A Note on Orthography

In the following pages Nahuatl terms, wherever introduced in isolation from a particular text, are written in a modernized Franciscan orthography descended from the spelling methods of the Franciscan missionary-linguists of the 1500s. This is the Spanish-flavored orthography widely used by present-day writers on Mexican topics, generally disregarding vowel length and the glottal stop. Thus vowels, roughly speaking, have the continental sounds (ah, eh, ee, oh, oo), except that oh and oo, both represented by the letter “o,” are not distinguished from each other. Consonants are approximately as in English, except that “x” is pronounced sh, “z” has the sound of the “s” in “simple,” and the combinations “cu,” “hu,” and “tl” are similar to English “qu” (in “quick”), “w” (in “water”), and “tl” (in “atlas” whether initial, final, or mid-word, never like the “tl” in “bottle”).

A modernized Jesuit system, derived especially from the seventeenth-century Jesuit grammarian Horacio Carochi, differs from the Franciscan in marking long vowels with a macron, or overbar, and in consistently using the letter “h” (except in the combination “hu,” see above) to signal the glottal stop. At various points in the present work, terms are respelled in the modernized Jesuit system so that they may be found more easily in modern dictionaries such as Frances Karttunen’s Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl and my own Nahuatl-English Dictionary (here cited as DICT). For simplicity, macrons are omitted except in a few cases, as needed.

The Romances transcription, however, is strictly paleographic (not respelled or repunctuated), and all quotations from the Romances are likewise paleographic, regardless of inconsistencies and outright errors (which are clarified, as necessary, in footnotes to the English translation). Similarly, quotations from the Florentine Codex (CF or FC), Cantares Mexica-
nos (CM or CMSA), Alonso de Molina’s *Vocabulario* (MOL and MOLS), and other old texts are paleographic.

It may be added that all linguists seem to accept Carochi’s (oversimplified?) dictum that Classical Nahuatl words are to be stressed on the second-to-last syllable.

Further observations on Franciscan, Jesuit, and paleographic orthographies will be found in CMSA xi–xiii and DICT 8–11.