoption of these imports in a very active and selective manner, in order to present the Spanish as bad Christians. As opposed to the Nahua historical conceptions, the Mayas only slightly modified the foundations of their pre-Hispanic matrix, and but similar to the Nahua, designated the age of Spanish rule as an era marked by injustice and sorrow that would

29 See Alberto Flores Galindo, *Buscando un inca* (México: Editorial Grijalbo & CONACULTA, 1993).

only last for a certain period of time, after which the Mayas would return to power.

In the case of the Incas and other Quechua and Aimara groups from the central Andean region, we see a sociopolitical panorama, which on the one hand is similar to the case of the Nahuas due to the presence of relatively powerful elite who adopted the precepts of cosmology and Christian history in an accelerated manner. On the other hand, it was similar to the case of the Mayas due to the presence of constant rebellions and conflicts, the construction of a very negative image of Christians, and the strong continuity of local thought, expressed in a clear manner in the attempt to completely reject everything that had Spanish and Christian origin.

In all cases – the appropriation of Christian precepts or the mere construction of a certain image of who the Christians were and their world – the traditions of Amerindian thought from New Spain and Peru produced new cosmological and historical constructs during the initial colonial period, adequate and intimately related to the elaboration of guidelines and plausible sociopolitical projects within that context. Many of these projects today can seem exotic, misplaced, or coming from an antiquated world with historically misled and largely defeated and dominated populations. But these can be considered exotic only if later historical reality is projected onto the initial colonial period, i.e., that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In these centuries, in general, the indigenous villages and cities of the vice-kingdoms of New Spain and Peru were already much more subservient to the Spanish Republic and there was no longer political space for projects that postulated, for example, the reversal of the Castilian conquest, the maintenance of autonomous Amerindian kingdoms, the existence of marvelous Christianized Amerindian lineages allied with the Christians, or the constitution of their own slightly orthodox interpretations of Christian gods and concepts. If we analyze the historical context in which these projects were initiated, carefully so as not to prematurely project the defeat of all of the Amerindian populations of New Spain and Peru in 1521 or 1532, we can see that we are facing plausible political projects in their gestational context, anchored in new histories and cosmologies. New histories and cosmologies which were a result of distinctive interactions between the Castilians and the Amerindian people and also distinctive interpretations of these varied forms of interaction.