This paper examines the convergences and continuities of Nahua and European historiographical genres in Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s Historia de la nación chichimeca. A well-known colonial historian of mostly Spanish descent, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s ties to Acolhua nobility nevertheless ensured his bilingualism and status as a cultural mediator between the “República de Indias” and the “República de españoles.” Like other early colonial texts written by “indio ladino” historians, Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s histories of the pre-conquest world attempted to create conformity with dominant culture values. This negotiation of colonial power affecting the content of the past, however, also took place on the level form. Conceived as a European “universal” history, the Historia de la nación chichimeca tells a linear, chronologically organized account of the past beginning with an account of the creation of the world. It also, however, carries on important conventions of its indigenous source texts. Historical genres in the Nahua tradition such as pictorial maps, annals, oral tales, didactic speeches, and fragments of historical songs influence and populate the narrative. In addition, circular structures of time and ideas of sacred landscape, common elements of Nahua (and Mesoamerican) semiotics, help shape the text. As with the work’s content, these intercalated genres and modes of rendering (and indeed of envisioning) the past speak to the culturally heterogeneous context of historical production in New Spain, and to the limits of colonization. Through the deployment of Nahua genres, the Historia forges contexts of signification in which ideas and meanings proper to a Nahua cultural context can be found, ideas that would not have been available to his monolingual, Spanish speaking audience. Alva Ixtlilxochitl thus uses form to generate a work with layers of meaning, one that reaches out in two cultural directions and becomes a space of cultural convergence and continuity par excellence. (Pictured below: Codex Xolotl).

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