

Although before the Conquest the Aztecs produced pictorial manuscripts, only with the coming of Spaniards they learned alphabetic writing and started recording documents in their language—Nahuatl. We know that written texts started to appear very soon after the fall of the Aztec capital, but the works of two first decades of writing (c. 1525-1545) have almost completely been lost. Now one of such early manuscripts surfaces in Poland, discovered in 2003 in the Jagiellonian Library, by a Mexican scholar! Such an opportunity could not have been ignored by Polish Mesoamericanists who, until now, have been forced to look for research topics in the libraries and archives of Mexico, Spain, France, United States, etc.

There are two main goals set within this project: to publish the Cracowian manuscript (a paleography of the Nahuatl text along with translations into Polish and English) and to pursue several lines of research in relation to this source. One of the most interesting things about the manuscript is that it forms part of a larger whole: it has four cognate documents, presently held by libraries in Mexico City and Paris. While the Mexican manuscripts have been studied by scholars for more than fifty years now, the Parisian one was only discovered in 1990s and the Cracowian one is almost untouched. Despite a long history of research we still know very little about the origin of the corpus which belongs to the genre of censuses. It is believed that it was drawn in the so-called Marquesado del Valle, an enormous landholding granted to the conquistador don Hernando Cortés as a reward for his accomplishments. A huge ambition of Cortés soon brought him into conflict with the Spanish crown and colonial authorities started to look for a way to diminish his power and influence. It is possible that the Nahuatl census was prepared with the purpose of counting the amount of tribute due to Cortés, but this hypothesis has never been confirmed by solid evidence. The Cracowian manuscript provides an excellent opportunity to reopen this line of study with new evidence and attempt at clarifying the mysterious origins of the census.

Further history of the Nahuatl manuscript from Poland is no less dark. We only know that the Mexican parts belonged, at some point, to the collection of Lorenzo Boturini and that our part of interest arrived in Europe with a German merchant named Hermann, who claimed to have bought it from a Mexican junk dealer. One of our aims is, therefore, to trace as meticulously as possible the path followed by the Cracowian manuscript, that led it from the Marquesado del Valle in the present state of Morelos to the Jagiellonian Library. Discoveries we will hopefully make will also contribute to our knowledge on other parts of the census. One of the ways in which we will try to accomplish this task is through a comparative study between the Cracowian document and its cognates. The five existing parts can be viewed as a manuscript jigsaw puzzle whose piece we will try to put in place assuming that some may still be missing.

While an intention of the project is to inspire further research on the Nahuatl manuscript from Poland, we want to initiate this research, showing paths that could be followed. Each of the team members has experience working with older sources, as well as their methods and interests. These assets will be taken advantage of, by exploring several of many topics that can be studied through censuses: social structure, family and kinship, language contact, evangelization of the Aztecs and, perhaps, other, depending on the potential of the document. In this way, we hope to deliver a high-quality academic publication that will also attract readers from beyond the scholarly world and that will spread awareness of such incredible treasures held by Polish cultural institutions.