The victory of the coalition of the Spanish and dozens of indigenous cities in the central plateau of Mexico over the Mexicas in 1521 opened the door for Christian conceptions to be proffered, immediately and lavishly, for local use and appropriation. This was especially true for the Nahua elites of this region, who considered themselves victorious and participating in a new political sorting, outlined after the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. A similar process, albeit with more limited regional reach and slower pace that resulted in a situation of less political stability for the victorious, occurred in the central Andes during the sixteenth century with the progressive victory of the coalition formed by the Castilians, Inca factions, and other Andean populations like the Chachapoyas and Cañaris over different Inca factions and their allies. An even more limited regional reach and slower pace resulted in a situation of decreased political stability for the victorious, a process similar to that experienced by the Maya people of the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala and the lowlands of Yucatan and Petén throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In these three cases in the initial colonial period,1 each featuring more or less political autonomy and subordination with regard to the growing power of

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1 We call the initial colonial period the historical phase that goes to the end of the Castilian-Amerindian conquests of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and Cuzco, a moment in which the Castilians began to participate in a more systematic and effective manner in the local sociopolitical networks, headed by or dependent on the Amerindian elite, until the time at which the same elite did not perform such central roles in regional sociopolitical organization or in the vice-kingdoms of New Spain and Peru. In the specific case of the central Mexican highlands and central Andes, we can situate the final moment of the initial colonial period between the 1560s and 1580s. In the case of the Maya region, this final moment comes later; varying between the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala, and it can be situated at the end of the sixteenth century, and the lowlands of Yucatan and Petén, where it can be dated to the end of the seventeenth century. See Eduardo Natalino dos Santos. "Construir a História dos povos ameríndios
the Spanish, the Amerindian elites of the vice-kings of New Spain and Peru interacted with and appropriated Christian concepts, interpreting and redimensioning them in accordance with their own philosophical traditions, political projects, and modalities for engaging with and interpreting the conquest processes and subsequent sociopolitical relations with the Spanish and other Christians, such as missionaries.2

The topic of interethnic relations in Spanish America and that of cultural transformation and the traditional mindset of Amerindian peoples as related to contact with Christians has been widely studied. On this occasion, our approach will examine how the Nahua, Maya, and Andean elites appropriated Christian concepts for themselves to update or generate new forms of understanding of the natural and social world, organizing them in accounts and according to concepts that incorporate the past and present – and, sometimes, the future – i.e., in explanatory works that we can call historical Amerindian cosmologies.

**The Nahuas of the Central Mexican Plateau**

After the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan on August 13, 1521, most of the Amerindian populations in the central Mexican plateau considered themselves victorious, especially the ruling elites. The defeat of the Mexicas was credited to a coalition formed between the Spanish and about 50 Nahua cities against the isolated Mexicas who maintained only two other cities – Itztapalapan and Malinalco – as allies until they were final defeated. After that, the Mexica elite, especially the descendant lineages of Moctezuma, also joined the victorious coalition. In this manner, the Nahua elites continued to rule their cities and participate actively in the expansion of the new coalition domains in regions beyond the central plateau, including in areas previously under Mexica domain as well as in regions outside that domain, such as the highlands of Chiapas.

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2 To assess the concentration of the Christian missionary effort in the regions of the former Mexica and Inca domain, and how these regions worked to support the dissemination of this effort in areas like the Maya region more refractive politically to the increasing political-religious domain of the Castilians, it is significant to know that out of the 6,000 regular religious men who came to America during the sixteenth century, approximately 2,700 went to New Spain and 1,800 went to Peru. We addressed the missionary company in sixteenth-century New Spain in: Eduardo Natalino dos Santos. *Deuses do México indígena* (São Paulo, Editora Palas Athena, 2002).