Several generations of scholars have ardently debated the presence and contributions of Tlaxcalan Natives in the early exploration and colonization of New Mexico. The master narratives of Mexican history had already muddied the waters by scapegoating the Tlaxcalans as collaborators with the Spanish Empire and traitors to the Nation, for the conquest of Mexico would not have succeeded without their help. The Tlaxcalans were one of the key indigenous groups of Mesoamerica to imagine and create a vision of the future with themselves sharing center stage. An enduring paradigm of mestizo culture emerged from Tlaxcala that held true to its core indigenous values. From their ancestral homeland east of the great volcanoes above Mexico City, their cultural influence soon spread far to the north, including Zacatecas, Nueva Vizcaya, Nuevo México, and Texas.

After the consolidation of the historic alliance between Tlaxcala and Spain, and the defeat of the Mexica (Aztecs) in Tenochtitlán in 1521, the Spanish Crown expressed its deep gratitude in a number of ways in subsequent decades. Before embarking on the great enterprise of colonizing the Gran Chichimeca, the vast arid region of northern New Spain, the alliance was renewed with the Capitulaciones de 1591 between Tlaxcala and Viceroy Luis de Velasco II.

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This much celebrated pact confirmed the rights and privileges of the illustrious native allies: the guarantee that “they and their descendants be hidalgos in perpetuity”; the legal protection of their barrios and lands, both inhabited and uninhabited; the protection of their agricultural fields and major and minor livestock; the annulment of tributes, taxes, levies, and obligations of personal service; the right to ride horses with saddles and carry arms; and the exercise of self-government in the form of mandato or decree, in accord with their rights and obligations.¹

The departure of four hundred families for the north in June of 1591 marks what historians and anthropologists have called the “Tlaxcalan Diaspora.”² Since then both allied groups have celebrated the event in triumphalist spirit. The Lienzo de Tlaxcala, which records their history on cloth in pictographic form, omitted the initial resistance to the army of Hernán Cortez, to extol more significantly the collaborations and victories that followed. On the Spanish side, the chronicles of expeditions of exploration and colonization exaggerated the deeds of Spanish protagonists without major recognition of the significant contributions of their indigenous allies, or identification of their particular ethnicities.

The scarcity of documentation of the Tlaxcalan presence in the Spanish colonial project in New Mexico in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is due not only to those omissions but to the destruction of all the documents archived in Santa Fe during the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680. The controversies between historians emerge from that documentary vacuum.

In the expedition of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado of 1540–1542, the majority of native troops were Mexicas and Tarascans.³ The archival search for documents
since then has not yielded much more than a brief list of Tlaxcalan individuals who distinguished themselves with their artisanal talents or their military and ecclesiastical service. Scholarship has uncovered that appreciable numbers of un-named Tlaxcalan settlers accompanied the Spanish settlers in the colonization of the north and the pacification of the south, notably Guatemala.\(^4\)

The first generation of North American historians commonly based their research on New Mexico on an extrapolation from more-complete archives of the foundational documents of the pueblos, villas, and ciudades of the Camino
Real de Tierra Adentro. If a person was identified as a “Mexican Indian,” historians concluded that he or she was probably Tlaxcalan. That ethnic label could just as well have been a simplification of the ethnic diversity of people and communities in the regions of New Spain’s northern frontier.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the ethnic composition of the Indian barrios was more homogenous than in subsequent decades. Zacatecas, the city of don Juan de Oñate, had at least five barrios of Christian Indians: Tlacuitlapan de los Tlaxcaltecas; Mexicalpa de los Mexica; Niño Jesús de los Texcocanos; San José de los Tarascos; and Tonalá Chepinque de los Tarascos. The first three were home to Náhuatl speakers from the central valley of Mexico, and the others were Purépecha speakers from Michoacán. In the following decades the ethnic boundaries between these groups disappeared as the population mixed. By the time of don Juan de Oñate’s expedition settled in New Mexico in 1598, the ethnicity of sizable groups of the “indios mexicanos” who accompanied them is unknown.

At the new capital of Santa Fe, from its foundation in 1609–1610, the Natives established the Barrio de Analco de San Miguel on the south bank of the river opposite the Villa de Santa Fe de San Francisco. In the Náhuatl language of the Mexican Indians who lived there the settlement was a tlaxilacaltin (an integral sector of the altepetl, or new territory) linked to the villa for its defense and support. The Spanish term barrio by definition implied a certain marginalization. According to its Arabic etymology, barri was an extramural settlement just outside a walled city. Across New Spain, several analogous barrios were founded, some with their own names and others named Analco as well, notably in Villa Alta in Oaxaca, Guadalajara, and Durango, the closest city to Santa Fe on the Camino Real.

In his genealogical study of the founding families of New Mexico, richly complemented by recent archival studies by José Antonio Esquibel in Santa Fe and Tomás Hillerkuss in Zacatecas, Fray Angélico Chávez denied the existence of a Tlaxcalan colony in Analco. According to his criterion, the generic term Mexican Indians in the documents only indicates that their inhabitants were from the south and spoke Náhuatl. There were various groups of Náhuatl speakers—Mexicas, Tlatelolcans, Texcocans, Tlaxcalans, Caxcanes, and people of other ethnicities—who used Náhuatl as a lingua franca.

The first document that mentions Analco de San Miguel de Santa Fe is the Memorial of Fray Alonso de Benavides written in 1630. He notes that the villa and its barrio contained three hundred Spanish and mestizos with seven hundred Indians “in their service.” The great majority of these Natives were free and lived close by, on the other side of the river from the villa. The unpublished revision in 1634 reveals even more detail. In this documentary desert, historians are obligated
to scrutinize existing texts and read between the lines to surmise who is who. The letter of Gov. Antonio de Otermín that describes the siege of Santa Fe in 1680 has received ample attention. Other narratives on the same topics emerged over the years, among them Juan de Villagutierre Soto-Mayor’s "Historia de la conquista, pérdida y restauración de el Reyno y Provincias de la Nueba Mexico en la América Septentrional" from 1701 in ten manuscript volumes. There is always the hope of new discoveries of soldier’s diaries and letters, and forgotten reports. To date, however, there has been no exit from this blind and silent alley.

In 1964 the young graduate student Marc Simmons dared to contest the famous denial of Fray Angélico. In great detail, Simmons enumerated all the mentions of Tlaxcalans as groups or as named individuals that he had gleaned from a few documents. In his still-unsurpassed article, he summarizes the different roles the Tlaxcalans played in their great diaspora. In the Spanish colonial enterprise they were colonizers formally established near the missionary centers, where they served as teachers of agriculture and role models to the neophyte Natives; free laborers in the mining regions; auxiliary soldiers; and servants and individual assistants to Spanish explorers and missionaries going to the north.

Simmons concludes that Tlaxcalans must have comprised a majority of the inhabitants of the Barrio de Analco de San Miguel. He cites a Franciscan report, written by a group in 1693, which mentions “the chapel of San Miguel that before [the Rebellion of 1680] served as the parish for the Tlaxcalan Indians.” The article also notes a twentieth-century Franciscan historian who concluded in 1934 that on the basis of other documents the inhabitants of the barrio on the other side of the river from Santa Fe in 1680 were Tlaxcalans.

Few Tlaxcalan families returned to New Mexico with the Reconquest led by don Diego de Vargas in 1693. What was left of the Tlaxcalan identity was submerged in an emergent group of genízaros, Hispanicized Indians of various ethnic groups who populated Analco de San Miguel in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The same process of transformation and submersion is found in all the other Tlaxcalan settlements of northern New Spain in which “the Indians became Mexicans.” In México Profundo, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla identifies the same process of de-indigenization in all of the Mexican nation.

Some researchers have even suggested a kind of “fantasy heritage” stemming from the Tlaxcalan presence in New Mexico and based on legend and the famous map of Santa Fe drawn by Joseph de Urrutia in 1766, with its suggestive and curious entry: “E . . . Town or Barrio of Analco which owes its origin to the Tracaltecas [sic] that accompanied the first Spaniards that came with the Conquest of this Kingdom.”

Archaeologists Elizabeth Oster and James Hare, who were involved in the
Plan de Santa Fe, Nuevo México, José de Urrutia, 1766. Detail of Barrio Analco and San Miguel Church south of the Santa Fe River, image courtesy British Library Add. Ms 17662 M.
latest archaeological studies of the chapel of San Miguel (2004 and 2006), claim that the criteria of the cartographer Urrutia was motivated even then by nostalgia for a Native culture that was already absent in the Santa Fe that he knew.  

The same nostalgia could have motivated don Benjamín Read, a nuevomexicano historian in Santa Fe, in his Historia Ilustrada de Nuevo México of 1911, in which he published a spurious legend on the earliest founding of Analco/Santa Fe by a group of Spanish and Tlaxcalans who were separated from the Coronado Expedition of 1540–1542. The story describes their flight to the sheltered valley of the ruined Tewa Pueblo of “Shell Bead Waters” to begin a new life.  

Santa Fe de San Francisco was later built on the site. Historians have discredited the legend as an exceptionalist invention and tourist promotion to ensure the fame of the chapel of San Miguel de Analco as “the oldest in the United States,” right next door to “the oldest house,” near the “oldest plaza.”  

In the final decades of the twentieth century, Chicano poets followed the same path of longing in their praise of the mestizo heritage. The poem “Barrio de Analco” by Francisco X. Alarcón declares:

The adobes of the oldest barrio in this nation speak Náhuatl:  

Analco  
Analco--  
“On the Other Side of the River”  

El Palacio Real was established on the north side of the Río de Santa Fe  

the south flank was the place assigned where la Raza had to live  

the Tlaxcalans the Indian allies the servants the mestizos  

the backbone the muscle the true hands of the empire  

on the thick walls of San Miguel-- the oldest church in this new land  

I can still hear your prayers half in Náhuatl half in Spanish  

were you aware that going north you were returning to Chicomóztoc  

the mythical land of the Seven Caves-- the original homeland of the Nahua people?
In view of the limitations of extant historical documents, the exit from the blind alley has come from the interdisciplinary methodologies of ethnohistory. The long-term projects of Angel Palerm, Tomás Martínez Saldaña, and their colleagues have been very productive. Lacking a more robust documentary trail, they found other sources of information indicating that the Tlaxcalan Diaspora was supported by the monetary explosion that followed the success of sixteenth-century mining. The large-scale extraction and transport of silver required new systems of agricultural production to feed miners, soldiers, and freighters.

Loyal allies and exemplary agriculturalists, the Tlaxcalans took charge of the adaptation of Mesoamerican agriculture to the deserts of the north. Thus, additional evidence of their presence stems from their agricultural legacy, which is revealed by ethnobotanical methodologies and genetic testing. In terms of social organization, Catholic religious confraternities observed ritual calendars organized around agricultural cycles and managed communal lands and water resources through acequias and their governance.

Another line of research follows the evolution and dissemination of design elements in the artisanal textiles that left Tlaxcala and were developed in Saltillo, and were taken by official contract to New Mexico, where the designs took root. Like the Eye of God, the brilliant central diamond design of these textiles keeps multiplying, watching over, and warming its people, in their places of origin, as well as with new groups like the Diné (Navajo), who also embraced them, as well as the sheep that provided the wool for yarn.

Other traces of Mesoamerican cultural heritage are found in popular speech, which overflow with Nahuatlisms and Náhuatl place names such as Analco and Atrisco; in gastronomy with a new constellation of flavors based on favorite varieties of chile, both fresh and sun-dried; and in a cycle of feasts and rituals expressing themes of conquest and resistance, agriculture, and the blessings of water. Cultural memory also has its somatic dimension in the performances of actors and dancers on the plazas. The documentation of feasts and rituals all
along the Caminos Reales de Tierra Adentro and de los Tejas has made possible a comparative analysis that outlines their cultural genealogy. However the question remains: How to link intangible cultural heritage to history?

Since Herodotus and Thucydides, the progenitors of western history, the goal of history has been a critical investigation of the past and a search for causes and the explanation of consequences. Through that “perpetual present,” in which human experience unfolds, historian Benedetto Croce reached his famous conclusion that “all history is contemporary.”23 By nature, history responds to the needs of the present. Without professional discipline and scientific corroboration, the phenomenon of historical fantasy emerges in its place, responding more directly to collective and personal desire and the perennial pursuit and construction of identity. In his book The Invention of Tradition, E. J. Hobsbawm defines the phenomenon as “a cluster of practices . . . by nature symbolic or ritual, that propose to inculcate certain values and norms of comportment by repetition, that automatically implies a continuity with the past.”24

We finish this inquiry with a brief review of traditions, both imagined and rooted, that complicate the project of tracing an authentic Tlaxcalan legacy in New Mexico. The documentary silence is filled with voices in the twentieth century and beyond. A series of cultural renaissances reclaims and celebrates various cultural heritages linked to the colonial past of New Mexico. Some emerge from the cycle of traditional feasts and others from civic celebrations, anniversaries, and commemorations. Each one deserves and has received in-depth
The legacy of Spanish triumphalism present in New Mexico dates to the territorial era of 1846–1912, which began with the military invasion of the United States and ended with New Mexico’s incorporation as a state in the Union. Although New Mexico had sufficient population to be admitted as a state in 1850 when Congress made it a territory, the political process of statehood dragged on for more than half a century. Impatient with the long wait, territorial governors such as L. Bradford Prince initiated a Hispanophilic discourse to distance the New Mexican population from its Mexican past and promote its more-distant Spanish colonial heritage. Being “sons of the conquistadors” was the best remedy to counter virulent American racism against Mexicans. Observing the same phenomenon of “whitening” in California, journalist Carey McWilliams named it “Spanish fantasy heritage.” The Coronado Quarto-centennial of 1940 celebrated the bloody expedition of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado to New Mexico with no regrets or historical analysis. To this day, the parades of costumed “conquistadors” in the Fiestas of Santa Fe are notorious for their ingenuous and unabashed Spanish triumphalism.

With the Chicano movement of the 1970s, another notable fantasy heritage was born with the arrival of the Neo-Aztecs. Although the pre- and post-conquest codices, particularly the Florentine Codex, richly document the ceremonial costumes of the Aztecs, very little of their original music or choreography has survived. After the success of the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century, the Mexican Ministry of Culture commissioned dance groups to fill the gaps in their new cultural agenda. The Concheros dances revived the armadillo-shell stringed instruments of colonial times and reinvented a Native tradition. Several decades later, groups of dancers broke away in search of pre-Hispanic forms
without “European contamination,” especially in stringed instruments. The new Danza Azteca rejected the stringed instruments in favor of drums and aerophones. With their frenetic movements and minimal dress, these contemporary dancers scandalized the Concheros. North of the border, the Neo-Aztecs created a cultural sensation for the Chicano movement. According to the participants in this cultural renaissance, their tradition dated to ancient times well before the Spanish conquest. Their popularity erased the memory of the cultural legacy of those other Mesoamerican Natives, the Tlaxcalans and others, who actually arrived in the north of New Spain.

In the 1980s, thanks to the cultural activism and research of New Mexico state historian Stan Hordes, the legacy of Crypto Judaism was rediscovered in New Mexico. In colonial times, large numbers of Jewish individuals and families fled the Spanish Inquisition, seeking refuge in northern New Spain. Since they could not reveal their devotions in public, they practiced them in private. In fragmentary form, some devotions survived into the twentieth century, according to Hordes, as Hispanos once again gathered in synagogues in search of the faith of their forebears. A heated debate between historians and anthropologists has emerged over the legitimacy and authenticity of this cultural renaissance. It is not so much a question of an invented tradition as it is an “imagined community,” according to the criteria of Benedict Anderson in his book of the same name. Mexican Jews played an important role in the colonization and development of the same northern regions that the Tlaxcalans settled. These colonial histories still have great resonance in the contemporary imagination.
The last cultural tradition deeply linked to the colonial era is neither invention, nor renaissance, nor imagined community. In New Mexico and all the regions of the north is found a double cycle of *morismas y matachines* (traditional folk celebrations shared between indigenous, mestizo, and Spanish Mexican groups). The oldest is the morisma, the famous and many-faceted dramatic plays of Christians and Moors that address the themes of conquest and reconquest dating to the eighth century in the Iberian Peninsula. The dances,
skirmishes, harangues, and pitched battles remind the participants of their long cultural memory, which is as corporeal as it is cerebral. After the Conquest of Mexico, Cortez organized pageants of Moors and Christians in Tlaxcala to celebrate great victories in Europe and to demonstrate the superiority of his arms and animals over those of the Indians or apostate enemies.\textsuperscript{31} Juan de Oñate did the same in his entrada or entry into New Mexico eighty years later. From the first contacts between Spaniards and Tlaxcalans, historical events and cultural processes have been dramatized for political and ritual purposes. The official transcripts of triumph and evangelization are contested with hidden transcripts of resistance and redemption. In New Mexico, the morismas were updated to substitute Moorish opponents with the new Comanche
enemies of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{32} In Comanche dances, as in those of the Matachines, the texts of the harangues and battle speeches become choreography—a play of symbols with profound histories behind them.

With a scarcity of documents, the Tlaxcalan legacy can be traced in the agriculture that they took to the north, the geometric imagination of their weavings, and a complex cultural heritage that keeps evolving to accommodate the dreams and ambitions of their many descendants. What cannot be located in paper and ink can be glimpsed in the fields, the kitchens, the looms, and the plazas of the north. These are the places in which the Tlaxcalan legacy is enacted and memorialized.

NOTES


3. Richard Flint, \textit{Documents of the Coronado Expedition, 1539–42: They were not Familiar with His Majesty, nor did they Wish to be his Subjects} (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 164.


