

When Cortés arrived in the Aztec Empire of Mexico in 1519, he observed that rich men and noblemen had many wives. This marriage pattern, polygyny, contrasted to that of Cortés's native Spain and of the entire Christian world, in which only monogamous unions were legally recognized. The Spanish Conquest of the Aztec Empire changed much of Aztec culture: ancient Mexico's land and riches came under Spain's control, and its native people were converted to Christianity—and obliged to obey marriage laws that demanded monogamous unions. This change in marriage practices had severe economic consequences for the Aztec nobility, because Aztec women wove cloth, and cloth was so highly valued that it was a form of money. Therefore, a household with many wives produced much wealth, and one with only one wife was much poorer. The secondary wives, the "concubines," held a status of respect because of the prosperity they generated. Far from being denigrated as sexual service workers, as would have been the case in Europe at that time, they were a source of pride and wealth.

This essay traces the relationship between marriage patterns and wealth in textiles through three successive periods in Mexican history: the Late Postclassic period heyday of the Aztec Empire (ca. 1430–1521), the Early Colonial period (1521–1620), and the Middle Colonial period (1621–1720; see table 11.1). It was the value of cloth, not the desirability of maintaining a voluptuous harem, that led Aztec men to have many wives, and this practice became exaggerated in the social upheaval in the transitional Early Colonial period, beginning with the Spanish Conquest. By the early 1600s, Europeanized culture was firmly in place,

TABLE 11.1 Chronology and Culture of Mexico

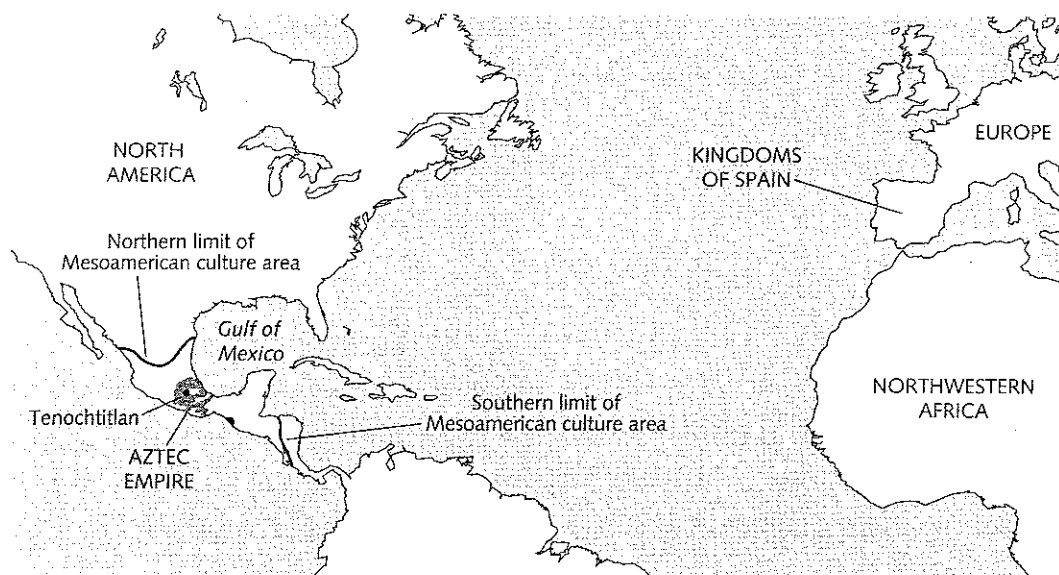
	Late Postclassic Period (1430–1521)	Early Colonial Period (1521–1620)*	Middle Colonial Period (1621–1720)*
Political rulers	Aztec empire	Spanish king and viceroy of New Spain	Spanish king and viceroy of New Spain
Population size trend	Population increase	Severe population decline	Stabilization of surviving population
Religion	Veneration of native deities	Process of conversion to Christianity	Christianity
Marriage patterns	Rich men = polygynous; commoners = monogamous	Unconverted men practice polygyny; commoners and converted elites practice monogamy	Monogamy
Textile production	By women in household contexts, using traditional methods	By women in household contexts, using traditional methods; some use of European products and methods	By women in household contexts, using traditional methods; by men and some women using European products and methods

\*Based on Charlton 1986.

and the surviving Aztec nobles had adopted Christianity and its monogamous marriage patterns. Patterns of textile production had also changed with the use of simple machines (treadle looms and spinning wheels) and factory methods introduced from Europe.

### Chronology and Cultural Change

The land we now know as Mexico was named after the Mexica (pronounced maySHEEKah) Aztecs, an ethnic group who established their capital at Tenochtitlan (later Mexico City) in about 1325 C.E. A little over a century later, they had become so powerful that neighboring ethnic groups paid them taxes in goods and labor. By 1519, Aztec armies had subjugated a large part of the Middle



MAP 11.1.

The Atlantic world. In the early 1500s C.E., Europe and the Americas were just beginning to become aware of each other. This map shows the Middle American subcontinent and (shaded) the territory controlled by the Aztec Empire.

American subcontinent (see map 11.1) and this territory's population of 5–6 million people was sending regular tribute payments to Tenochtitlan.

But other countries also had ambitions to expand their wealth by extending their territories. Spain began sending explorers to the Americas in 1492; by 1521, the Aztec Empire was conquered, and the Spanish Empire straddled Europe and the Americas. The Spanish Conquest of the Aztec Empire ushered in the Early Colonial period, a chaotic time of transition. Spaniards were eager to make their fortunes and to convert the native peoples to Christianity. These aims were complicated by the catastrophic death rate of the native population, as indigenous peoples succumbed to European diseases against which they had no immunity.<sup>1</sup> By the early decades of the seventeenth century, population levels had stabilized and so had social patterns in New Spain, as Mexico was then called. The Spaniards, of course, monopolized political power and access to key economic assets, but they continued to permit native nobles to occupy administrative offices at local levels and to retain such economic resources as they possessed in the Early Colonial period. By this time, the indigenous nobles had fully adopted Christianity and its attendant customs such as monogamous marriage. Many textiles for native markets were still produced by traditional techniques, but they no longer served as a form of currency—nor were they valued by the new elites, people of European descent who used cloth made by European methods. Thus the old pattern of Aztec palace concubines producing woven wealth was entirely

superseded by monogamous marriage and textile fabrication in male-dominated factory settings. Let us look more closely at Aztec society and its patterns of marriage and textile production, and how these were transformed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

### Aztec Society in the Late Postclassic Period (ca. 1430 to 1521)

The Aztecs were a set of ethnic groups in ancient Mexico who claimed to have descended from the inhabitants of a mythical homeland they called Aztlán.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned above, the Mexica Aztecs came to dominate related ethnic groups, and then came to control populations hundreds of miles from their main capital at Tenochtitlan. Like their European contemporaries, the Aztecs had distinct social strata: a small class of nobles, perhaps fewer than 10 percent of the total population, drew tribute in labor and goods from a huge mass of commoners who were farmer-artisans. There was no “slave class” as such; slavery could befall anyone who was brought low by extreme poverty or crime.

Family ties were the most important social relationships for nobles and for commoners, and every marriage created an alliance between two families. Here, as in many traditional agrarian societies, professional matchmakers brokered engagements for commoners. For Aztec nobles, important marriages were part of political alliances and were arranged through diplomatic channels.

Nobles and commoners tended to follow different marriage patterns. Most Aztec commoners were monogamous, married to one person at a time (divorce was legal, and both men and women had rights to their property and to custodianship of their children). However, there were no laws against polygyny, and any man could have as many wives as he could afford. Because wealth was necessary to set up a large household, the practice of polygyny was limited to affluent nobles and to a small number of wealthy commoners, such as long-distance merchants.

Different marriage practices resulted in considerable variation in household size. The size of the monogamous household was fairly small—perhaps five or six individuals living together. But polygynous households ranged in size from those that were only slightly larger than monogamous households to those containing hundreds of people—Motecuzoma, the Aztec emperor who was defeated by Cortés, is said to have had hundreds of wives, plus great numbers of children and servants. He had at least half a dozen palaces, so the members of his vast household no doubt occupied several different locations.<sup>3</sup>

### Aztec Polygynous Family Households: First Wives, Secondary Wives, and Concubines

Moteczuma's household, with its many houses and many family members, may have been the most complicated in the Aztec Empire. Each wife had a particular status, the most important being that of the "first" or "primary wife"—usually the man's initial legitimate spouse but always his most important one, and the mother of his fully legitimate children.<sup>4</sup> The Aztec nobleman's goal in this primary marriage was to marry up—to get a wife from a dynastic family that had more prestige than his own, so that his heirs would have powerful relatives who would help them advance.<sup>5</sup>

Secondary wives had a legitimate marital status, but it was one that assumed that they and their offspring would have a lesser position in the family. The choice of secondary wives, women whom Westerners might label "concubines," was less constrained by strategy and political considerations. Secondary wives could be selected—or accepted as gifts—in order to secure a stronger relationship with an ally or a client, or because the women themselves were desirable for such reasons as physical appearance or skill at necessary palace household work such as preparing special food and drink for feasts and producing fine-quality weaving and embroidery.

This system casts a different and non-Western light on the practice of concubinage. The term *concubine* in Western culture has a negative connotation of being servile—in particular, of having to perform sexual service. In societies like that of the Aztecs, women were given to a noble lord as a means of currying favor with him. However, the same considerations that made primary marriages the object of careful negotiation with matchmakers also encouraged men to protect the well-being and dignity of concubines. No sensible ruler carelessly antagonizes his clients by mistreating a member of their family. Nor was this arrangement unattractive from the viewpoint of the young women who became concubines in noble houses. The lives of the Aztec commoners were filled with hard work in a setting of simple living conditions, lacking many comforts. Marriage to another commoner would be inevitable if a young woman's exceptional good looks or household skills did not make possible life as a palace concubine, and even slaves could earn such a position.<sup>6</sup> Once a concubine was taken into the palace, her life largely revolved around these more specialized household duties, only in a much more luxurious setting, with basic drudge work taken care of by servants.

Whether the concubine found her sexual duties toward her lord to be onerous or highly pleasurable, they were unlikely to occupy a significant proportion of her time. Even if she were her husband's favorite partner, the inevitability of

pregnancy and customs of celibacy after childbirth would remove her from contact with him for years at a time. Furthermore, maternity could be translated into power, if a woman's child became an important member of the elite. A case in point is the great Aztec emperor Itzcóatl (r. ca. 1428–40). His father, Acamapichtli (r. ca. 1376–96), was the first Aztec ruler, but his mother was not a royal princess. She was described in various sources as a slave or as a seller of vegetables in the public market. Whatever her exact circumstances, she was low-born but highly appealing to Acamapichtli, and her son Itzcóatl was the Aztec ruler responsible for the establishment and early expansion of the empire. The mother of the emperor was usually also a high-ranking noble; but regardless of the social station into which she was born, the power of her son would elevate her to an exalted rank. The example of Itzcóatl's mother must have inspired many concubines to dream of upward mobility, fueled by a gifted and ambitious son.

### Palaces

In contrast to the few imperial palaces with dozens of wives and concubines, most polygynous households in the Aztec period were probably much more modest. This assumption is based on the kinds and sizes of palaces dating from the Late Postclassic period and from our knowledge of how the Aztec Empire was administered. The archaeological evidence leads us to assume that in the Basin of Mexico (the region around Tenochtitlan) there were just two great imperial administrative palaces, in Tenochtitlan and in Texcoco, the other major Aztec capital. There were also about fifty much smaller administrative palaces in city-state capitals, and about three hundred local palaces, the residences of nobles who governed rural villages.<sup>7</sup>

What do we know about these different kinds of palaces? For the imperial palaces, there are accounts by eyewitnesses, both the Spaniards who lived in them in 1519 and 1520, or who saw the surviving palaces after the conquest, and native lords who described their family histories and residences during the Early Colonial period. However, we have little archaeological evidence, because later buildings were built over them. Motecuzoma's great palace, for example, was demolished during the siege of Tenochtitlan, and modern Mexico City's Palacio Nacional now occupies its site.

More is known of the smaller palaces, because often the communities in which they are located were not rebuilt after the sixteenth century. The only completely excavated palace in the Basin of Mexico, in fact, is located in the Aztec village of Cihuateopan, which was abandoned in 1603. In 1519 it was a community of about one thousand people, most living in houses of three or four rooms that conformed to the needs of the commoner family.

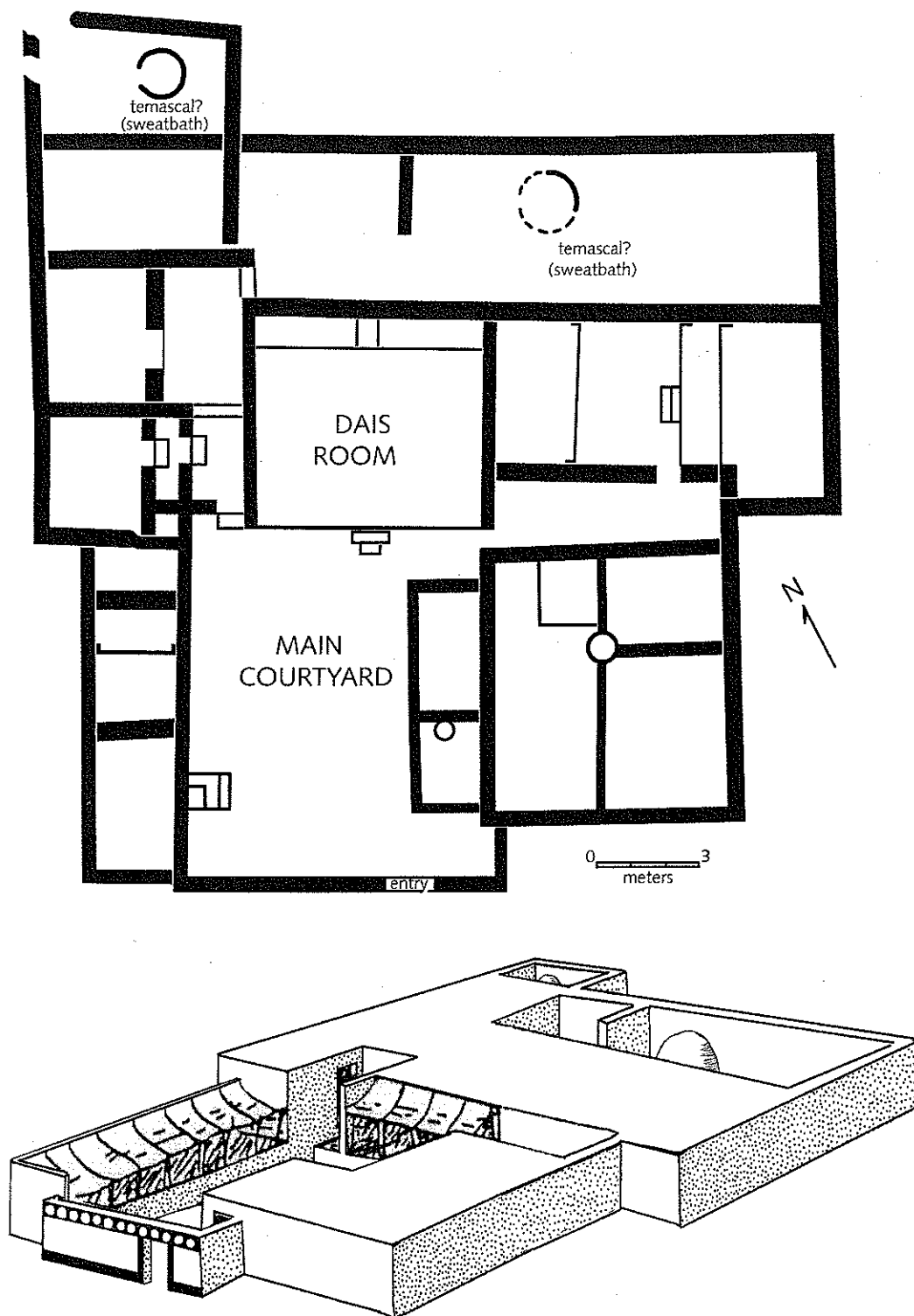


FIGURE 11.1.

Layout of the palace at Cihuatecpan, an Aztec village about 65 kilometers northeast of the capital city of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City). The local ruler would have lived in this palace, a smaller version of the great imperial palaces of the capitals.

The Cihuatecpan building that was probably an Aztec palace was three times the size of the average commoner house, and its construction was of much higher quality. As the building plan shows (see figure 11.1), suites of residential rooms surrounded a central courtyard spacious enough to hold meetings of all two hundred household heads in the village. The suites of residential rooms would have suited the needs of three or four wives and their children. The “dais room” is assumed to have been the ruler’s own quarters, and also the stage from which he—or she—would address assemblies.

Service yards at the back of the palace contained sweat baths, which were important to Aztecs of both sexes but viewed as particularly essential for the health of pregnant women. Around the sweat baths were broken figurines of an Aztec fertility goddess (Xochiquetzal) who was also venerated by “embroiderers, and weavers.”<sup>8</sup> “Xochiquetzal was the essential creative force, and those who participated in creative acts—transforming nature into art—paid homage to her.”<sup>9</sup>

Cihuatecpan in the Aztec language means “woman palace” or “woman lord-place.” Scholars do not agree about the meaning of this place-name, which is also used of several other communities. A palace where there are lots of women? a palace ruled by a woman? Such a name naturally makes one wonder whether women ruled Aztec palaces. The answer, as pertains to the city-state and village levels, is yes. Ethnohistorical documents record no women emperors, but a handful of women ruled city-states in the Basin of Mexico. Also, there were women heads of household, though the pattern was not common—2.2 percent in a traditional Aztec village in the Early Colonial period that supplies the best evidence on this question.<sup>10</sup> Extrapolating from these data and from our knowledge that Aztec women regularly occupied positions of administrative and financial responsibility, we can assume that occasionally, a woman governed at the village level.

### Cloth Production and Palace Life

A few women may have ruled, but all women spun thread and wove cloth and embellished it with embroidery. Mastering needlework skills—spinning, weaving, and embroidery—was essential to their upbringing. This point is reiterated in such Early Colonial sources as the *Codex Mendoza* (see figure 11.2) and Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’s *General History of the Things of New Spain*, also known as the *Florentine Codex* (see figure 11.3). Aztec kings admonished their daughters to master these important skills, because without them, they would not secure the dignity of a good marriage: “apply thyself well to the really womanly task, the spindle whorl, the weaving stick. Open thine eyes well as to how to be an artisan[;] . . . [selling] the herbs, the wood, the strands of chili . . . are not . . . thy gift, [nor] art thou to frequent another’s entrance, because thou art a no-

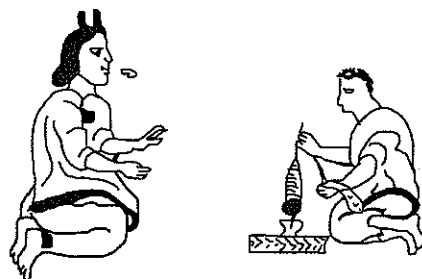




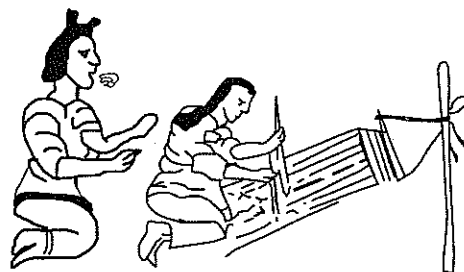
age 4



age 5



age 6



age 14

FIGURE 11.2.

Aztec mothers taught their daughters textile skills from an early age. The spindle, shown in the drawings for ages four, five, and six, has a hank of unspun cotton attached to the top; the bundle of spun thread forms an oval above the half-circle of the spindle whorl. The spindle rests in a ceramic spinning bowl, to keep it steady, and that bowl, in turn, rests on a mat. By age fourteen, this girl has mastered spinning and is also weaving, using a backstrap loom. The curved motifs emerging from the mother's mouth are speech scrolls, the Aztec glyph for speaking. Illustrations from the *Codex Mendoza*, fols. 58r, 60r, redrawn by author.

blewoman.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, princesses do not make their living in door-to-door sales—unless they have utterly failed to achieve the necessary skills that will do credit to them as noblewomen. These values even extended to the afterlife. In the paradise of Tlalocan, “the women were great embroiderers, skilled in work with cotton thread.”<sup>12</sup>

Archaeological evidence of these important skills is limited because wooden looms, and the textiles they produced, are biodegradable and have not survived from Aztec times. In fact, the only type of archaeological evidence for the entire Aztec textile industry is the spindle whorl: a baked clay solid hemisphere, pierced to be placed on a wooden rod (spindle) and serve as a weight to regulate the hand-spinning process (see figure 11.4). Spindle whorls are found in



FIGURE 11.3.

Aztec noblewomen who were part of the same polygynous household looked to the principal or first wife for leadership and worked together on household tasks. "The Noblewoman," in Sahagún 1961, fig. 79, redrawn by author.

all Aztec sites; at Cihuateopan they occurred in all houses, but at a slightly higher frequency in the presumed palace structure. There, 0.24 whorls were found per cubic meter of dirt excavated; at the other houses, the average was 0.17 whorls per cubic meter. These slight differences suggest not that each woman in the palace was spinning more thread than commoners outside it but that the practice of polygyny among nobles resulted in a disproportionately high number of adult women in the palace. More thread was spun there because there were more women committed to that task, and to weaving, and to embroidery.

Such a concentration of textile workers ensured that the palace was a mon-eymaking operation, because cloth was a standardized medium of exchange in Aztec society as well as a product valued for its many uses. Each woven cotton cloak (also known as the cape or mantle, *manta* in Spanish) took about one hundred person-days of labor to produce from raw, unspun cotton.<sup>13</sup> According to accounts preserved from the Aztec Empire, as many as 217,600 cotton garments were required in tribute, including 65,600 plain cloaks.<sup>14</sup> A string of jade beads cost 1,200 cloaks; a jaguar skin cost 40 cloaks.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to being demanded by the government in tribute, cloth was sold in Aztec marketplaces. Industrious women who were skilled spinners and weavers were thus empowered to maintain or advance their own social and economic status and that of their children. Not only could they sell what they pro-

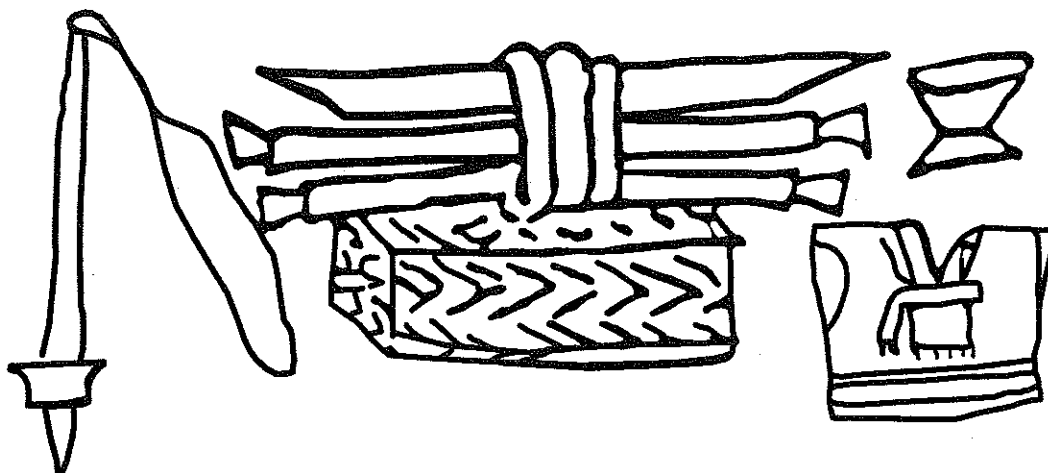


FIGURE 11.4.

An Aztec woman's weaving tools were among her most important possessions. Here, from left, the spindle, equipped with its whorl near the bottom, then the parts to a loom neatly packaged atop a basketry box. At upper right, a spinning bowl, and below it, a decorated huipil (blouse), product of weeks of work. Sahagún 1969, fig. 30, redrawn by author.

duced but, as mentioned above, they could use their textile skills to marry into wealthy households.

Beyond their commercial exchange value, fine textiles had an important prestige value in elite gift exchanges. Lords gave each other these goods as high-level diplomatic gifts and in celebration of baptisms, betrothals, marriages, and funerals.<sup>16</sup> The distinctive designs and valuable finishing materials displayed in palace-produced textiles were subtle reminders of the many hours spent by the high-status women of the royal household in making each of these luxurious pieces. Thus, both economic and social forces encouraged nobles to practice polygyny. As one Spaniard observed around 1540, "Aside from the consideration of the wide distinction and relationship they established by having the women, and also the great support they hereby obtained, it was through the women they possessed a great advantage in having them weave cloth, make clothes and render them many services, since the principal women brought other serving women with them."<sup>17</sup>

### New Spain in the Colonial Period

For the Aztecs, high-level diplomatic gifts included women. The Aztecs assumed that women presented to other high-ranking men would be graciously received,

as would any diplomatic gift, and that the women themselves would cooperate with their new masters. As one Colonial period chronicler put it, the rulers of ancient Mexico had taken "absolutely whichever woman they wanted, and they were given to them as men of power. And, following this usage, many daughters of the rulers were given to the Spaniards, so that they would leave descendants there, in case they should go away from this land."<sup>18</sup> Thus, when Spaniards arrived on the Gulf Coast, native lords presented them with women. However, these women were moving from a culture in which polygyny was standard among the elites into one in which monogamy limited legitimate status to just one wife: all other women with whom a man had sexual contact were assigned one within a range of demeaning statuses (mistress, harlot, prostitute).

In 1519, in one of their first peaceful interactions with the native population, Spaniards under Cortés received twenty women, among them Malinalli (Malinche), whose facility with languages and shrewd ability to size up complicated political situations made her a pivotal character in the dramatic events of the Spanish Conquest.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, Malinalli was herself a noblewoman and in line to inherit not one but two rulerships. Her mother and stepfather had other plans for the disposition of these domains, however, and sold her into slavery instead. The fantastic intersection of her personal misfortune with the collision of two global empires made her life radically different from the Aztec noblewoman's routine of textile production and local political administration. Her story thus helps us understand the chaos of the Early Colonial period, when the ambitious and strong could advance themselves, regardless of the rules of the vanished Aztec Empire or the emergent Spanish colony.

As the Spaniards moved toward the Aztec capital from the Gulf Coast, the rulers of other groups continued to present them with gifts, including women. "When the rulers of Tlaxcala presented noblewomen to the Spanish invaders, they were acting in accordance with the forms of donation of women and matrimonial alliances customary in the Nahua [Aztec] kingdoms."<sup>20</sup> According to a member of the Spanish expedition, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the rulers also lavishly bestowed gold and textiles on the Spaniards.<sup>21</sup>

When Spanish intentions of conquest became clear, elite gift exchanges ceased and hostilities began. After Tenochtitlan was conquered in 1521, and neighboring groups were subdued and brought under Spanish control, a period began in which various strategies of adapting to old and new circumstances co-existed.

### The Establishment of Colonial Period Patterns

Changes in marriage patterns included the imposition of monogamy as the only legal form of marriage. While a few Spaniards had Spanish wives, many

married native noblewomen, a practice that was encouraged in order to secure possession of the large estates held by native noble families.<sup>22</sup> The wealth that such wives brought to the marriage was in land, not textiles.

Native men thought of wealth in traditional terms, and their goal of maximizing their wealth through women and weaving was an obstacle to their conversion to Christianity. Native noblemen who refused to convert (or managed to avoid doing so) could amass huge households of women. As one eyewitness reported,

Some [of these men] had two hundred women and others less, each one as many as suited him. Since the lords and chiefs stole all the women for themselves, an ordinary Indian could scarcely find a woman when he wished to marry. . . . The Indians would contend that the Spaniards, too, had many women and when we friars answered that the Spaniards had them in the capacity of servants, the Indians replied that they had them in the same capacity. It is true that, although the Indians had many women, to all of whom they were married according to their custom, they had them also as a means of profit, because they set all the women weaving cloth, making mantles.<sup>23</sup>

The Aztecs had good reason to see hypocrisy in the Spaniards, who insisted on monogamy yet practiced extramarital relations whenever they desired. However, the Spaniards were writing the social rules, and one of the most stringently enforced was the requirement that the natives be converted to Christianity. Resistance could result in death by torture, but most of the pressure to convert was more subtle. Catholic clergy traveling the countryside often stayed with nobles, and their mere presence encouraged the suppression of polygyny. The native chronicler Chimalpahin wrote that when a Franciscan friar came to stay in the palace of the ruler of Acxotlan, a city-state, the ruler "agreed to give up all but one" of his five wives.<sup>24</sup>

Another means by which the clergy pushed the natives toward accepting Christianity was to interject indigenous concepts and imagery into traditional Christian works. In 1583, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún produced *Psalmody Christiana*, a hymnal in Nahuatl, and described Saint Anne in terms that would guarantee sympathy toward her: she was "a very strong woman. . . . She sought wool and cotton. Many were the capes she made, for well did she know her womanly tasks. . . . [She] took great pains with spinning [and] with weaving. At no time was she idle. She wasted neither day nor night." Saint Clare was similarly depicted.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, some aspects of native culture—such as the finely woven and expensively decorated clothing traditionally worn by perfectly respectable noblewoman—were, in the Early Colonial period, deliberately

associated by the Spanish authorities with harlots.<sup>26</sup> This association may have emerged from the Spanish assumption that Aztec concubinage was rooted in lust rather than in the value the Aztecs placed on the large polygynous household as prestigious and wealth producing.

In addition to insinuating the new religion into the traditional Aztec value system, the Spaniards imposed an entirely new pattern of gender relations. "Priests and Spanish officials alike extolled the patriarchal system as the divine design for humanity. . . . A husband had control over his wife, his children, and any others in the household. Women and children . . . owed him nearly total obedience. . . . His legitimacy rested upon his responsibility to support and look after the well-being of his family."<sup>27</sup> By contrast, the Aztec norms for commoner men and women were complementarity and equivalent legal rights, because in their culture "adult Mexica women were considered to be autonomous beings and not the dependents of men."<sup>28</sup>

Larger trends in the economy of Colonial New Spain undercut the economic strength of Aztec women and their ability to gain some degree of financial security through their skilled labor. Two related introductions—sheep and the treadle loom—transformed the textile industry. Sheep were among the herd animals (together with cattle, horses, and goats) that poured into the central highlands of Mexico, their numbers booming during the sixteenth century as the native human population underwent demographic collapse. In the Mezquital Valley north of Mexico City, the sixteenth-century conquest era saw the numbers of human inhabitants reduced by 90 percent; conversely, by 1565, three decades after their introduction, there were two million sheep.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1530s, small woolen mills (*obrajes*) were constructed in sheep-raising areas, each containing numerous "small European hand-and-foot looms" operated by commoner men.<sup>30</sup> Thus textile production was one of the first sectors in the Colonial Mexican economy in which European methods replaced the Aztec means of supplying an important resource. As part of that shift, Spanish standards of gender behavior were applied, isolating women in the home and increasing their dependence on their husbands as polygyny, which had played an important role in textile production, disappeared.

The changes that the Spanish Conquest wrought on women differed profoundly according to their status. By some measures, the quality of the lives of native women actually became worse. "By the seventeenth century . . . the legal status of Mexica women declined as new notions of separate but unequal spheres developed among the indigenous populations of the Valley of Mexico."<sup>31</sup> The complementarity that had characterized the relations between Aztec commoner



FIGURE 11.5.

Seventeenth-century Aztec noblemen and noblewomen: "The men, bearded and clothed in Spanish style, have wide hats . . . and carry rosary beads in their right hands. This could indicate religious piety or that they were members of a *cofradía* [brotherhood] of the Rosary. . . . One of the men carries a sword, which was a special privilege granted to certain individuals. The women are garbed in pre-Hispanic styles, with huipil [blouse] and skirt decorated in geometric designs. . . . Each woman carries a spindle whorl, supporting cotton fibers, unspun over her left arm, carrying the spindle in her right hand" (Horcasitas and Simons 1974, p. 280). Horcasitas and Simons 1974, fig. 28, redrawn by author.

men and women was eroded as Spanish patterns such as male property inheritance replaced the Aztec custom of leaving an estate to all the offspring from a marriage. Unless they were widowed, married women had little say in the disposition of the family property; nor did they stand to inherit any significant assets from their fathers. These practices would have largely eliminated most women from access to family wealth after a few generations.

The changes forced on Aztec noblewomen depended on their marriages. Those who married Spaniards would find themselves absorbed into European-style life, while those who wed Aztec noblemen would have a lifestyle that merged native and European practices. Of course, no Aztec nobleman could have more than one wife, so each married noblewoman would have had an unchallenged position in her household. She would also have had much less help with household work, though native nobles still had servants. An illustration from a document related to Tepeaca, a town in the Mexican state of Puebla, shows native nobles adapted to two worlds in the first half of the seventeenth century (see figure 11.5). The couples are, of course, monogamous. Their piety and good citizenship are expressed through the conservatism of their clothes and the accoutrements they have chosen to carry. The men are depicted as more acculturated to Spanish ways than are the women, as is to be expected in a culture in which women were discouraged from participation in public life. The men's clothes are embellished with lace and they carry rosaries, which demonstrate their devotion to Catholicism. The women carry hand-spinning tools; the circular object dangling from each woman's right hand is the spindle whorl. In this simple drawing, the women's clothes convey the traditional native style of dress, but a closer look reveals that the artist has taken pains to show embroidered designs—these are not just any native garments but palace-quality clothes.

These couples illustrate the changes produced by more than a century of Spanish rule and by the imposition of Spanish customs. With the conquest, the Aztec noble class was demoted to a position little better than that of commoners. Some individuals took advantage of the upheavals of societal transformation to gain great wealth in the short term, but the overall trends, economic and demographic, crushed most native efforts to advantage themselves. Aztec royal concubines who had been exhorted to become master artisans in order to earn their place in a palace would have been heartbroken to see their granddaughters reduced to the extreme measure of selling vegetables door-to-door. And yet, as the drawing shows, a fortunate few families did survive, and with them the role of the woman of the palace, proving the worth of her womanhood with her spindle and loom.



## Notes

1. Diamond 1997; Sanders 1992; T. Whitmore 1992.
2. For a general discussion, see Evans 2004a, pp. 437–540.
3. Evans 2004b.
4. Pomar [1582] 1941, p. 24.
5. Carrasco 1997.
6. Sahagún 1959, p. 46.
7. Evans 2004b.
8. Durán 1971, p. 244.
9. McCafferty and McCafferty 1999, p. 103.
10. Harvey 1986, pp. 287–88.
11. Sahagún 1969, p. 96.
12. Sahagún 1961, p. 188.
13. Hicks 1994, p. 92.
14. Berdan 2001, p. 184.
15. Gasco and Voorhies 1989, p. 77.
16. Sahagún 1969, pp. 129, 196.
17. Motolinía 1951, p. 246.
18. Muñoz Camargo [1584] 1984, p. 238.
19. Karttunen 1997.
20. Carrasco 1997, p. 103.
21. Díaz del Castillo 1956.
22. Carrasco 1997.
23. Motolinía 1951, p. 202.
24. Schroeder 1991, p. 77.
25. Sahagún 1993, pp. 207 (Saint Anne), 237–41 (Saint Clare).
26. Arvey 1988.
27. Carmack, Gasco, and Gossen 1996, p. 328.
28. Kellogg 1995, p. 95.
29. Melville 1994, pp. 40, 51.
30. West and Augelli 1989, p. 267; Melville 1994, p. 163.
31. Kellogg 1997, p. 124.

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