

Religion in New Spain

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UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS
ALBUQUERQUE

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Printed in the United States of America

12 11 10 09 08 07 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Religion in new Spain / edited by Susan Schroeder and Stafford Poole.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8263-3978-2 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. New Spain—Religion. 2. New Spain—Religious life and customs.

I. Schroeder, Susan. II. Poole, Stafford.

BL2530.N49R45 2007

277.2—dc22

2007002529

Design and composition: Melissa Tandysh

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS		vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		ix
INTRODUCTION: SUSAN SCHROEDER AND STAFFORD POOLE		1
PART ONE: ENCOUNTERS, ACCOMMODATION, AND OUTRIGHT IDOLATRY		13
CHAPTER ONE: KEVIN TERRACIANO The People of Two Hearts and the One God from Castile: Ambivalent Responses to Christianity in Early Colonial Oaxaca		16
CHAPTER TWO: LISA SOUSA Tying the Knot: Nahua Nuptials in Colonial Central Mexico		33
CHAPTER THREE: DAVID TAVÁREZ Communal Defiance, Divided Allegiances: Zapotec Responses to Idolatry Extirpation Campaigns in Oaxaca		46
PART TWO: NATIVE SEXUALITY AND CHRISTIAN MORALITY		63
CHAPTER FOUR: SONYA LIPSETT-RIVERA Language of Body and Body as Language: Religious Thought and Cultural Syncretism		66
CHAPTER FIVE: JOHN CHUCHIAK Secrets Behind the Screen: Solicitantes in the Colonial Diocese of Yucatan and the Yucatec Maya, 1570-1785		83
PART THREE: BELIEVING IN MIRACLES		111
CHAPTER SIX: MARTHA FEW "Our Lord Entered His Body": Miraculous Healing and Children's Bodies in New Spain		114

Communal Defiance, Divided Allegiances

Zapotec Responses to Idolatry Extirpation Campaigns in Oaxaca

DAVID TAVÁREZ

On September 14, 1700, a confrontation that presaged the end of local attempts to maintain dual spheres of worship in colonial Zapotec communities took place in San Francisco Cajonos, a town in the southern reaches of the *alcaldía mayor* of Villa Alta. Sometime between eight and eleven o'clock at night, following a confidential report from San Francisco residents don Juan Bautista and Jacinto de los Angeles,¹ the town vicar fray Alonso de Vargas and the minister fray Gaspar de los Reyes caught many of the inhabitants of San Francisco Cajonos engaging in a communal ritual act in the house of Joseph Flores, the chief officer (*mayordomo*) of the local confraternity of Saint Joseph. Flores's guests—who included many of San Francisco's inhabitants—had plucked and beheaded some turkeys, and were in the process of bleeding a doe to death in order to fill some

containers with its blood, as they repeated some prayers in Zapotec before images of Christian saints with their faces turned toward the walls. One detail held the mendicants' attention: several male and female children who were praying on their knees imparted a jarring touch of innocence to what seemed to be a despicable act. The celebrants fled the house, leaving the friars to confiscate the remains of the sacrificed animals and other implements.

On the evening of the next day, an enraged native crowd surrounded the church of San Francisco, where the Dominicans, the two informants, and about a dozen non-Indians had sought refuge. Vicar Vargas took out an image of the Virgin Mary and asked the crowd to disperse, but only received mocking responses and hostile remarks. The mob shouted threats and threw stones at the church, while its

defenders used arquebuses to shoot first into the air and then into the crowd, killing at least one native rebel. However, when the defenders ran out of ammunition, they decided to surrender the two native informants. After don Juan Bautista and Jacinto de los Angeles were handed over, they were taunted, whipped at the pillory, and taken away to a nearby mountain where they were executed. Juan Antonio de Mier y Tojo, *alcalde mayor* (chief magistrate) of Villa Alta, immediately began an investigation into the fate of the two Zapotec informants. The townspeople initially claimed that the informants had fled the Cajonos area, but after the imprisonment and interrogation of about thirty-four revolt participants, the *alcalde mayor* obtained a full confession. After a protracted trial for rioting, murder, idolatry, and insubordination that lasted from November 1700 until January 1702—requiring several consultations with the viceroy and the Audiencia—Mier y Tojo handed down an especially unforgiving form of exemplary punishment. On January 12, 1702, fifteen of the Cajonos rebels were hanged and quartered after being sentenced to death without appeal, and their remains were exhibited in San Francisco Cajonos and along the main road to Oaxaca. The following day, two more defendants were paraded in an *auto de fe*.²

The structural features of this rebellion—the apparent lack of a guiding ideology or premeditation, the collective nature of the response against the ministers, the swift punishment of the informants—suggest that a key triggering factor was the interference of the Dominicans and their informants, which may have broken the

collective expectation that some of these communal realms could be maintained beyond the reach of the church and its agents in the local sphere. Such an approach echoes E. P. Thompson's well-known model of a peasant "moral economy," which argues that peasant populations may rebel against the ruling class once the traditionally accepted boundaries of economic and political subjugation are trespassed by government officials. However, unlike James Scott's precise formulation of an economic model that depicts boundary conditions for the moral balance between rulers and subjects, the task of defining what demands or contingencies may trigger the collective defense of a moral economy in a colonial situation may call for a more complex—and subjective—assessment of the meaning of boundaries and expectations.³

Before we can produce a full account of implicit expectations in a situation of colonial hegemony, we should provide an adequate account of local strategies in the context of colonial evangelization, and we should relate these strategies to the production of specific arrangements for local forms of worship that coexisted with more orthodox practices. Therefore, in order to attain a full understanding of the drive and motivations of this particular native revolt, we must address the series of confrontations among native ritual specialists, native officials, and colonial authorities that took place in the last quarter of the seventeenth century in southern Villa Alta, both before and after the 1700 revolt at Cajonos. It is only through a lengthy examination of evidence regarding ecclesiastical attempts to investigate and suppress certain ritual

practices, native strategies for maintaining local spheres of worship beyond the reach of these attempts, local factionalism as it assessed the wisdom of engaging in a rebellion, and the relative political weight of various colonial authorities that we may arrive at a full account that may be tied to a thesis of a higher order—either the moral economy argument, or another argument describing the emergence of peasant and native consciousness in a colonial context.⁴ This essay should be read as a first step in this direction.

This essay begins with a brief appraisal of the ecclesiastical policies against idolatry suspects in Villa Alta that were implemented between the late 1660s and the early 1700s. This appraisal will introduce a specific local response to extirpation efforts in Villa Alta between 1700 and 1706: the defense of local control over dual spheres of worship in the Zapotec towns of Betaza and Lachitaa. Rather than reducing these events to an inventory of economic or political fulcra that pushed moral consensus in one direction or another, this essay will depict the collective objectives of Zapotec office holders in action as they strove to defend a local notion of autonomy supported by their public engagement in collective ritual practices. It should be stressed here that a full discussion of local factionalism is beyond the scope of this essay, which focuses instead on a description of the social and economic organization that maintained a separation between two parallel realms of ritual practice: one Christian and official, and the other local and collective. Finally, this essay will present a hypothesis regarding the contrasting local responses to ecclesiastical

measures against idolatry in Cajonos in 1700, and in Betaza and Lachitaa in 1704.

Civil and Ecclesiastical Idolatry Extirpation Policies in Oaxaca, 1665–1696

A consideration of the “spiritual conquest” of Villa Alta from the mid-sixteenth century onward goes well beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, this essay will discuss ecclesiastical policies toward idolatry suspects—which have been incorporated into John K. Chance’s extensive discussion of colonial Villa Alta⁵—beginning with the indigenous rebellion of Tehuantepec in 1660, which may be seen as the initial fulcrum behind a period of confrontations and tense impasses between native communities and ecclesiastical and civil authorities in both Villa Alta and the Isthmus area in Oaxaca. On March 22, 1660, a large group of Zapotecs who had congregated in the Isthmus town of Tehuantepec for Holy Week celebrations rioted against and killed their *alcalde mayor* Juan de Avellán, along with two of his associates. The rebels then appointed new local authorities, sought the support of neighboring native communities via letters and meetings, and maintained control over the surrounding region for the following year. Exactly two months later, on Corpus Christi, the Zapotecs of Nexapa also rose up in arms, forcing a military standoff which was resolved only through the mediation of bishop Cueva y Dávalos. During 1660 and 1661, the rebellion spread like wildfire—to use its chroniclers’ simile of choice—through several Chontal, Huave, Mixe, Zapotec, and Zoque communities.

This sequence of events occupies a

unique place in the historiography of New Spain due to its multiethnic character and its sudden expansion over a large swath of Oaxaca. One may ask what could have motivated native peoples from linguistically and culturally diverse communities to form an unprecedented (and short-lived) alliance against Spanish rule. There exist two complementary analyses that have attempted a response to this question. One analytical view—espoused by Hector Díaz-Polanco et al.⁶—rehearses a cumulative theory that resembles the moral economy argument: taxation abuses related to the *repartimientos*,⁷ followed by the punishment and humiliation of recalcitrant native elites, may have provided a spark for the Tehuantepec rebellion. On the other hand, Marcelo Carmagnani stresses the symbolic use of social space by native rebels and colonial officials, and emphasizes the differential participation by native actors at various stages in the rebellion.⁸ In his view, rather than a rebellion, this movement was a confrontation against the expanding political role of the *alcalde mayor*, which collided with the reformulation of communal identity in seventeenth-century Oaxaca.

In a development that seems to confirm Carmagnani’s observations about the expanding powers of *alcaldes mayores* in seventeenth-century Oaxaca, between 1665 and 1736 Villa Alta’s *alcaldes mayores* and deputy governors (*tenientes de alcalde*) presided over at least a dozen trials against Indians accused of engaging in idolatry or sorcery, according to surviving records.⁹ Under other circumstances, the attempt to take native defendants of crimes against the faith before a civil judge would

have been regarded as a violation of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over such crimes. Nevertheless, the extant trials housed in the judicial archives of two *alcaldías mayores* in Oaxaca—Villa Alta and Teposcolula—provide evidence to support the argument that, besides marking a transition in episcopal policies toward idolatry, the decade of the 1660s was also characterized by more frequent judicial interventions by civil authorities in cases of native idolatry and superstition.¹⁰

Both bishops Monterroso (1665–1678) and Del Puerto (1679–1681) held in high esteem the cooperation of civil authorities in inaccessible regions regarded as prone to rebellion, as was the case in Villa Alta. In fact, it was during Del Puerto’s brief tenure as bishop that the six towns in the Cajonos region—San Francisco, San Mateo, San Pedro, Santo Domingo, San Pablo, and San Miguel—regained their saliency as strongholds of idolatry in the consciousness of the extirpators.¹¹ In a 1679 letter to the crown, Del Puerto reports the discovery of a “high priest” who, along with four others, exercised a parallel ministry in some of these six towns. These specialists received the same deferential treatment accorded to Christian priests, heard confessions, and admonished their followers not to confess with the Christian priests. Del Puerto had these specialists imprisoned in the royal jail of Oaxaca City, intending to exile them permanently from their native communities.¹²

Isidro Sariñana (1683–1696), Del Puerto’s successor, was the first bishop of Oaxaca to support extirpation efforts with the establishment of a novel punitive institution in Oaxaca City: a prison devoted to the

permanent seclusion of "teachers of idolatries" and recidivist idolaters that would be known as the "perpetual prison of idolaters."¹³ After arguing that such a prison was required to curb native idolatry, Sariñana obtained a grant of 3,000 *pesos de oro* from the crown for the project and began building this prison only a few streets west of the cathedral, and announced its completion in a 1692 letter to the crown. However, Sariñana's prison lasted only a few years: First, an earthquake devastated many buildings in Oaxaca City, including this prison; then, in November 1696, Sariñana died, leaving the prison's finances in a state of uncertainty. Sariñana's prison building had been so devastated by the earthquake and the subsequent lack of funds that bishop fray Ángel Maldonado (1702–1728) abandoned it in order to establish a new prison in a different area of Oaxaca City. Bishop Maldonado inherited Sariñana's punitive project, and turned it into one of the supporting pillars of the exacting extirpation campaigns he carried out in Villa Alta in the first decade of the eighteenth century.

Although the September 1700 Cajonos rebellion was unusual in its defiance of ecclesiastical authority, the Dominicans resident in southern Villa Alta could not have been surprised by the acts of collective defiance, and by the unyielding persistence of suspicious practices in southern Villa Alta. Two documents drafted to counter Maldonado's contention that idolatry had prospered in Villa Alta due to Dominican leniency—a December 1704 letter from fray Joseph Castilla to his provincial, and a July 1706 Dominican testimony drawn up before an *escribano* (notary)—indicate

that at least fifteen Dominicans had worked as extirpators of idolatry in the last decades of the seventeenth century in the Villa Alta towns of Yatec, Yaa, San Francisco Cajonos, Zoogocho, and Yatzachi.¹⁴ Unfortunately, few details about the trials organized by these extirpators have survived. On the other hand, an April 1691 riot in the town of Zochila—which was triggered by a Dominican friar's attempt to arrest some of the town's officials and its choirmaster—bears some structural resemblance to the Cajonos revolt of 1700, except for its resolution. After a short-lived confrontation, the Zoogocho rebels, the Dominican minister, and colonial officials reached an uncertain point of equilibrium when the town officials were freed, motivating the rebels to put down their weapons, return to their daily lives, and beg the forgiveness of the Dominican minister—which was granted immediately—only days after the rebellion.¹⁵

Maldonado's Amnesty: A Novel Approach to Extirpation Policies

Between 1702 and 1728, Oaxaca Bishop fray Ángel Maldonado would assume a particularly activist position on the issue of native ritual practices, which would lead to the loss of parish control by the Dominicans and would join the growing influence of the *alcaldes mayores* of Villa Alta as external factors that impinged on the internal affairs of native communities. Upon his arrival in Oaxaca on July 20, 1702, Bishop Maldonado learned about the 1700 Cajonos revolt and the current state of the legal procedures, and decided to carry out a personal inspection (*visita*).¹⁶ On November 1702,

Maldonado departed on an exhaustive visita of Villa Alta, during which he inspected seventeen endowed curates (*beneficios*), confirmed more than 4,000 natives, undertook a number of abridged idolatry proceedings, and sent several idolatry convicts to be incarcerated in the new prison for idolaters he had erected near the orchards of Santo Domingo el Grande in Oaxaca City as a substitute for Sariñana's prison.¹⁷

During his first visit to Villa Alta in late 1702 and early 1703, Maldonado discovered that the idolaters of this region were not only rebellious, but also highly accomplished authors of clandestine ritual texts. In order to extract information about local maestros, ritual practices, and ritual texts, Maldonado appointed the parish priest of Ejutla, Joseph de Aragón y Alcántara—Sariñana's leading secular extirpator during the 1680s—as his Visitor General, and took him along on his first visit.¹⁸ However, as Maldonado later indicated in a Latin epistle to Clement XI in April 1708, his first scrutiny of the inhabitants of Villa Alta only led him to suspect that they concealed "even greater abominations."¹⁹ In order to motivate the natives of Villa Alta to confess their idolatrous activities, turn in their ritual texts, and denounce their local maestros in exchange for an absolution, Maldonado tried an innovative approach to the announcement of his amnesty measures. According to later testimony presented to the crown by Dominican Procurator General Antonio de Torres, Maldonado selected one of the eleven defendants from San Francisco that were surrendered to him by the *alcalde mayor*, placed his pectoral around his neck, and ordered him to travel throughout the region of

Villa Alta announcing his offer of absolution.²⁰ Maldonado's offer was simple and non-negotiable: in exchange for denouncing their ritual specialists, turning in the clandestine ritual texts that several generations of extirpators had called "books of the devil," and making a full confession about communal and private ritual practices, each native community would benefit from both a general absolution and an amnesty from any formal trial.

When Maldonado returned to Villa Alta for a second visita in 1704, he organized an exhaustive investigation into native ritual practices. He was assisted in this task by several extirpators: the indispensable Visitor General Aragón y Alcántara, the Dominican minister of San Ildefonso fray Joseph de Contreras, and the secular priests Miguel Martínez de Salamanca, Domingo Zenlí y Cerdán, and Juan Manuel de Urbina.²¹ Following cooperation guidelines that had been established through earlier extirpation attempts between the bishopric and Villa Alta, the *alcalde mayor* Diego de Rivera y Cotes assisted Maldonado and turned over the testimonies of about forty-five "teachers of idolatry" who had been imprisoned in the royal jail of Villa Alta.²² Maldonado's offer of mercy, coupled with the fresh memory of the exemplary punishment that had been visited upon the Cajonos rebels, convinced many residents of Villa Alta communities to yield at least some of their specialists and ritual implements. At the request of Maldonado, between November 1704 and February 1705, the elected authorities of most of the 104 native communities in Villa Alta—representing a

native population of about 60,000 according to Maldonado's count—journeyed to San Ildefonso to register a communal confession before Aragón y Alcántara in order to benefit from Maldonado's amnesty. Through this innovative extirpation strategy, Maldonado harvested 103 separate manuscript versions of the 260-day Zapotec ritual calendar, or *piyè*, and about thirty-seven Zapotec ritual songs, which had been composed to be performed during communal ritual practices to the beat of a cylindrical drum called *nicachi* in Zapotec and *teponaztli* in Nahuatl.²³

Maldonado vs. the Dominicans: Ecclesiastical and Political Reforms, 1704–1712

Maldonado's growing disillusionment with the state of doctrinal education in native communities in Villa Alta and elsewhere lead him to take a reformist position that clashed with the interest of the Dominicans in preserving the status quo. Shortly after his 1704 Villa Alta visit, Maldonado proposed to the crown the creation of six new curates. In an intermediate chapter celebrated in May 1705, the Dominicans agreed to this petition, but requested that these curates be filled by Dominicans. Maldonado agreed, and these regulars were given their appointments through the bishop—a novel form of episcopal intervention in doctrinal matters that the Dominicans had long regarded as internal. In August 1706, Maldonado upped the ante by asking the crown to confirm the creation of eleven new curates—Zoochila, Tabaa, Yalálag, Betaza, Lachixila, Comaltepec, Latani, Santa María, Puxmetacán, Ayutla, and Atalacatepec.²⁴

The Dominicans attempted to counter-

act Maldonado's proposals at every step, both in Oaxaca and at the Council of Indies. Although the details of this controversy exceed the scope of this essay, the arguments for and against the division of curates that were based on the proliferation of idolatry may be summarized into two broad categories: the effectiveness of Dominican doctrinal administration and the number of ministers that Villa Alta and other geographically isolated regions required for the administration of sacraments. These pitched confrontations were interrupted in June 1712 when pro-Dominican forces in Madrid convinced King Philip V to remove Maldonado from Oaxaca by appointing him to the diocese of Orihuela—a small but comfortable bishopric in Murcia (Spain). However, since Maldonado had already reached an agreement with the Dominican provincial, he was able to reject this offer in December 1712, arguing that the common agreement would solve the impasse over the partitioning of curates.²⁵

From Omens to Confrontation: Communal Resistance to Extirpation in Betaza

Between November 1702 and November 1704, Maldonado and his emissaries spread a clear and succinct message: each of the 104 communities in Villa Alta had to surrender specialists and implements linked to local communal practices, or face severe punitive measures. The newly expanded range of these punishments had been richly illustrated by the spectacle of the decaying body parts of the Cajonos rebels along the road to Oaxaca. Toward the end of 1702, Maldonado himself brought his message to the towns

of San Melchor Betaza and Santo Tomás Lachitaa in Villa Alta. Betaza was a relatively large town, with an estimated population of 935 residents in 1703; the neighboring community of Lachitaa shared numerous political and kinship links with Betaza and had an estimated population of only 178 individuals in 1704. It should be noted that, prior to 1704, the people of Betaza celebrated only eight Christian holidays per year under the supervision of a visiting priest.²⁶

In spite of Maldonado's visit, the townspeople of Betaza and Lachitaa were not ready to renounce their communal ritual practices. According to Agustín Gonzalo Zárate, a former town official of Betaza in 1702—and the specialist whose arrest would trigger a revolt in this town—hardly a month had passed after the bishop's visit before the town engaged in another communal ritual celebration. Sometime during the next year, it was decided that the town would consult a realm that exceeded that of the powerful alcalde mayor in Villa Alta, as well as that of their enterprising but remote bishop. Through the mediation of ritual specialists who were experienced interpreters of the visions produced by *cuana betao*,²⁷ the town of Betaza would ask its own tutelary deities what would befall them. Two ritual specialists—Simón de Santiago and Nicolás de Espina Aracena—ingested *cuana betao* before the entire town, who awaited the response of the local deities assembled outside the *Yoo Yagtao*—a house that provided these specialists with the darkness and quiet required to communicate with the *cuana betao* entities. Both Santiago and Aracena reported having received the same premonition. Santiago, the eldest of the two,

would later declare before the alcalde mayor that the deities of Betaza had revealed

that they had fallen into the hands of God the Father [*que ya habían dado en manos de Dios Padre*] that the Christian doctrine would come into town, and that the Spaniards would come in and take away their parents and grandparents—meaning their idols. The first would be *Goque Yagchila*, and in fact, he was brought out and burned in the town square of [Villa Alta] later.²⁸

Santiago's elegiac tone was echoed by Espina Aracena, who confessed that the town deities had told them that “the law of their ancestors would be lost; the Spaniards will come and take away the things we have from our ancestors.”²⁹

Due to public concern about the bishop's visit, communal celebrations in Betaza were carried out only three times in 1703, as opposed to eight to ten times in the previous year. Although the trial records provide only fragmentary information about the rationale for these practices, it could be argued that these collective observances were linked to particular ritual observances in the 260-day Zapotec ritual calendar, and had as their main objective the propitiation of local deities in order to obtain good harvests and well being for the community. Later that year, visiting priest fray Francisco de Orozco came to ask the people of Betaza to surrender their ritual implements, but the townspeople denied having any.³⁰ After this visit, Betaza's officials called a communal meeting, and discussed whether they would surrender their implements,

specialists, and calendrical texts. According to Agustín Gonzalo Zárate, in spite of the fateful omens and mounting ecclesiastical pressure, the entire town decided not to yield to Maldonado's order, and asserted that, rather than turn in their ritual implements, "they would first surrender and give up their own blood."³¹

Following a pattern of intercommunity communication—a local diplomacy of sorts that was also pursued by rebel communities during the Tehuantepec (1660) and Cancuc (1712) rebellions, Betaza's town council sent letters to neighboring towns informing them of their decision to resist Maldonado's proclamation, and asking them for support. According to Juan Martín de Cabueñas, Betaza's governor, the council sent a letter asking the neighboring communities of Yaa, Yatee, and Lachirioag not to break ranks with Betaza and not to turn in their idols or fruit stocks—which were used for the illegal production of alcoholic beverages—even if events led to a "great legal proceeding."³²

Idolaters Against the Alcalde Mayor: The Failure of Native Resistance in Betaza

The communal resolve of the inhabitants of Betaza and Lachitaa was tested by several incidents that occurred on December 17, 1703, during a local fair that took place in Yalálag, a town located a few kilometers to the south.³³ In spite of their decision to resist Maldonado's proclamation, Betaza's town officials were apparently not concerned about any immediate consequences, for several of them went down to Yalálag's fair. Among the crowds of outsiders who thronged in the town square, Bernardo

García, a Spaniard from Villa Alta, recognized Agustín Gonzalo Zárate, a ritual specialist from Betaza whose detention had been requested a short time earlier by Bishop Maldonado. Another visitor from Betaza was don Pedro de Paz, a former alcalde and gobernador who possessed such confidence about Betaza's communal decisions that he approached one of the *regidores* (councilmen) of Yalálag and scolded him by saying:

Perhaps the people of Yalálag are women, for they do not deserve to wear pants, and it would be better if they wore their women's petticoats, or else why should they have turned in their idols without resistance? They should not have turned them in without fighting to the last drop of their blood.³⁴

After this exchange, Yalálag governor don Juan de la Cruz conferred with García, and arrested Zárate, Paz, and four other Betaza and Lachitaa officials who were at the fair.

Initially, the people of Betaza seem to have interpreted these arrests as a direct attack on them from the community of Yalálag. In fact, upon learning of the detention of their husbands, some of the prisoners' wives left Betaza with one of their alcaldes in order to complain to the alcalde mayor that the officials of Yalálag had seized their husbands without justification.³⁵ Shortly after his detention, Zárate was able to send a nephew back to Betaza with news about the arrests. Therefore, one of Yalálag's couriers was detained in Betaza by an angry crowd, who placed him under detention. However, an anonymous

informant from Betaza sent word to Diego Rivera y Cotes, alcalde mayor of Villa Alta, that a courier bearing a letter for him had been detained in his town. Since the courier bore a letter for the alcalde mayor, the people of Betaza had gone beyond mere local conflict, and were now engaged in an act of disobedience against the provincial representative of the crown. Cotes immediately ordered his *alguacil mayor* to lead a force of sixteen men into Betaza in order to make inquiries. This small army retrieved both courier and letter, and escorted a group of Yalálag residents to the town of Villa Alta along with the five remaining prisoners from Betaza and Lachitaa, who were placed in the town's jail along with Zárate, who arrived separately.

The decisive intervention of Cotes in Betaza seems to have defused Betaza's planned resistance to idolatry extirpation campaigns. After the Christmas holidays, Cotes issued a formal order of arrest against eleven residents of Betaza and three men from Lachitaa, which included the people seized earlier in Yalálag. This order had the effect of discouraging any would-be revolt leaders, since it included all of the former elected office holders in Betaza and Lachitaa who, as ritual specialists, had orchestrated communal ritual practices in both towns during the previous decade. The arrested leaders from Betaza included Fabián de Vargas (a *fiscal* [church official] in 1703), don Pedro de Paz (former *regidor*, alcalde, and gobernador), Simón de Santiago El Tuerto (Betaza's eldest specialist), Agustín Gonzalo Zárate (a *regidor* in 1702), Joseph Bolaños (a former alcalde), Agustín Gutiérrez de Benito (the town's *escribano* since circa

1686), Agustín Gonzalo (an *alcalde* in 1693), Nicolás Martín (an *alcalde* in 1703), and Nicolás de Espina Aracena and Simón de Santiago (Betaza's foremost *cuana betao* drinkers). For Lachitaa, this list included Pedro Cano (a *cuana betao* drinker), Nicolás de Celis (a renowned specialist and a former *fiscal*, *escribano*, and *maestro de doctrina* [teacher of doctrine]), and Joseph de Celis (a *belao*, or ritual singer and musician, who had also been *fiscal* three times). On January 14, 1704, after a defense attorney was appointed to represent these thirteen defendants, a parade of witnesses began wending its way before Cotes. The defendants provided Cotes with detailed accounts about various subjects: communal decisions regarding Maldonado's proclamation, the activities of past and present local "teachers of idolatry," and, most importantly for Cotes, the financial measures that were taken by the community to fund clandestine ritual practices. The defendants' declarations reflect a solid consensus on the identity of the most respected ritual specialists in Betaza: Simón de Santiago El Tuerto, Nicolás de Espina Aracena, Fabián de Vargas, and Nicolás Martín.

The Social and Financial Management of Communal Ritual Practices in Betaza

Communal ritual practices in native communities were a collective undertaking that was financed by both individual contributions and collective sources of revenue. Betaza was not an exception to this pattern, and it seems to have developed a parallel system in which various methods were used to collect funds for two distinct budgets, one for Christian devotional

practices, and the other for clandestine communal ritual practices. In Betaza, town officials took collections to satisfy the yearly demand for tribute to the crown. A group of twenty-four mayordomos—replaced on a rotating basis—raised three pesos each in order to cover expenditures for the visiting priest and for the seven public Christian holidays that he led yearly. Additional funds for Christian celebrations were raised by the only religious confraternity in town, the *Cofradía del Rosario*.³⁶ Then, whatever communal funds remained every year after satisfying the demands of the crown and the church were devoted to communal ritual expenses. The escribano Gutiérrez estimated that, every year, about 170 pesos of uncollected tribute to the crown remained in the town, along with about 27 pesos that remained from the collections taken to fund the visits of their priest.³⁷ At least once, 25 pesos were appropriated from the budget of the *Cofradía del Rosario* for a non-Christian purpose: they were given as payment to Nicolás de Celis, Lachitaa's foremost specialist, so that he would impart his knowledge of ritual practices to two Betaza men—Nicolás Martín and Nicolás de Espina Aracena. Joseph de Celis, Nicolás's brother, was a *belao*, and taught his ritual specialization to four Betaza residents: Gaspar Bautista, Fabián Luis, Joseph Luis, and Juan Gerónimo.³⁸

Gutiérrez, Vargas (who was a fiscal in 1703), and former alcalde Bolaños indicated two other methods for raising funds for communal ritual practices. The first one was an outright collection of between one or one and a half *reales* per household head, which was used to fund immediate expenditures.

The second one involved a set of communal obligations and money lending practices that mirrored the financial practices of indigenous sodalities in other native communities.³⁹ Three mayordomos—Juan de Paz, Juan de Celis, and Agustín García—supervised the plowing of three land plots that corresponded to Betaza's three subdivisions, and kept three dwellings in which celebrants ate and drank after the communal celebrations. After the maize obtained from these plots was sold, profits were lent to people in the community at a high interest rate of 37.5 percent—or three reales for each peso that was borrowed.⁴⁰ Through the accumulation of communal funds earmarked for communal ritual practices, the town had bought ten teams of oxen that were used primarily to plough the three land plots mentioned above. Moreover, in order to raise additional funds, these teams of oxen were also rented out for a daily rate of three reales.⁴¹

The following deposition by Fabián de Vargas—son of a famous “teacher of idolatry” who owned transcriptions of ritual songs and was a respected ritual specialist himself—deserves to be quoted *in extenso*, as it depicts both the range of activities comprised in communal ritual practices and the various expenditures that were involved:

During the communal idolatries [the specialists] sacrifice two or three deer, and many turkeys and puppies, and they make the men fast and avoid their wives for thirteen days, and during this time, rather than going to the steam baths, they bathe in the river at the cock's

first or second crow. They confess with the priests before the sacrifices, bringing each a real or a real and a half. In order to receive these reales, the regidores are present there, and the amount they should bring is determined beforehand by the town council, the escribano, and the other priests. They also bring four young boys to these communal sacrifices; . . . these boys behead the turkeys and the dogs, and open the deer chests while the priests hold these animals. . . . In a piece of paper made from tree bark, they pour [the animals'] blood; then, everyone comes in, gets on their knees, and over the bloodied paper, they toss a bit of ground tobacco called *pisiete*, which each Indian carries in a little gourd. . . .

After making those sacrifices, the alcaldes purchase some thin candles from the money that remains, and place them on the altars at the church, and then they order people to sing a litany. A large feather that adorns the images of Our Lady is taken to the sacrifices, and the person who plays the *teponaztli* and sings diabolic songs wears it on his head. . . . During the sacrifices, they post guards in various places, so they may give a warning if they see a Spaniard or any suspicious person.⁴²

Although the vocabulary of the court interpreter has reduced the original Zapotec terms to routine Christian designations—such as “priests” or “diabolic songs”—this description depicts the entire town council at work, orchestrating collective ritual action, receiving individual

contributions, and participating in these ritual practices. While an outside observer might fall into the temptation of designating these practices as a hybrid mixture of Christian and native practices, the attitude of the celebrants is rather clear: they were conceived by the town as collective ritual practices that were essential to the communal identity and well being of Betaza. Therefore, they were practiced clandestinely and under the potential risk of discovery by outsiders. From a local perspective, these practices belonged in a communal realm that was kept relatively separate in spatial, budgetary, and social terms from local public Christian celebrations.

Conclusions

How may one explain the fact that native resistance in Betaza did not lead to a violent confrontation with colonial authorities, as had occurred in Cajonos three years earlier? Other than assuming that mere fright convinced the Betazans to yield, one could propose that Betaza's town council misread the arrest of their specialists at the Yalálag fair: based on previous experience, they did not expect a neighboring native community to take the side of idolatry extirpators, and they believed that the arrests were a collective act of aggression on the part of Yalálag. When a small army arrived from Villa Alta making inquiries, it was too late to organize armed resistance, and the town officials and leading ritual specialists had little choice but to surrender to the powerful *alguacil mayor* Joseph de la Sierra. At this point, Betaza's fight against extirpation was a losing proposition in both ideological and political terms: Betaza's neighbors had

not pursued the path of resistance that they had vowed to support through their clandestine correspondence, and Betaza's neighbors seemed ready to accept Maldonado's offer of amnesty rather than risk another rebellion. Betaza's former elected officials had concluded that rebellion was not in the cards, and thus yielded easily to Cotes's questions about their communal ritual practices, allowing an exceptionally detailed description of the social organization of clandestine ritual practices in a native community in New Spain to be inscribed in the legal record.

The 1703–1704 Betaza idolatry trial provides us with a richly detailed perspective into the local reformulation of a prescriptive political system that was imposed by the colonial regime. Betaza's councilmen refashioned the obligations and faculties of their posts as *alcaldes*, *escribanos*, and *regidores* in order to reproduce a separate social and economic realm for collective ritual practices. It would be rather misleading to simply label these practices as clandestine; from the perspective of Betaza's residents, they were both public and collective exercises, but they were clandestine and illegitimate from the extirpators' perspective. In the manner of other native officials—most notably, the church officials of San Miguel Sola who circulated copies of the 260-day Zapotec ritual calendar among a network of at least thirty-five text users and specialists⁴³—Betaza's town officials led a dual existence as leading members of their town council and as ritual specialists who participated in collective and private ritual practices. As in Sola, this attempt to reproduce a position of authority in both a legitimate

political sphere and in a clandestine realm for local ritual practices was eventually suppressed by the colonial authorities.

We should not assume, in spite of the town officials' claim about local consensus, that the people of Betaza uniformly embraced this dual system and offered unconditional support for an agenda of defiance. It is more appropriate to interpret the local arrangements on behalf of traditional ritual practices as a project that was embraced by a particular faction of town officials. In fact, there exists evidence of local resistance to the policies set forth by town officials. On February 4, 1704, a few weeks after the interrogation of Betaza's officials began in Villa Alta, the vicar of Betaza, fray Joseph Cardona, celebrated mass and pronounced a communal absolution from idolatry over the entire town. However, the town authorities—which seem to have had a clear picture of who had supported them and who had collaborated with the priests—punished some of the inhabitants whom they regarded as traitors the day after Cardona's absolution. Betaza resident Juan Mateo would report that he was intercepted as he walked down the street by a man called Juan Luis, who assaulted him, accusing him of betrayal to the people of Betaza. At that point, Betaza's *alcalde* incarcerated him and accused him of having gone to Villa Alta to give accounts about their customs, and had him tied to the pillory and whipped several times. Before being released, he was ordered to pay a five-peso fine.⁴⁴

In their attempts to refashion local political offices, the people of Betaza, Lachitaa, and Yalálag attempted to profit from a *de jure* separation between indigenous and

nonindigenous subjects: as native subjects, they endeavored to maintain a dual system of public religious practices that would only be viable in a relatively isolated indigenous community. The social reproduction of a dual system in these communities was facilitated by their geographic isolation and by the laxity of the evangelization policies that were pursued by Dominicans and secular priests in the area during the first half of the seventeenth century. However, during the second half of the seventeenth century, two policy changes began to have substantial effects in Villa Alta. On the one hand, two activist bishops—Sariñana and Maldonado—embraced a more severe set of legal measures and punitive efforts against

alleged idolaters; on the other, the office of the *alcalde mayor* in Villa Alta expanded its reaches into idolatry extirpation measures, and increased its economic and political impact among natives through a greater control of policies that appropriated goods and labor in native communities. In the most terrible of ways, local Zapotec deities had the last word. When Betaza's ritual specialists consulted their local deities through the mediation of hallucinogens, they understood that the time of the Spaniards and God the Father—a second civil and ecclesiastical conquest in the slowly unfolding cycle of colonial evangelization projects—had finally arrived in the isolated mountain ranges of Villa Alta.

NOTES

The abbreviations used in this essay are as follows:

- AGI: Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain
- AGN: Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico
- AGOP: Archivio Generale dell'Ordine dei Predicatori, Rome, Italy
- AHAO: Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de Oaxaca, Mexico
- ALC: Archivo del Lic. Luis Castañeda, Oaxaca, Mexico
- ANSM: Archivo de Nuestra Señora de la Merced, Oaxaca, Mexico
- ANO: Archivo de Notarías de Oaxaca, Mexico
- ATEP: Archivo Judicial de Teposcolula, Oaxaca, Mexico
- AVA: Archivo Judicial de Villa Alta, Oaxaca, Mexico

1. Although a strong local historical tradition—which Archbishop Gillow embraced during his 1889 inquiry into the Cajonos revolt—identified don Juan Bautista and Jacinto de los Ángeles as native *fiscales*, neither of them

was designated with this title in the 1700–1702 Cajonos trial documents. While they both acted in the stead of conscientious *fiscales*, they did not seem to hold such title in September 1700. It should be noted that the Catholic church proclaimed them as Blessed in the summer of 2002.

2. ANSM, *Mártires de Cajonos*: ALC 1270, 161v–169v; AHAO *Mártires de Cajonos*, S-4, 615–31; Eulogio Gillow, *Apuntes históricos sobre la idolatría e introducción del cristianismo en Oaxaca* (México: Ediciones Toledo, [1889] 1990), 174–81.

3. See E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 76–136, and James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). The moral economy argument has been presented as a suggestive analytical framework for a colonial Maya rebellion in Kevin Gosner, *Soldiers of the Virgin: The Moral Economy of a Colonial Maya Rebellion*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

4. See Steve J. Stern, "New Approaches to the

- Study of Peasant Rebellion and Consciousness: Implications of the Andean Experience," in *Resistance, Rebellion and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World*, ed. S. Stern, 3–25 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987). For an example of contending analyses of colonial native rebellions tied to religious practices, see the characterizations of the complexity of the various forms of native cultural consciousness that informed the 1712 Tzeltal rebellion in Cancun in Kevin Gosner, "Religion and Rebellion in Colonial Chiapas," in *Native Resistance and the Pax Colonial in New Spain*, ed. S. Schroeder, 47–66 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), and Juan Pedro Viqueira, *Indios rebeldes e idolátras: dos ensayos históricos sobre la rebelión india de Cancun, Chiapas, acacida en el año de 1712* (Tlalpan, DF: CIESAS, 1997).
5. See John K. Chance, *The Conquest of the Sierra* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).
 6. The most extensive analysis of the 1660 Tehuantepec rebellion to date is Héctor Díaz-Polanco et al., *El fuego de la inobediencia. Autonomía y rebelión india en el obispado de Oaxaca* (México: CIESAS, 1996).
 7. *Repartinientos* were the appropriation of local raw and manufactured goods by colonial authorities through a mandatory exchange for goods manufactured elsewhere that natives did not need, and at unfavorable exchange ratios. Alcaldes mayores manipulated these ratios for their own advantage. See Chance, *The Conquest of the Sierra*.
 8. See Marcelo Carmagnani, "Un movimiento político indio: La 'rebelión' de Tehuantepec, 1660–1661," in Díaz-Polanco et al., *El fuego*, 81–102.
 9. See Díaz-Polanco et al., *El fuego*, and Marcelo Carmagnani, *El regreso de los dioses: El proceso de reconstitución de la identidad étnica en Oaxaca, siglos XVII y XVIII* (México City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988).
 10. During the 1660s, we find at least one idolatry trial initiated by Juan de Baena, the notary public, or *escribano*, and teniente de alcalde mayor in Teposcolula: a case against Catalina Mendoza and Melchor Hernández of Tamasulapa, accused of performing "idolatrous" practices in order

to murder town mayor Domingo de Ayala in 1662 (ATEP 502). On the other hand, Diego de Villegas y Sandoval Castro, alcalde mayor of Villa Alta in 1653–1655, and again from late 1665 until late 1667, appeared to be an especially active civil extirpator of idolatries under the aegis of bishop Monterroso (1665–1678), for he presided over at least three idolatry trials in 1665 and 1666: the trial of Luis de Vargas of Yojovi (AVA Criminal 39) and the related trial of Vargas's murderer, Lucas de los Reyes in 1665 (AVA Criminal 20); the trial of Juan Gonzalo and Pedro de Viloria of Lachirioag in 1666 (AVA Criminal 22); and finally, the multitudinous trial of eleven residents of Lachirioag accused of engaging in suspicious acts that could have been idolatrous in 1666 (AVA Criminal 23). Moreover, at least three of Sandoval Castro's successors are known to have presided over idolatry trials in Villa Alta—don Fernando de Velasco y Castilla, Captain Cristóbal del Castillo Mondragón (AGI Mexico 357, AGOP XIII.12760), and Captain don Alonso Muñoz de Castilblanque, who began an idolatry trial against six defendants from San Francisco Cajonos in 1684 (AVA Criminal 49), but surrendered both the procedure and its defendants to ecclesiastical jurisdiction at the request of Bishop Sariñana (1683–1696). A detailed discussion of the failed prosecution of a group of idolatry defendants from the Villa Alta town of Lachirioag in 1666 appears in David Tavárez, "Idolatry as an Ontological Question: Native Consciousness and Juridical Proof in Colonial Mexico," *Journal of Early Modern History* 6, no. 2 (2002): 114–39.

11. The association between Villa Alta and suspicions of idolatry was not a novel one at this point. The Dominican fray Pedro Guerrero began the first systematic extirpation campaign in the region in 1560, when he convinced scores of natives to turn in their idols. Guerrero apparently achieved this objective through indiscriminate use of the whip, which motivated the suicide of a ritual specialist in Tabaa (AGI Mexico 358, exp. 3 bis). A summary of early extirpation attempts in Villa Alta appears in Chance, *The Conquest*.
11. AGI Mexico 357.
13. Sariñana was inspired not only by the

previous experiences of his predecessors, but also by other inquisitorial precedents. In Mexico City, in the early seventeenth century the Holy Office erected a *prisión perpetua* for proselytizing Jews (*judaizantes*) and heretics—see Solange Alberro, *Inquisición y sociedad en México, 1571–1700* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988). In the archbishopric of Lima, a prison for idolaters called *Casa de Santa Cruz* was finished in 1618, and ceased to exist as such before 1639; its inmates were to remain imprisoned for unspecified periods of time, earning a living by weaving textiles. See Iris Gareis, "Repression and Cultural Change: The 'Extirpation of Idolatry' in Colonial Peru," in *Spiritual Encounters: Interactions Between Christianity and Native Religions in Colonial America*, ed. N. Griffiths, and F. Cervantes, 234 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999). Sariñana's prison project is described in several letters to the crown found in AGI Mexico 357.

14. AGI Mexico 881, 882.
15. AHAO Mártires de Cajonos 5—1.2; Gillow, *Apuntes*, 93–99.
16. Maldonado brought to the bishopric of Oaxaca his abilities as an experienced theologian. He obtained a doctorate in theology at the University of Alcalá, and taught there for several years before taking the title of *magister* in his order of Saint Bernard. Although he was named to the bishopric of Comayagua (Honduras) in August 1699, he received a second appointment as bishop of Oaxaca by Innocentius XII only several months later. See José Antonio Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca* (México: Editorial Porrúa 1998), 387.
17. AGI Mexico 877.
18. *Ibid.*
19. AGI Mexico 880.
20. This vivid detail was provided in a report to the crown written circa 1710 against Maldonado by Antonio de Torres, procurator general of the Dominican Order in Oaxaca, found in AGI Mexico 880. Although Maldonado wrote a point-by-point rebuttal of this report, he remained suspiciously silent on the subject of this most peculiar emissary.
21. AGI Mexico 879, 882.
22. AGI Mexico 882, 296f–391v.

23. A survey of the pocket calendars and the communal ritual practices of Villa Alta appeared in the first monograph devoted to the topic—José Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos* (México: UNAM, 1993). The first contemporary translation of one of the Zapotec songs of Villa Alta appeared in David Tavárez, "The Passion According to the Wooden Drum: The Christian Appropriation of a Zapotec Ritual Genre in New Spain," *The Americas* 62, no. 3 (2006): 413–44.
24. AGI Mexico 880 and 881.
25. AGI Mexico 880. Maldonado's institutional proposals for addressing widespread idolatry went beyond ecclesiastical reforms. Both Maldonado and the alcalde mayor Rivera y Cotes presented the crown with the ambitious suggestion of congregating all the towns in Villa Alta into groups of four hundred married couples; they also recommended appointing Spanish language teachers in each town, as well as allowing the alcalde mayor to name local representatives as he saw fit; see AGI Mexico 882. As Chance (*The Conquest*) has noted, many natives opposed these proposals, and there is no extant evidence that these *congregaciones* were carried through. Native resistance to this measure was so great that some towns offered large bribes to the alcalde mayor if he desisted from carrying out congregaciones.
26. See Chance, *The Conquest*. Betaza and Lachitaa's abridged liturgical year featured the observance of Epiphany (which also celebrated Saint Melchor, Betaza's patron saint), Christ's purification at the Temple, Easter, the feast of the Holy Spirit, Corpus Christi, Our Lady of the Rosary, All Saints, and Christmas. Before 1704, visiting priests did not perform such celebrations in Betaza itself, but in an isolated location in between the towns of Betaza and Lachitaa. See AVA Criminal 117, 28v, 27v.
27. According to multiple testimonies, certain Zapotec ritual specialists took the seeds of a plant called cuana betao in Sierra Zapotec, ground them, and drank them with water. This plant is probably *Turbina* (or *Rivea*) *corymbosa*, a vine of the morning glory family with hallucinogenic properties, which was known as *ololihqui* in Nahuatl communities.
28. AVA Criminal 117, 39v–40r, my emphasis. An

ongoing translation project led by the author that focuses on the Zapotec ritual song corpus seized during Maldonado's campaign (AGI 882. Calendarios 100-102) has confirmed that a subset of these songs celebrated Coque Yagchila and other local deities.

29. AVA Criminal 117, 37v.
30. *Ibid.*, 60r.
31. *Ibid.*, 24 r-v.
32. *Ibid.*, 60r.
33. Yalálag held an important place among the Zapotec communities of southern Villa Alta due to three factors: its role as a regional market hub, its location on the road between Oaxaca and the cabecera of Villa Alta, and its position as the largest town in southern Villa Alta, with an estimated population of 1,577 residents in 1703. See Chance, *The Conquest*, 48.
34. AVA Criminal 117, 9r.
35. Although the extant records do not indicate the existence of conflicting claims over outlying lands and forests between Yalálag and Betaza during this period, Betaza and Lachitaa seem to have had land conflicts with their northern neighbors of San Andrés Yaa; see AVA Criminal 207.
36. AVA Criminal 117, 17v.
37. *Ibid.*, 28v.
38. *Ibid.*, 47v, 49v.
39. Central Mexican indigenous sodalities routinely constituted themselves as productive and money-lending enterprises. A particularly

well-documented operation during the 1760s in the Nahua community of Tlapa in what is now central Guerrero is described in Danièle Dehouve, "The 'Money of the Saint': Ceremonial Organization and Monetary Capital in Tlapa, Guerrero, Mexico," in *Manipulating the Saints*, ed. A. Meyers and D. E. Hopkins, 149-74 (Hamburg: WAYASBAH, 1988). In Tlapa, the "money of the saint"—a collective fund raised by pooling monetary contributions from *cofradía* members—was used as a source of revenue for the cult of the saint. Both members and nonmembers of the *cofradía* borrowed amounts from this fund at usurious rates of interest that ranged from 25 to 50, and even to 100 percent, provided that both principal and interest were returned by the year's end.

40. AVA Criminal 117, 17 r-v.
41. *Ibid.*, 28v.
42. *Ibid.*, 16r-18r.
43. See Gonzalo Balsalobre, "Relación auténtica de las idolatrías, supersticiones, vanas observancias de los indios del obispado de Oaxaca," *Anales del Museo Nacional de México* (1^a Época) 6, [1656] 1892, 229-60, and Tavárez, "La idolatría letrada: Un análisis comparativo de textos clandestinos rituales y devocionales en comunidades nahuas y zapotecas, 1613-1654," *Historia Mexicana* 194, 49, no. 2 (1999): 197-252.
44. AVA Criminal 117, 51r.

PART TWO

NATIVE SEXUALITY AND
CHRISTIAN MORALITY

The carnal woman is an evil woman who finds pleasure in her body. . . . She consumes her inner substance—a brazen, a proud, a dissolute woman of debauched life. . . . She parades; she moves lasciviously; she is pompous.

—fray Bernardino de Sahagún, c. 1577

The worst thing that he did was that he came into my house four times, trying to take my wife by force in order to sow sin [fornicate] with her. He desired this, but he did not fulfill his desire.

—Diego Fox, notary, Tabí, Yucatan, late sixteenth century

Tuesday, 6 November [1658], at eleven in the morning they took fifteen men from the Royal Court jail, in order to burn fourteen of them, and one, because he was a boy, they gave him two hundred lashes

and sold him to a *mortero* for six years, all for having committed the sin of sodomy among themselves for many years.

—Gregorio Martín de Guíjo, 1658

In that time there will be lies and madness, and also lust and fornication . . .

—Chilam Balam of Chumayel

I deny all of this, and I believe that no good Christian person, much less a priest, could do such a thing . . .

—Padre Cristóbal de Valencia, 1609

Once Pope Alexander VI granted the Patronato Real to Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabel in 1494, all of Spain's dominions were destined to be Christian and subject to their patronage. The crown's ministers to the colonies were reform minded but steeped in medieval theological