

Review

Berthold Riese ed., *Crónica Mexicayotl. Die Chronik des Mexikanertums des Alonso Franco, des Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc und des Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin. Aztekischer Text ins Deutsche übersetzt und erläutert*, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag 2004 (= Collectanea Instituti Anthropos, 44). 425 pp.

Berthold Riese presents a new edition of the Nahuatl written chronicle of the city of Tenochtitlan generally known as *Crónica Mexicayotl*, together with a German translation. The original text and the translation are given in parallel columns, covering 314 out of 425 pages that make up the book. The edition is enriched with a total of 1739 footnotes referring to problems of both reading the original and translating, with many of them giving hints on literary and historical topics that go far beyond the text. There is an introduction (pp. 12–31), a bibliography of 172 titles (pp. 353–69), an extensive register of Nahuatl terms covering all the person and place names within the chronicle as well as selected items of natural beings and Nahua culture (pp. 371–404), some manuscript reproductions (p. 407–19) and three maps that zoom in from the central Mexican basin into the western lake shore and further into the quarter distribution and main city roads of Tenochtitlan (p. 423–25).

The book offers indeed an amount of information. The question is: why another edition of *Crónica Mexicayotl* (henceforth *CM*), and why a German translation? We will treat both questions separately. The first one has in its scope the fact that there is an edition from the same original manuscript of *CM*¹ (together with an English translation) published by Anderson and Schroeder in 1997.² The translation is a different matter. The point here is both

¹ University of Cambridge Library, UK, British and Foreign Bible Society stock, no. 374, vol. 3, fols. 18r to 63r. This is the most complete of the extant manuscripts, probably written by Chimalpahin's own hand, at some point between 1609 and 1631 (Riese, p. 18).

² Somewhat significantly, the book is mentioned by Riese (introduction, p. 19), but it is not cited in the bibliography, even though it is in fact made use of, on numerous occasions. Riese comments upon Anderson/Schroeder's translation in notes 318, 529, 619, 687, 818, 877, 880, 902, 1308, 1311, 1376, 1377, and probably others.

the attention and respect given to the Nahuatl original and the stylistics aimed at in the translation's target language independently.

Riese cuts *CM* into pieces. He maintains the paragraph divisions introduced by the text's first editor (and Spanish translator), León 1949, and further divides the inherited 374 paragraphs into smaller parts by an (abc) numbering.³ The chunks that result from this splitting are at times one sentence long. This kind of splitting certainly facilitates parallel reading of both the translation and the original (in fact, it might stem from the translation process itself), it facilitates citation and retrieving, but it makes the text look like a canon of laws which it is not.

As the Nahuatl and the German text run in parallel columns, the layout even reminds of lyrics, again inappropriately. The overall aspect is dominated by German intermediate titles which head both columns and thus structure both texts. The titles are introduced by the editor.⁴ They seize hold of *CM* and are therefore illegitimate. Being 266 in number, nearly one per page, the intermediate titles do not even give any idea of how the text runs, as becomes clear from the content table (pp. 7–11), where they are all listed. The original folio lines introduced into the running text may have been important for the editor while translating. They are of no use to the reader. Giving them helps to destroy the original's rhythm.

On the other hand, Riese downgrades the original divisions of the text, rendered both by the manuscript's layout and by textual devices. *CM* has no title in the modern sense of the word, it just starts right away with an account of the most salient event it refers to, the foundation of the city. This account covers 20 lines in the original, the ultimate nine lines being progressively shorter and centered. This clearly *is* the title, in the author's sense.⁵ Next, the proper text starts, saying “Yz catqui nican vmpehua” ‘Here it is, here begins’, and gives preliminary considerations on what's going to be told, up to (fol. 20r). Here is the next break, signaled out in Spanish (“Aqui comienza la chronica y antiguedad de los mexicanos”) and confirmed in Nahuatl. The generally accepted title *Chronica Mexicayotl* stems from the first lines of this part.

³ León's edition comes from a different manuscript copy, the one located at the BNF Paris, FM (Fonds Méxicain), ms. 311b.

⁴ In fact, Riese says literally he has *created* them (“geschaffen”, p. 29).

⁵ The text is generally ascribed to Chimalpahin, even though authorship is ‘layered’, with Chimalpahin certainly being the last writer who worked on it.

The text starts again a little ahead (fol. 21r), where the very same words are used as compared to the beginning: “Yz catqui nican on pehua”. This part ends on (fol. 36r), when the city is finally founded, although there is no colophon, no open indication of an ending. The final chunk – in fact, the second main part of *CM*, which runs up to (fol. 63r) – starts with an extensive chronological consideration, a description of calendars, Mesoamerican and Christian. ⁶ Riese rules out all these dividing lines by the way he edits text – he does not ignore them. The point is that the overall composition seems ‘unorganic’ to him, so he adjusts it (p. 14).

The editor holds that the first part of *CM* belongs to the event-structured type of wandering sagas (as opposed to time-structured, p. 14). He classifies the second part as a kings’ list (“Königsliste”, p. 15). He specifies that *CM*, henceforth stands out within this genre as completely refraining from conquest reports and refraining largely from chronology, and that it insists on genealogy instead, both pre-European and colonial. Riese further points to *CM*’s preference for speeches and dialogues. This is certainly interesting. It even challenges the given genre attribution. As we said before, the phrase *Chronica Mexicayotl* is to be found in the text, and as such, suggests a structure that would follow chapters. In fact, there is a ‘first chapter’ (*Capítulo achto*, the only one chapter mark, p. 49). However, a few lines further down, we find a marker of the typical prehispanic and colonial historical genre developed by Mesoamerican groups, generally called “annals”: the term *tlapobualli* “count”, *yn iuh neztica yntlapobual huebuetque* (p. 50), this is “as it becomes clear [as it is revealed] in the count of the old people”. The word *tlapobualli*, as Riese states, probably corresponds to *xiubtlapobualli*: “the year count”.⁷

The prehispanic annals genre was maintained well into the eighteenth century. It survived in a more independent manner from Spanish authorities than other Nahuatl written texts. In the case of annals, considering it a well known practice among several Mesoamerican *altepetl* or cities, we realize that “[a] near universal of Nahuatl historical writing is the inclusion of each event under its corresponding year reckoned by the indigenous calendar, creating a work in which the equivalents of chapters are the successive year units. The year is prominently marked and serves as a heading” (Lockhart 1992: 377).

⁶ See Ruwet 1997, p. 22.

⁷ We find it again as *xiubtlapobuallamatl* “register/codex of the year count”, on pp. 81, 100, 115, 119.

The structure of *CM* does correspond in general terms to a chronological organization of narration.⁸ It may happen that not every year is cited referring to a historical event. On the other hand, there are some year entries for which there is more than one event registered, for example, *ce calli xihuitl 1285 años*, “year one house, 1285 years”, on page 104, and then again on page 110. Both situations can be expected to happen in annals.

Chimalpahin mentions his own investigations into the matter of the text, and marks on two occasions additions or corrections he did (fol. 29v and 30v, p. 115 and 119). It is obvious though that he intervened more often. We observe critique of sources and doubts on certain informations, in sum, a layering of facts for their evidence, on numerous occasions.⁹ Still different from such doubts on informations given are frequent indications of *lacunae*, of information *lacking*, more often than not the names of females. This kind of evidentiality remarks would be an interesting topic to investigate in both colonial and pre-colonial annals.

We now turn to the part of the translation. The editor’s German is uncomfortably unmodern. This is an impression one gets from the very title of book and it is not deceived as one keeps on reading. There are terms that suggest an antique flavor pretendedly stemming from the text, some hardly accessible to the contemporary reader.¹⁰ The author misses standard German in still different senses.¹¹ For the most part, these solutions may seem justified from the Nahuatl language, but they still repel the reader, which to our understanding is not the aim of translations. In fact, Riese’s project is to *imitate* Nahuatl word formation in German (“nachzubilden”, p. 28), and he thinks to have *enriched* German vocabulary (“bereichert”, p. 28). This must be so because he says to have avoided *unGerman imitations* (“undeutsche Nachbildungen”, p. 28). Translating is not a license for neologizing, though.

⁸ Just to mention the length of the time period: the year count starts on p. 50 (Riese’s edition), the first year being 1064. The last one is 1579, on p. 345. There are about sixty year entries in between.

⁹ See pp. 110, 112, 119, 172, 192, 194, 263, 282, 285 and others.

¹⁰ No one accepts as contemporary standard items ‘sich beweiben’ [to wed/literally ‘to get oneself wifed’] and paradigm (p. 125); ‘Kebsweib’ [concubine] and paradigm (p. 241). ‘Freien’ [to wed, once more] (p. 220, 250) is obsolete in the sense of ‘to wed’ (if not in that of ‘to woo’).

¹¹ “Buben” [boys] is regional (p. 266), it translates *oquichtin* which is ‘males’, not ‘boys’); „ist schon gut” [that’s OK] is colloquial (even though it translates *ca ye qualli* literally, p. 130, 165, 180); “machte dieser Miyahuaxochtzin ein Kind” [literally, made her have a child] (p. 191) and “als die Mexikaner erledigt wurden” [when the Mexicans were processed/finished off/executed] (p. 290) are quite colloquial, if not vulgar, “Prinzen” [princes] (translation of *tlabtocapipiltin* [the ruler’s children, the ruler’s sons], p. 290) and “diese adlige Dame” [this noble or aristocratic lady] (translation of *ynin cibuapilli*, p. 284, 290) remind of fairy tales.

tollibtic [“in the middle of sedges”, “amongst sedges”] is translated by ‘Röhricht’ and *acaibtic* [“in the middle of reeds”, “amongst reeds”] by ‘Binsicht’.¹² This is certainly appropriate in terms of Nahuatl derivational morphology,¹³ but still, the second term does not exist in German and it sounds ill. ‘Schilf’, [“rush”] would have done perfectly. *Catca* is translated by ‘weiland’, used as uninflected adjective postposed to (proper) nouns, while in fact it is an obsolete adverb.¹⁴ ‘Der er/sie war’ [that he or she was] would have been fine.

The editor argues in the introduction that German Aztec philological standards (as set up by Walter Lehmann in 1938) are superior to those of other nations (p. 28). He subscribes to these standards, but only insofar as text splitting and derivational fantasies are concerned. With regards to syntax he prefers to refrain from the licenses of ‘that poor tradition’ and use German grammar straight away. (“Von dieser schlechten Tradition mache ich mich frei [...]”, p. 28). This is an arbitrary option. From our point of view, both morphology and syntax of the source language should have been respected insofar as the target language offers convenient means. If it does not, different target language resources are in order. Riese reinvents German morphology, but less than exhausts German syntax, missing the limit in both cases.

There are arbitrary options in the edition of the Nahuatl original as well. *CM* is a text whose orthography and word composition are somewhat unstable considering Nahuatl writings elaborated during the seventeenth century. The criteria Riese uses for its transcription, go beyond the discretionary powers the editor of a text may have. It is generally accepted that missing letters should be supplied or abbreviations spelled out. However, it is not common to modify word units and orthography.¹⁵ The most noticeable case in *CM* refers to verbs in perfect tense, compounded by the “o” prefix particle, the personal pronoun, the verb stem, and its ending. All these elements are conventionally written as a single word, e.g.: *onitlapix* “I kept (something)”; *onitenotz* “I called (someone)”. The key tense elements are the “o” prefix and the ending of the verbal stem. In *CM*, Riese systematically separates the prefix particle “o”

¹² See p. 109, 138, 140, 141, 144, 145, 155, possibly other passages.

¹³ *Röhricht* [reed bed] is formed on *Robr* [reed] by means of the suffix *-icht*, in a somewhat obsolete German, licensed in poetry. Riese gets *Binsicht* out of *Binse* [rush], again obsolete in current speech (beyond phraseology), by the same procedure.

¹⁴ See p. 71, 91, 205, 216 and others.

¹⁵ It is a different situation when the edition of a manuscript is accompanied by a full gloss of its phonological or morphological elements. It may be that we now have a better understanding of the composition principles that underlie Nahuatl word formation than a few decades ago. But this is not a reason for modifying the standards in which the text was written.

from the rest of the word unit: *o momiquilico* [he passed away] (p. 71), *o quimilhui* [he spoke to] (p. 79).¹⁶ He separates word elements although it is not appropriate to do so, as in transitive verbs, *yn tla buelmati* [they like it] (p. 71) *yn amo tla buelmati* (they do not like it) (p. 72). *tla* is usually bound to the verb, due to its function signaling the transitivity of the verb. Riese argues he facilitates the reading comprehension of the text and adheres to modern transcription criteria, without specifying references, phonological or morphosyntactical guidelines (p. 25-27).¹⁷

On the other hand, there are unclear criteria for managing two of the most important morphological and stylistic features of Nahuatl: the honorific system used in noun and verbal clauses, and the use of couplets as metaphors.

At times, an adjective is used for translating honorifics, “verehrter” [respectable, honorable];¹⁸ this probably is the best choice, considering that there is no morphological equivalent in German for the honorific system. It should have been maintained all along the translation of the text. However, more often than not, there is no trace of such affective or respectful mark in the translation.

Couplets (two terms or phrases for one referent), are cut by introducing (normally, but not always in parenthesis) a copulative conjunction which then happens to establish two different referents (p. 87, 90, 91, 96, 103, 148, 241). Sometimes the couplets are translated literally and a footnote clarifies their metaphoric meaning. We then have *yn intlillo yn intlapallo* (p. 36) [their black colors, their red colors], translated as “mit ihren schwarzen Farbe, mit ihrer roten Farbe”. Footnote 59 clarifies the metonymic meaning which is ‘painting or writing (the codex)’. Further on we find: *yn ibiyotzin yn itlahtoltzin* (p. 39) [his respected breath, his respected word], translated by “der Befehl, das Wort”, which is “the order/command, the word”. Metaphorically speaking, “der Befehl” alone would do as a translation for both terms, at least such is the meaning of the couplet. However, it does not correspond to the original word in the couplet. It is not clear when or why the editor is translating literally and supports his choice by explaining it further in a footnote as is the first example, and when or why he translates partially, metaphorically, without further comment.

¹⁶ See pp. 33, 35, 42, and others.

¹⁷ Other examples of arbitrary word division are: *yn chichimeca tlalpan* (p. 74) [the land of the Chichimeca]; *chalca tlalpan* [the land of the Chalco people] (p. 115), where we would expect the inhabitants name to be bound to *tlalpan*, making “Chichimecatlalpan”, “Chalkatlalpan”.

¹⁸ This choice was used a few times. See pp. 40, 47.

Regarding syntax, the editor does not always offer a choice that would avoid ungrammatical German sentences, but still remain close to the original.¹⁹ Take for example one of the sentences on p. 37: *quitotibui quitenehuatibui ybuan yn oc yollizque yn tlacatizque yn mexicana tepilhuan yn tenochca tepilhuan* [They will give testimony of it, will narrate about it with pride, those who will still live, those who are still to be born, the children of the Mexica, the children of the Tenochca], which is translated as: “Und die Kinder der Mexikaner, die Kinder der Tenochkaner, die noch (später) leben werden, geboren werden, werden, es sagen und bezeugen.” The word order could have been, similar to the English translation: “Es werden dies sagen, dies bezeugen, die die später leben werden, die die noch geboren werden, die Kinder der Mexica, die Kinder der Tenochca.” This structuring is not only loyal to the original, perfectly possible in the target language, but still has the advantage of anticipating the verb, which in Riese’s translation is hard to retrieve because of the extended subject-topic sequence.

Printing errors are not rare.²⁰ More often than not, errors are grammatical in nature (they apparently stem from revisions carried out imperfectly).²¹ There are three of them on the first page of the book. There are erroneous capitals, separations of words and – most annoying – commas in the translation that in German make no sense at all.²²

¹⁹ We are aware that Nahuatl has a flexible word order due to its various composition and incorporation processes, as well as possible differences in emphasis or focus, which can be expressed either in a predicate-subject or subject-predicate word order.

²⁰ True errors are [the actual printing comes first, in italics] *Charkteristika*/Charakteristika (p. 21), *volkalisches*/vokalisches (p. 24), *grundsätzlich*/grundsätzlich (p. 25), *kumulativ*/kumulativ (p. 29), *vernichtern*/vernichten, (p. 106), *Huitzilopchtli*/Huitzilopochtli (p. 107), *Röricht*/Röhricht (p. 144), *gmeint*/gemeint (p. 191), *Märtyreres*/Märtyrers (p. 290).

²¹ Examples of this type are *Titelblättern*/Titelblätter, *eingegrenzter*/eingegrenzte, *einleitenden*/einleitende (all on p. 13), *keine erkennbaren nützlichen*/keine erkennbar nützlichen (p. 23), *für sinnvollen gehaltenen*/für sinnvoll gehaltenen (p. 25), *Ko-Author*/Ko-Autor (p. 14), *der Kopftier*/das (p. 93, not an established word), *der Älteren*/der Ältere, *im dem Jahr*/in dem Jahr (both on p. 115), *zu unsere Tochter*/unserer (p. 178), *genannten*/genannte (p. 247), *hatten*/hatte (p. 252, below), *Kinde*/Kinder (p. 260), *des fünfte*/fünften (p. 277), *Männern*/Männer (p. 293), *Jahren*/Jahre, (p. 329).

²² Some examples are : *sie/Sie* (p. 30), *Entsprossen*/entsprossen (p. 299), *nocheinmal*/noch einmal (p. 104), and just two examples for ‘wild commas’: „Denn, wir, kommen, deinen ehemaligen Untertanen, ihn, den Nachkommen des Opochtli Iztahuatzin, das Kindlein, unsere Halskette, unsere Quetzalfeder, dessen Name an dritter Stelle Itzpapalotl ist, den Acamapich, zu holen.“ (p. 178), „Wir werden, seine Tochter, namens Miyahuaxihuitl rauben.“ (p. 197).

Other omissions deal with the references cited, right the first reference, an article by Riese himself, is not in the bibliography or is cited there incorrectly.²³ The Thouvenot 1992 online edition of *CM* is not cited, just as Anderson/Schroeder 1997 is not.

The edition and translation of *CM* is not just the texts. It is a full introduction into the history of central Mexico. There are numerous sources both pictographic, and alphabetic cited and commented throughout the book, which allow to construe a broad picture of prehispanic times and the first decades of the colonial period of Mexico.

Günter Zimmermann (1963, 1965), edited some of Chimalpahin's works, without translating them. That edition was used for sure by scholars who had a full knowledge of the Nahuatl language. Still, those were probably a minority. The translation of *CM* into German will provide to German reading scholars a direct access to a text acknowledged as a master piece of Nahuatl colonial historical writing. The splitting of the text is in fact useful for a public not entirely familiar with Nahuatl.

CM is a first hand text written for other Nahuatl speakers and readers, not so much for the colonial authorities. Chimalpahin selected and corrected information from sources he had access to, and he was truly an interpreter, a knowledgeable person of both, the prehispanic pictographic, and the colonial alphabetic writing systems. The title of the text, as it is registered in the first folios, *Chronica Mexicayotl*, partially in Spanish, partially in Nahuatl, witnesses the contrasts and ambivalence of the second half of the sixteenth century in Mexico. But precisely in order to give access to the shifting cultural situation that underlies the text and to Nahua culture in the first place, a translation along different lines would have been desirable. The point is not that Riese prefers nineteenth century stylistics. The point is that he prefers nineteenth century methodology, holding that in a sense, things antique come close to be the same everywhere. For the reviewers Nahua culture – including Nahua culture of the sixteenth century – is mainly alien, unfamiliar, but it is not past.

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²³ See p. 13, note 1, cf. p. 366.

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