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Author

Restall, Matthew

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The Trouble with Andrés Mexia: Sixteenth-Century Documents in Yucatec Maya

Matthew Restall

1. THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

The historiographical golden age of Yucatan was instigated in the 1930s and 1940s by the Carnegie Institution's funding of France Scholes and Robert Chamberlain, who worked on sixteenth-century Spanish documentation, Eric Thompson, who worked a little on everything, and Ralph Roys, whose fifty articles, monographs and books published between 1920 and 1965 made him, in Thompson's words, "by far the greatest gringo scholar in Maya"¹

Roys was the first and only scholar to acquire a knowledge of Yucatec Maya sufficient to transcribe and translate a substantial corpus of colonial literature in that language, from medical and botanical tracts to the obfuscating *Ritual of Bacabs* and the *Books of Chilam Balam*. The sum of these efforts is an ethnography of the Yucatec Maya, yet Roys never produced an analytical synthesis or *magnum opus* that adequately reconstructed Maya society in the colonial period.²

An example of the extent, and the limitation, of Roys' contribution lies in his transcription and translation of the 250-year municipal records of the town of Ebtun, published fifty years ago; documents similar to those presented below. This was an invaluable gift to future scholars. But Roys' image of the Yucatec Maya as simply a "tribal group", rather than a collection of complex entities (of which Ebtun was one), symbolizes the conceptual infancy of his analysis.

That these sociopolitical entities have still yet to be clarified, let alone mapped in the way that Charles Gibson did with the *altepetl* of the

Matthew Restall received his B.A. in History from Oxford University. He received an M.A. in History from the University of California, Los Angeles, where he is currently a doctoral candidate working on colonial Yucatan.

Valley of Mexico,³ is indicative of the failure of the new generation of Mayanist scholars to build upon the pioneers' foundations. Two important works of the early 1970s did much to unveil social and economic patterns in later colonial Yucatan,⁴ but their perspective remained Spanish.

A decade later Inga Clendinnen produced an award-winning study that purported to present both Spanish and Maya viewpoint of the Conquest, but which ended up focusing its discussion on Diego de Landa and his persecution of the Maya in the 1560s, using Spanish Language sources. Nancy Farriss' impressively substantial analysis of *Maya Society Under Colonial Rule* largely succeeded in achieving what it seemed to intend to: to do for Yucatan what Gibson had done for the Valley of Mexico. Significantly, Gibson read no Nahuatl; Farriss implies a knowledge of Yucatec Maya, but the book bears meager evidence of it, relying rather on Spanish ecclesiastical records.⁵

The point here, of course, is not to find fault with the work of accomplished scholars (one might aspire oneself to such heights), nor to criticize the use of sources (one must use what there is), but to indicate the historiographical lacunae of this time and region. The "Spanish observed only part of what the Indians were up to, and understood even less."⁶ We have only scratched the surface of three centuries of Maya society, its institutions, its culture, its *mentalité*. We may never be able to uncover the details revealed in Europe at this time, for example, by the Annales school. But ethnohistorical scrutiny must begin somewhere.

II. THE DOCUMENTS

These three documents in Yucatec Maya are from three small, indigenous towns near Peto, in the southern tip of the modern Mexican state of Yucatan. The documents concern a Spanish priest, one Andrés Mexia, two being complaints against him (from Xecpes, 1578, and Tixmeuac, 1589) and the third essentially being an apology for previous complaints (from Tetzal, 1589).

All three documents ended up in the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City⁷, in the files of of the Inquisition, implying that a case was eventually brought before the Holy Office against Andrés Mexia, and all relevant documentation gathered together as evidence. Clearly there were other documents related to the activities of this particular priest, but unless they come to light, we shall never know the outcome of the case.

The fact of the existence of these documents is indicative of the rapid adoption of the Spanish legal process by the Maya for their own ends (as was the case with the Nahuas), despite the significant expense of litigation. The abundance of Maya representation of civil suits of the colonial period can be partly attributed to the fact that Maya legal fees were paid out of the one-real head tax that funded the *Tribunal de Indios*; but the tribunal was not established until 1591, shortly after the filing of the complaints below.

1. Complaint against the priest Andrés Mexia by the town of Xecpes, 1578⁸

ten cen bataben don gaspar cupul yetel ah cuch cab canche y.⁹ cuch cab pot y. cuch cab >uc¹⁰ y. unucil uinicob intoc kinab hex ca yum padre andres mexia mabal tach u >aic ca paxab uaye maixbal ca conahti uaye xecpes maixnan uinic utuchitah taho baxci qui maixnan cacaticti hex ca yumil padre xane tibilix lic y u[t]zcinic toon licix u tzaic misa kechaante uaye licix u caput cicic palal baix a thancilob hex tamuc cauiih xane maixtan y ulel tumenel uiih yok manan uinic uay ti cah tumenel uihe laix u chum matan yulel utibon uaye tumenel mananil hanal toon maixbal bin katzabti uhandante hex ca yumil padre ca maixthan cacuxilti tibilix u kah toon maix bal lic ka caticixam lai uchun bin >ibtah y. unucil uinicob uchbal y oheltabal tibilil ka puccial y icnal ca yumil padre haili uaye ka>ib tah tu kinil sant lorencu u lahun petz ukinil agosto -

in than cen don gaspar cupul don gaspar cupul gonzalo uyau francisco poot francisco hol escribano martin tzuc alonso cupul juan canche francisco nahuat maestro

I who am batab, don Gaspar Cupul, and the regidor Canche and the regidor Pot and the regidor Tzuc, and the principales, are gathered. As to our father Padre Andrés Mexia, he is not in the habit of giving us music, nor do we buy from him here in Xecpes. Neither does he send a man [...]. Why? For we ask nothing of him. Our father the Padre is good and does well by us, but he says the mass here in a twisted fashion, and makes the boys clean [?] a second time. What do you say? As to the question of eating: he also doesn't come because of that. In other words, there's nobody here in the town because there's no food. This is the reason why his goodness does not come to us here, because we have no food, nor will we give him any. Our father the Padre, he doesn't

remember us, although we lead good lives. This is the reason that I, along with the principales, have written, so that the goodness of our hearts vis-à-vis our father the Padre be known. That's all. Here we write on the day of San Lorenzo, the tenth day of August.

This is my statement, don Gaspar Cupul

[the signatures:] don Gaspar Cupul, Gonzalo Uayu, Francisco Poot, Francisco Hol escribano [notary], Martin Tzuc, Alonso Cupul, Juan Canche, Francisco Nahuat maestro.

2. Complaint against the priest Andrés Mexia by the town of Tixmeuac, 1589¹¹

Dios ca nan ti cech ti mam u lah ukinil cech caya yumilile uohel te uay tihuloon tixmiuace yicnal almehen don pedro xiu gobernador uay ti cah caix ti yalah toon akubenthanil taualahtie cila maecool cati cuyah yutzil athan cicithantabac dios avokol licil avanticoon hex than ta valah ti ti almehen ti yalah toon tulacal bai tatzolah ti heva cakot ba cacah tech yoklal dios ca tibay avan toon licil aua lici uatab citan uchuc cutz cinic ca>aic uhah lay ubeel padre mexia lic ubeel tic ti cah bay licil avubic ucanile hevac >ib te hunti tac yum ti padre frai hernando de supuerta ca u tzac ubeel tic hibal lic calic yokol padre la hehix tulacal tu>i cool caix aualab ti yohil auhun catal cabac huntul juez frayle tumenel heuac he cathan cech yume caix a>ibte ychil auhun ti coon ti ubah missa uay tixmiuace uahmaatex yax oc coon ti xpianoil uaye lay na tah oklal licil coctic cabateh caa>oclukez colah cech yume uayon yan tixmiuace benel ca cah ti oxtzucon petu tah>iu titzal uayon yan yetel canucilob hayli tac >ib tahtech ti okinal Domingo uaye caix a >ab a >ib yumil tupach uinic cabins tiho lah lic camuctic uaye caix a >ib te uhahil athan cubi

hahi lae he tilic u >aic confesar ti chuplalobe tilic yalic uamatan a>ab aba tene matan y>ab confesar tech lay licil u payic chuplalti matan u>ab confesar ti uamatan utalel chuplal tamuk upakic ukeban chuplalob matan u>ab confesarti

lay uhahil tulacal baix ucoilob tu>acan chuplal xan ucanan tech dios tix maxul ukinil cech cayume A palilon ti don Juan cool go^r petu don Francisco Utz tah>iu g^{or} alcaldesob tulacal

God keep you on this the last day[...]¹². You, our father know we come to Tixmeuac with the nobles ¹³. When don Pedro Xiu, governor here in the town,

told us your greetings, you told him we saw[...]¹⁴. We are persuaded that your words are good, God will be blessed, you know how you protect us. Here is the word you gave to the noble: he told us all that you arranged for him here. We are asking you, for the sake of God, will you protect us, as you say you will, so that we can carry out our desire to tell the truth about the deeds of padre Mexia and what he does in the town. So that you will thus hear the story of it, we write this letter to the father padre frai Hernando de Sopena. Whether he does something about what we say about this father, which is all true[...]¹⁵, what you said in your letter, that a judge, who is a friar, should come to investigate because here is our word to you, father, just as you write in your letter to us that he heard mass here in Tixmeuc[...]. Above all our Christianity is the reason that we place ourselves before you, so that you will satisfy our hearts, you our father. We who are here in Tixmeuc, we are coming to Oxtzucon, Peto, Tahdziu, and Tetzal, we who are here with our principales. Thus we wrote to you at dusk on Sunday. Give us your writing, father, to the men we are taking there to Tiho¹⁶. We will wait here. You write the truth. We will hear your word.

#¹⁷ Truly listen. When he gives confession to women, he then says, if you do not give yourselves to me, I won't confess you. This is how he incites the women. He does not give the women confession, if they don't come to him. Until they recompense him with their sins, he doesn't confess the women. That is the whole truth of how the women are made to prostitute themselves. May God Eternal¹⁸ keep you, our father. We who are your children [the signatures:] don Juan Cool governor of Petu, don Francisco Utz governor of Tahdziu, all the alcaldes.

3. Statement made to the Priest Andrés Mexia by the town of Tetzal, 1589¹⁹

#hele tu bolonpiz u kinil u março yabil 89 a^os hun molun ten cen don P^o ppol gov^{or} uay ti cah tetzal yetel Ju^o hau allde y. Ju^o ek P^ocach Regidoresob uay ti cah lae catuhcinah uhuhil cachahil²⁰ utzan canohxibob tulacalob yetel tukabaob lic calic tohcol yethun ca yumti padre andres mexia cura uay tu provinçiail petu caualkaçah cabati ualkeçalix ubatoon yoklal yanix ubocaltun yethun cuchi tumenel chipulchi y. canyectzil laytah oklal u keyahun talkinil ca >ibtah yhunil ti halach uinic tihoo tuxchii ca canatah talanil u cantabal upectzil padresob timachacan uhahil tumenel can pectzil tayic benelix ca cah tiho cuchi caualkazon uay to cah lae caix cacantah y. ca yum kuluinicil

yet p^e. ca catuhcinah col yet. yoklae xpianoilon²¹ mahunah caleppolae yetel
 yet hibal ticalah yokol p^e lae cuchilae ti maiibe maixbal cakatti maix than
 yokol xan tumen ti manii lae Hohil lic caliclae mabahun bin cakaheztu caten
 tumenel mabal cohel xan chembelcan xectzil y. chupulchi²² bay uthan
 canohxibob tulacal yokhahlae ca>ibtah cakabahlae yetel cayum kuluinicil y.
 uhahan kuluinicilob uts^oil - don p^o pol gov^{or} Ju^o Hau alldé Ju^o ek p^o cach
 regidoresob di^o mo escribano

Here on the 9th of March of the year 89 years ²³, we are gathered together in the town of Tetzal, I who am don Pedro Pol, the governor, with the alcalde Juan Hau, and the regidores Juan Ek and Pedro Cach. We assert the truth of the world of all our elders and their names. We truly declare our hearts. Our father, padre Andrés Mexia, we reconcile ourselves to him and he likewise reconciles himself to us. For there was formerly bad feeling on our part because of women's talk²⁴ and the telling of tales, for which reason he reprimanded us. For this reason we wrote to the halach uinic in Tiho²⁵. Through a messenger we explained that telling tales about priests is a bad thing, when their truth is not manifest. It is because of telling tales that formerly we were going to Tiho and returning here to the said town, when we told our father the kuluinicil²⁶ and the padre, with whom we certified it, that because of Christianity we gave up our anger with him and that which we formerly said regarding the father. Nor do we request anything of him. Nor do we have anything else to say about it, because it's all past. We say the truth. Nothing is going to be remembered by us the second time also, because we know nothing about it, only tale-telling and women's words. Thus are the words of our elders; therefore we write our names with our father the kuluinicil and the other leaders and witnesses: don Pedro Pol governor, Juan Hau alcalde, Juan Ek, Pedro Cach regidores, Diego Mo escribano.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The first two documents are largely typical of many complaints against local priests that appear in the indigenous language records of Central Mexico, and are now surfacing in the records of the New Spanish peripheries, such as Yucatan.²⁷ The obvious problem with this form is the lack of balance; still one does not have to take the accusations at face value to make use of them. Supportive and comparative information can facilitate analysis.

For example these two complaints compare interestingly with the petition of the Nahua town of Jalostotitlan for the removal of their priest

in 1611²⁸. Among the Nahuas' grievances were the two most common charges: lechery, the chief complaint of the Maya at Tixmeuac, and abuse, which is hinted at in the Xecpes complaint. At a time when the confessional rarely physically separated priest and penitent, accusations of clerical abuse of confession were common wherever this was a standard ritual. There are reportedly colonial documents relating to such complaints presently safeguarded in Mérida by the Church, who refuse scholars access to them. It is uncertain to what degree these abuses occurred and to what degree communities such as the above used this accusation because they had learned that it got the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Although Jalostotitlan claimed that their priest spent all his time at his *estancia*, there is no explicit charge of absenteeism. This however is the crux of the Xecpes gripe. Andrés Mexia seems to have responsibility for at least the five communities mentioned in the above documents: Xecpes, Tixmeuac, Oxtzucon, Tahdziu and Tetzal.

By 1580 there were thirty-eight friars at most for the whole peninsula of Yucatan, half of whom were at any one time residing in Mérida or Campeche. The pacified area was divided into twenty-two *doctrinas*, of which only the most compact could be toured once a week. Only a third of the Indians in the diocese of Yucatan actually lived inside the *doctrinas*. On the southern and eastern fringes a year might pass between a priest's visits. In addition to the Franciscan presence there were four secular *curatos*, manned by a modest seventeen priests, most of them attached to the cathedral in Mérida.²⁹

Judging from those towns I have been able to locate (see map), Mexia's *visita* covered an area of at least 100 square miles north of the nearest *cabecera*, or head-town, Peto, where he mostly would have resided. Fr. Hernando de Sopena, the Franciscan *Provincial* to whom the Maya appeal in the Tixmeuac document, listed in a letter of 1580 the *visita* towns of each *cabecera*.³⁰ The average was 8.3. Making the rounds must have been an arduous process, especially in the high humidity of the Yucatecan summer. Even today there is only an unpaved road from Peto to Tahdziu, and beyond that point, through the scrub forest, only trails.

In Sopena's letter there is no mention of Peto or its neighbors. The implication is that the area was one of the four *curatos*, and indeed in a letter of 1582 from the governor of Yucatan to the king the "Vicaría de San Andrés de Petu" is listed as the only clerical zone in the province

of Mérida.³¹ The question of the size of the *visitas* is not fully answered, but suffice it to say that in another letter of 1582 to the king, the bishop of Yucatan states that Peto has a single priest.

This cleric is named: Pedro de Acosta, a Portugese, a recent appointee and not a "lengua" (a Yucatec speaker). Was Andrés Mexia therefore removed soon after the Xecpes complaint of 1578 and reinstated before the Tixmeuc complaint of 1589? The clarification of such a detail requires further research, in local parish records and in the answers to Philip II's famous questionnaire, for this area known as the *Relaciones de Yucatan*.³² Still, the above documents illustrate the underemployment dilemma of the ecclesiastical authorities in a colonial periphery such as Yucatan.

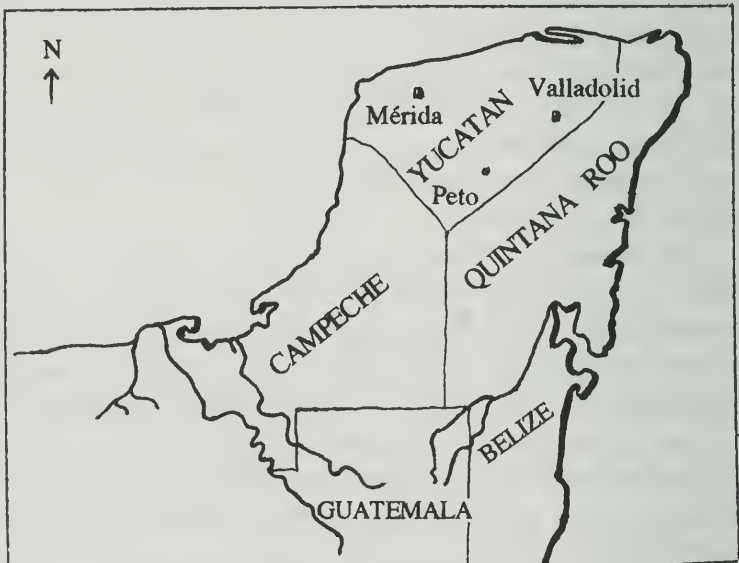
The Maya complaints against the ritual style of Mexia are certainly intriguing. First, he does not give them "paxab": the Yucatec "pax" can mean a musical instrument played by the tapping of the fingers, such as a tambourine or an organ; or it can simply mean "music". Does this mean Mexia said mass rather than sang it? Presumably he was not required to produce music himself, but perhaps his ritual role was the vital ingredient needed before the local musicians (or choristers) could be of religious use; and he refused to allow their participation.

Second, Mexia says mass in a manner that is *k'echaan*, twisted or tilted. Again the specific meaning is uncertain, although the problem is presumably not one of language: all would expect the mass to be said in Latin. The Maya of Xecpes are probably dissatisfied with the lack of due pomp and ceremony invested in the ritual by Mexia. This is consistent with the music complaint above and with the fact of the size of the *visita*. A hurried spoken Latin mass might seem a poor substitute for the non-Christian Maya rites of worship and sacrifice.³³

The obvious implication of the Xecpes complaints is that this community needed Mexia, even if he wasn't up to scratch in their eyes. Does this signify successful conversion to the conquerors' faith? Perhaps only superficially. By the 1560s pacified Yucatan had been divided into parishes, and every *visita* consisted of newly-built Christian churches. But the infrequency of clerical visits enabled the partial survival of Maya belief-systems; indeed the Xecpes document talks only of ritual, not of the significance of that ritual to the Maya beyond the implication that it mattered to them.



(Above) Central Yucatan, c.1600, showing indigenous provinces, and approximate edge of unpacified area. Towns mentioned in documents are underlined. Not located: Xecpes and Oxtzucon. (Below) The modern Yucatan peninsula.



Maya ritual had been forced underground, partly through the ongoing efforts of the Franciscan clergy (the seculars made slow advances into the New Spanish fringes), but more directly as a result of the infamous idolatry trials held by Diego de Landa in 1562. In that year a substantial portion of the Maya élite of Mani (which included the visita of the above documents), Sotuta and Hocaba were found to have been engaging in traditional sacrificial rituals; even if their confessions, exacted as they were under brutal torture, cannot be considered completely reliable, Franciscan violence sent a clear message to the Maya.

By 1578 a process was well under way whereby indigenous ritual had become increasingly furtive and individualized. It might survive for centuries via domestic "paganism", or in the form of remote, truncated ceremonies, but this was hardly a substitute for public ritual with sufficient pomp and ceremony.

Did Mexia remain so alien to Xecpes as to be denied the basic hospitality of food? The Maya may have considered that his performance was not deserving of nutritional compensation. On the other hand, the Yucatec population was badly hit by a series of famines and European disease epidemics in the 1560s and 1570s, causing a demographic decline of up to fifty percent between the surveys of 1549 and 1580-1586. The classic response of the Maya to such disaster was to flee beyond the control of colonial officers to sources of milpa or breadnut in the zone the Spaniards misteamed *despoblado*.³⁴ This is illustrated by the Xecpes remark that "there's nobody here in the town because there's no food."

It is unfortunate that the Tixmeuc complaint fails to state the month: was it made before or after the Tetzal apology of the same year? Either way, the Tetzal document indicates that this town was also in on the campaign to remove Mexia. When this failed, reconciliation must have seemed the prudent alternative. Hernando de Sopena may have acted as arbitrator; Peto was a secular curato, yet it is to the Franciscan provincial that the Maya *principales* appeal in the Tixmeuc complaint. The scarcity of priests must have been a factor. In the last resort the desire of these Maya communities for a priest was strong enough that a bad one was preferable to none at all.

Another obvious question opened up by these documents is that of political organization. What was the nature of the Maya *cah*, or, municipality? How was it subdivided? How do the units of pre-conquest organization map against colonial units, geographically, conceptually and

in terms of office tenure? These issues require the analysis of a larger corpus of Maya-language records. However, the three above illustrate a few points.

The imposition of the Spanish *cabildo* system onto a society whose traditional sociopolitical organization had only been destroyed at the very top, meant that at first, in theory, two rival sources of authority existed. In fact the Maya élite had responded quickly to new circumstances and continued to control their own political system and its access to office. Judging by Spanish documentation, the Maya élite fade away in the seventeenth century. But documents like the above continue to be generated into the nineteenth century by an élite that not only survive, but maintain a ruling position. Yucatan's poverty prevented the Maya nobility from engaging in Spanish-style entrepreneurial activity the way the Nahua nobility did. No matter: The Maya population continued to recognize the descendants of the old rulers as public office-holders.

The reader will note that in the document of 1578 the officers are titled *batab* and *ah cuhcab*, whereas in the two of 1589 the terms *gobernador*, *regidor* and *alcalde* are employed. Farriss suggests that the change over of terms was a gradual process that was complete until the late seventeenth century. Three documents alone do not refute that conclusion, but suggest that in some cases the change may have been quick. (The switch to *gobernador* was temporary; by 1700 *batab* was again standard). Although not all colonial offices had precise pre-Columbian cognates, the Maya were able to adapt one system to the other with apparent ease.

The *ah cuhcab* were traditional community officers that may have had responsibility for quarter subunits of the *cah* (like the *calpulli* of the Nahuas' *altepetl*); they translated well into *regidores*, as there were usually four of the latter. Above them were usually two *alcaldes*, but the Maya played with the numbers to suit their traditional perspectives in a way that is not yet fully clear. In the Xecpes documents the signatories are clearly in the community leaders acting as a body in indigenous Mesoamerican tradition. Specific offices are unclear; the titles of Gonzalo Uayu and Alonso Poot are not stated. The Maya are not revealing much, perhaps because to them it is all obvious. While this of the three documents most reflects the traditional system, it also indicates a system in transition.

In the Tetzal document the transition seems to be complete, yet the Maya way of doing political business is still visible through the Hispanized

166, cap. 6, p. 111 277

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28 tres. i carta en la lengua original

REPUBLICA FEDERAL DE MEXICO
MEXICO

Dios ca nan tiecch. ni man vlag skimil a thcoya yumitile
 wofiel te coy ti kuloon. ke mi vacyenal al mesen don p
 dig. coy ticoy. caix tiyalay tron. akubent banil
 tabalag tie. etla anaccod. cati cuyag yuzilacton. cici
 tron tabac dig. avetiel. hial avan ticoon. fietfonta
 valag ti thial mesene tiyalay tron. tulacal. Bai taholag
 tie. hevae. ofot. ba cacay te. jochal dig. mavon tron
 hibay lail a valia. vatab atan vhuucuk emic. caixie
 vhaalay vbeel. padre. mexia. hevbeel tie. ticay. baylicie
 avubic. vcamile. hevae jib te hunki lac yum ti padre
 feai hex nado de yu puer ta. cavhae. vbeel tie. hibal tie
 calic yohol. padre la. haxix. tulacal tusicool. caix
 avatlab ti yohil avium. cael cabac. hui n tul juez.
 fragle tumonel. hevae tie catson cedhy umic. caix
 avib te ybilavum ti. catavoon h'ibay missa way tie
 minice. vax maatex. yax oc coon ti xpi anoir vax
 lay na tay shal. hiel toh tie cabate. caaxoc lutez
 vlag ced yume. vagon yan tix mixa ca. benel
 cacay ti x yucon. peru. tag siv. ti bal. vagon
 yan yene canuelob. bayli tac jib tag te. ti
 thinal. Domingo. vax. caix avab. avib yunie
 tupa. imic cabines ti holag. tie canuelic
 vax. caix avib te. vhael. atson. cubi
 x hazi. lae. huclic. vaxie con fesar ti sup lalobe
 tie galic. vamatan. avab aba tene. matan avab
 confesar teh lay licie payic ti sup lal matan avab
 confesar ti. vamatan. vtael sup lal. tomute vpatie
 vteban. ti sup lalob. matan. vlab confesarti
 lay av hazi. tula cal. baix. vavitob tuzacon ti sup lal
 tron. vconan te. dig. tix maxul skimil celcazu
 me

Apalilon ti don juicool Don fran
 903. peru. jah dig.
 .7. alcal de. tula call.

(Document 2) Complaint against the priest
Andrés Mexia by the town of Tixmeuc, 1589

vener. Aside from the governor the four signatories are titled *alcalde*, *regidor* (two) and *escribano*, but because there are four it seems logical that each officer represents a subunit of the *cah*. According to the rotational nature of the system, each subunit would take it in turns to hold each colonial *cabildo* office. Those community *principales* who were out of office that year were still present, according to tradition: *uhahan kuluinicilob ut[e]s[tig]oil*, the other leaders and witnesses.

A final example of the utility potential of these documents lies simply in the names of the signatories. The reader will note the use of the Spanish *don*. At the time of the conquest only the highest Spanish noblemen enjoyed the *don* prefix, although most women of *hidalgo* rank were *doña*. The Nahuas almost immediately adopted this title, but with an important difference: it was less hereditary than indicative of high office, and thus the equivalent of the Nahuatl *teuctli*, "lord." The Yucatec Maya were equally quick to appropriate the status-indicator of their conquerors; the above documents show only the governor among the officers of the Maya *cah* using the *don* prefix. In other words, the title denotes the office, as much as the words *batab* or *governor* do when following the patronym. The sole exception would be the retired predecessor of the *batab*. Central Mexico, and indeed Spain, witnessed a phenomenon that we might call "don inflation"; in the 1540s only the governor of Tlaxcala was a *don*, but by the 1620s the title had spread to include the whole *cabildo*.³⁵ This process had not reached Yucatan by Independence, and even today the Yucatec use of *don* is far more conservative than in Central Mexico.

The reader will also have noticed the use of Christian names in conjunction with Maya patronymics. A comparison with colonial Nahua practice is informative: the lack of lineage surnames in pre-Columbian Central Mexico, beyond the case of ruling dynasties, carried over into the early colonial period. The Nahuas adopted Spanish names but not the Spanish system of family nomenclature. Until about the 1620s most Nahuas still had indigenous last names that were not patronymics but reflected a pre-conquest tradition of naming a child after its birthdate: Aca for example (Reed), or Quauhtli (Eagle).

Yet the prevailing trend was to use Spanish names as a complex denotation of social status. Thus Juan Diego, having two first names, would be at the opposite end of the scale from *don* Hernando Cortes, of whom there were many among the Central Mexican indigenous nobility

due to the proliferous sponsorship of the *conquistador* Cortes. Although this oversimplifies a continually evolving system that was subtle and highly differentiated³⁶ the outline of a comparison can be seen. A high-ranking Maya noble sponsored by the *Conquistador* of Yucatan was renamed at baptism don Francisco de Montejo Xiu. In other words, the Maya response differed primarily because there were pre-conquest patronymics in the Yucatan with lineage significance to important to be abandoned.

The social role of Yucatec personal names is a lucrative subject waiting to be exploited. Ralph Roys published a six-page study in 1940 that has yet to be built upon.³⁷ His list of about three hundred Maya patronymics seems comprehensive, but the names need to be mapped to indicate the geographical foci of prominent lineages. Roys, citing Landa, writes of a sense of kinship, an obligation to hospitality among those of the same patronymic, and a belief in a common ancestor. These vague claims demand thorough investigation.³⁸

The documents above contain some interesting patronymic examples. Cupul was one of the seven or eight dominant lineages at the time of the conquest that gave their names to provinces. The Cupuls continued to be prominent in the *cahs* of a large area in eastern Yucatan; we see that a Cupul was *batab* of Xecpes in 1578, and a relative (probably a son) of another one of the *principales*. Unable to locate Xecpes on any map, I suggest that it is to the north-east of the Peto area, that is, towards the Cupul province.

The three most important lineages at the turn of the sixteenth century were the Cocoms, the Huits, and the Xius.³⁹ After the conquest they could no longer govern at a provincial level, but, like many lesser lineages, they continued to control the highest community positions throughout the colonial period.⁴⁰ The Xiu were not highly numerous and were sparse outside of their province in Mani, the only part of the peninsula where they held high municipal office. As the *cahs* to which Peto was the *cabecera* were all within the Mani province, it is no surprise to see a Xiu as governor of one of them: Tixmeuc.⁴¹ The surviving *probanzas* of the Xiu are, in Roys' estimation, the most complete family papers of colonial Mexico. Although he published a brief study of them, and Farriss made clear use of the papers in her study of the Maya elite, they promise to yield further insights for any scholar who can read them.⁴²

The transcriptions, translations⁴³ and the analysis above suggest more questions than they answer. Maya language studies have barely

begun tap the vast potential that the available (and potentially available) material offers, and have yet to reach the point attained by Nahuatl language studies with the publication, for example, of *Beyond the Codices* in 1976. Still, the pleasure is in the perseverance, even if the result will be as the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* prophesied: "After it had all passed, they told of it in their own words, but its meaning was not plain... Still he who comes of our lineage will know it, one of who are Maya men..."⁴⁴

NOTES

¹J.E.S. Thompson, "Ralph Loveland Roys, 1879-1965" *American Antiquity*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1967): 98.

²For a complete bibliography of Roys' published and unpublished works see Pierre Ventur, *Maya Ethnohistorian: The Ralph L. Roys Papers*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1978.

³Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History Of The Indians Of The Valley Of Mexico, 1519-1810*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964.

⁴Manuela Cristina Garcia Bernal, *La Sociedad de Yucatan, 1700-1750*. Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1972 and Marta E. Hunt, "Colonial Yucatan: Town and Region in the Seventeenth Century." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1974.

⁵Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Nancy Farriss, *Maya Society Under Colonial rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. I should also mentioned the doctoral research of Philip Thompson which, though highly anthropological in methodology and intent, is a contribution to Yucatec ethnohistory worthy of publication: "Tekanto in the Eighteenth Century." Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1978.

⁶Ibid.: 400.

⁷I am grateful to my colleague Kevin Terraciano for stumbling across these and other colonial documents in Yucatec, while pursuing his own investigations, and for having them photocopied for me.

⁸AGN Inquisicion v.69 exp.5, f.199. The Spanish index, which reads "Notificacion del cura Andrés Mexia a los naturales, para que paguen sus impuestos" seems tantalizingly to refer to a different document from the same case.

⁹"yetel" ("and/with") is mostly written as a "y" with a dot after or with a line underneath.

¹⁰The > here and below represents a backward c, and is pronounced like an explosive tz, written in modern Yucatec as dz. It is the only letter which was invented in order to write Yucatec using the Roman Alphabet. The precise origin of the innovation is uncertain; probably a creation of the Maya working with the Franciscans soon after the founding of Spanish Mérida in 1542. (See also note 20 below).

¹¹AGN Incuision v.69, exp.5, f.277. Index description: "Informacion de los naturales al comisario del Santo Oficio fray Hernando de Sopena contra el cura Andrés Mexia, por mala conducta ya mal comportamiento." The index dives Peto as the origin town. The governor of Peto did sign the document, as did the governor of Tahdziu, but it appears to have been drawn up in Tixmeauc. It seems very odd that Tixmeauc's governor (and indeed other witnesses) did not sign the document, although it does look as if the escribano simply ran out of space. (in translation and commentary I use the modern spellings of all Maya toponyms).

¹²The month seems to have been omitted.

¹³The Yucatec, *almehen*, works remarkably similarly to the Spanish equivalent, *hidalgo* ("hijo de algo"). It literally means, someone with a father and mother, i.e. parents of note. The pre-colonial Maya had both matrilineal and patrilineal lines of descent, the

patronymic being preceded by a name coming from one's mother's mother: a matronymic. See note 37 below.

¹⁴I am unable to make sense (yet) of what seems to be "maecool"

¹⁵I remain stumped by "tu > icool", and a few lines below "uahmaatex," which seems to mean "you receive offerings/gifts" but that fits clumsily into the context.

¹⁶The Spanish founded Mérida on the site of the Maya town Tiho (or Tihoo); the Maya continue to use the latter term through the colonial period and to this day.

¹⁷Here the Spanish "item" sign is written. This short paragraph is the real substance of the letter: the complaint.

¹⁸Literally: "no end of his days".

¹⁹AGN Inquisicion v.69, exp.5, f.275. Index description: "Notificacion de los naturales al cura Andrés Mexia, de que ellos estan contentos y que si antes estaban enojados fue por diceres." This document has a Spanish translation appended which, although it is not word-for-word, is extremely helpful. It is in the same hand as the Maya; therefore the Maya itself is a copy. The translation is signed by the *interprete general* of Yucatan, Gaspar Antonio (this would be the famous Gaspar Antonio Chi who worked with Landa), and dated April 12, 1589; from Antonio's signature it is obvious that he had an assistant do all the work!

²⁰There is a line through the vertical of the first "h" to indicate an explosive "ch".

²¹A line runs above the first five letters; this of course is a standard Spanish abbreviation, the "xp" really being the Greek letters for "ch" (pronounced "k") and "r", with a Maya noun suffix.

²²Explosive first "ch".

²³This repetition (using both the Spanish and indigenous words for "year") is common in Yucatec and Nahuatl documents.

²⁴Significantly (and amusingly) the Spanish version replaces "women's talk" with "Indian Gossip".

²⁵Before the Conquest the halach uinic was the supreme political offer, or territorial rule, of a province. Tiho being the Spanish provincial capital, the reference here is therefore the the Governor of Yucatan.

²⁶An unusual way of referring to a municipal governor; the word must have been a title for senior officials of the pre-conquest cah. As discussed below, at the end of this document it also appears in the plural. (Roys gave the literal translation as "mighty man" and in one context even translated it, perhaps dubiously, as "Spaniard": Roys, Scholes, and Eleanor Adams, "Report and Census of the Indians of Cozumel, 1570". Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, Pub. No. 523, *Contributions to American Anthropology and History* vol. 6, Contribution 30, 1940: 22)

²⁷See another of the Notes and Documents in this journal for an example from northern New Spain.

²⁸Transcription and translation from Nahuatl in *Beyond the Codices*, Arthur Anderson, Frances Berdan and James Lockhart eds., UC Press: Berkeley, 1976: 166-173.

²⁹Farriss, *ibid.*: 93,304.

³⁰Farriss V. Scholes et al., eds., *Documentos Para La Historia De Yucatan*, 3 vols. Mérida 1936-1938, 2:48-50.

³¹*Ibid.*, 2:51-54. The letter lists six towns subsidiary to Peto, all between 2 and 12 leagues from it. These are Tahdzui ("Taçiu"), Tetzal ("Tiçal") and four others that do not appear in the above three documents.

³²The answers for Tahdzui at least are extant, as they are referred to by Philip Thompson, *op.cit.*, The Relaciones were published with other unedited documents of the Spanish Empire in Madrid in 1898-1900, but copies of this are hard to come by.

³³see, for example, Michael D. Coe, *The Maya*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987 (4th ed.):169-173 or Sylvanus Morely, George Branerd and Robert Sharer, *The Ancient Maya*. Stanford University Press, 1983 (4th ed.):480-496 or the exemplar of the revolution in hieroglyphic decipherment: Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*. Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1986.

³⁴Farriss, *ibid.*: 57-79.

³⁵*Ibid.*:281-283.

³⁶James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*. Unpublished MS: 268-290.

³⁷"Personal Names of the Maya of Yucatan", contribution 31 in Carnegie Institute

Pub. No. 523 cited above.

³⁸Thompson's presentation of kinship terminology is a start in the right direction, but he seems oblivious to the development of "family" history in England and France during the period of his research. Thompson, *ibid*:62 ff.

³⁹The name of Xiu is probably Nahuatl in origin, as must be the name of the Xecpes maestro: Nahuatl.

⁴⁰The Camal lineage not only dominated the cah of Ebtun throughout the colonial period, producing three times as many governors as any other name, but a Camal held the senior local office both immediately prior to the conquest and still in the 1930s when Roys was researching there. Ralph Roys, *The Titles of Ebtun*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, Pub. No. 505, 1939.

⁴¹This is presumably not the same don Pedro Xiu who was involved in a legitimacy conflict with a rival for the governorship of Tekax, don Fernando Uz. See Farriss, *ibid*.: 246.

⁴²Ralph Roys, *The Indian Background of Colonial Yucatan* (1943). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972: 129-171. Farriss, *ibid*.: 96-102, 164-176, 227-255, 272-285. The original Xiu papers are in the Peabody Museum of Harvard University.

⁴³These were done under the tutelage of Marta E. Hunt and James Lockhart, without whom this study would not be possible.

⁴⁴This is Roys' translation. *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, Pub. No. 438, 1933.