

Abstract: Robert Haskett, a paper for the AHILA Symposium “Más allá de Cortés y Moctezuma: Reevaluar la conquista de México 500 años después”

Acxotecatl and Don Zacarías de Santiago: Time-Traveling Nahua *Conquistadores* in Evolving Historical Memories

Over the last several decades, scholars have complicated the traditional binary rendition of the so-called “Spanish conquest” by moving beyond the iconic figures of Cortés and Moctezuma, and the famous war chronicles created by likes of Bernal Díaz de Castillo and the authors of Book 12 in the *Florentine Codex*. It turns out that there are many competing versions of what happened during and after the fall of Tenochtitlan and the identities of significant actors in these events. One of the latter was Acxotecatl, lord of Atlihuetzian, who is best known as the father who murdered his zealously new Catholic son, Cristóbal, a tale told repeatedly in various ways in text, drama, and art. But Acxotecatl was also revered by at least some Nahuas as the “Spanish” era lengthened as a valiant Nahua *conquistador* honored by Hernando Cortés and entrusted with a miracle-working image of the Virgin Mary. Today both Acxotecatls, the villain and the hero, exist simultaneously in representations found in his hometown of Atlihuetzian itself, including a massive eighteenth-century painting in the community’s church showing him martyring his innocent child, and as a stirring statue standing outside the *atrio* with a carved text that makes no mention of this act. In a supposed sixteenth-century *merced* issued by Cortés, another Nahua “conquering” hero is honored, the Tlaxcala region’s Don Zacarías de Santiago. He seems to have been so famous, at least in his regional context, that he was “adopted” by several communities as they—or people who produced later-colonial documents of various types for these places—looked back at the formative era of their journey through the “colonial” centuries. Yet just as Acxotecatl ended up being an ambivalent character in his enduring dual persona as champion and monster, the inconvenient truth about Don Zacarías is that he could not have actually participated in the Mexican war of the early sixteenth century. Instead, he traveled back in time to become a leading figure in its history. And in their own ways, both indigenous *conquistadores* trekked into the future to become multivalent icons of Nahua agency, valor, or perfidy in the allied struggle against the Triple Alliance and the formation of proud, self-governing Catholic *altepetl* in the post-war era.