Words with [ʃ] in the Sandoval dictionary: Calpixque

Laura Martin, Ph.D.
Last revised June 2006

This word is one of the many adopted by early Spanish cronistas to describe positions related to government activities in the new colonies. Often translated as mayordomo or estanciero, the calpixque worked for the encomendero, or finca owner, and supervised indigenous workers.

*CALPIXQUE, m. = Capataz o sobrestante de indios, en las fincas. Procede del mexicano *calpixqui, compuesto de calli = casa + *pixqui = el que guarda.

Although the etymology suggests a kind of guard or steward, the word actually referred to the Aztec tax or tribute collectors. Calpixque ~ calpisque appeared often in early colonial reports. For example, in a royal cédula written in Valladolid on 7 June 1550 and concerning language use in the new colonies, we find the following:

Para introducir nuestra lengua y aun nuestra policía y costumbres entre éstos, será: lo primero, que no se prohiba la conversación y trato de españoles con éstos, sino que indistintamente el encomendero, el calpisque, el clérigo y el fraile, todos vayan y vengan a sus pueblos, hablen y conversen con ellos, y españoles que entre ellos hablen siempre nuestra lengua... *

An internet search under either spelling turns up numerous other citations from colonial documents. Because of its utility, it was early accepted by the Royal Language Academy. The current DRAE entry uses orthographic x, evidently to reflect the archaic palatal pronunciation. For the DRAE, the word is associated only with Honduras and Mexico, but the entry and proposed etymology are almost identical to Sandoval’s.

calpixque.
(Del nahua calli, casa, y pixqui, guardián).
1. m. Hond. y Méx. En la época colonial, capataz encargado por los encomenderos del gobierno de los indios de su repartimiento y del cobro de los tributos.

By now, calpixque should probably be considered archaic. My own notes suggest that few people without advanced education in history recognize it nowadays. It is included in a useful on-line dictionary of now largely forgotten colonial Spanish terms, to be found at http://www.tamu.edu/academics/mperr/ColAm/Spanish%20Terms.htm.