

**A Way Back to Aztlan:**  
**Sixteenth Century Hispanic-Nahuatl Transculturation**  
**and the Construction of the New Mexico**

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Thesis for PhD in Social Anthropology

London School of Economics and Political Science  
University of London

2001

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is a library and archive-based study within the field of historical anthropology. It is concerned with one particular case of cross-cultural borrowing that occurred during the sixteenth century Spanish conquest of mainland North America; a process of imperial expansion that resulted in the establishment of several colonial provinces, which comprised all of present-day Mexico, Guatemala and some parts of the United States of America and were administratively dependent on the viceroyalty of New Spain. The thesis focuses on the creation of the most northerly province within this territory, *Nuevo México*, which —unlike other provinces in the Spanish overseas domains— had a social and political existence before it had an actual geographic embodiment.

Rather than the actual politico-geographic entity founded as a colonial "kingdom" in 1598, *Nuevo México* is understood in this study as a "disembodied imaginary world," mainly consisting of the image of the Aztec ancestral homeland that Spanish conquerors and their Indian allies and/or subjects fabricated in the context of their colonial interaction. Therefore the focus of this thesis is on the transformation of abstract, symbolic space into concrete, politically marked territory. Through the semantic analysis of the term *Nuevo México* and via reconstructing the process of its formulation and reification (1539-1598) I have explored issues of alterity, local knowledge, cultural hybridity and misunderstanding.

Part one of the thesis discusses the relevance of historical case-studies for anthropological theorisation on colonialism and the creation of culture. It also provides an ethno-historical background for the area and people addressed in the thesis and displays the chain of events related to the exploration and conquest of *Nuevo México*. Part two argues against traditional interpretations of the colonisation of *Nuevo México* as entailing the transplant of the European mediaeval imagery and proposes instead that it was the Nahua pre-conquest myths of origin what prompted the Spanish conquest of the area. Finally, it discusses the complexity of cross-cultural interaction and the creation of culture in colonial contexts.



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Several institutions and many people supported me and collaborated to make this thesis possible.

I am grateful for funds from the Dirección General de Asuntos del Personal Académico (DGAPA) of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), which sponsored my studies with a six year scholarship (1994-1999) to pay my fees at LSE and my living expenses in London. Also the Central Research Fund of the University of London awarded me a grant from the Irwin Trust (December 1995) to carry out archive research in Spain between May and August 1996. Without their financial aid this thesis could hardly have been done. The support and advice of my supervisors in México —Alfredo López Austin (UNAM)— and in Britain —Joanna Overing (LSE), Alfred Gell (LSE), Fenella Cannell (LSE), and Peter Hulme (University of Essex)— were of invaluable importance at different moments in the process of this research. I want to thank particularly Fenella Cannell, who took most of the burden, providing me not only with her theoretical guidance but also correcting even my language mistakes. Any error in this thesis, however, is my own responsibility.

The idea for this project evolved from the work I developed, and the scholarly discussions I participated in, as a contributor to the project "Historia de la Historiografía Mexicana," coordinated by Juan A. Ortega y Medina and Rosa de Lourdes Camelo in the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas (UNAM), for which I held a collaborative research grant from DGAPA/UNAM. I therefore thank the members of the seminar on the colonial period, directed by Rosa de Lourdes Camelo, to which I was ascribed (1991-1993). I am also indebted with several colleagues who generously shared their specialised knowledge and/or materials with me throughout the last six years, reading, commenting and criticising preliminary drafts or simply discussing my ideas and clarifying specific doubts: Tristan Platt, José Rubén Romero, José Luis Mirafuentes, Federico Navarrete, Isabel Medina, Humberto Medina, Cuauhtémoc Medina, and Emily Carreón.

Finally, I want to thank Emily Carreón for copy-editing the final draft of this thesis, cleaning my prose from the syntax and grammar mistakes typical of non-native English speakers, and Edith Llamas for helping me in the final revision and correction of my references and bibliography.

## **NOTES**

- 1) For the present thesis it is important that the reader can readily access the original sixteenth and seventeenth centuries texts quoted. Therefore I have decided to provide an English translation within the main body of my text, and the original in Spanish in the footnotes, although when the fragment quoted or referred is minimal (a short phrase, one or two words) I have incorporated it in brackets in the main text. All the translations from Spanish colonial texts into English are mine, except for a few cases, in which case I specify the edition I quoted.
- 2) Also it is important for the reader to distinguish when I am using secondary, modern studies and when I quote colonial (sixteenth and seventeenth century) texts. I have tried to make this clear by providing, in the reference marks of my texts, the date of the edition I am using+ followed by the first publication or elaboration date in square brackets. I have also done this with modern literature every time the edition I use is more than ten years posterior to the first publication date. The same criteria are followed within the main body of my text and in the bibliography.
- 3) I do not include a detailed index of the archive documents or archive sections I consulted and used. Each document quoted is fully referred within my text, in brackets, with its location in the archive where it is preserved. The Names of the archives consulted and the abbreviations I use to refer to them in my text appear at the beginning of my bibliography.
- 4) Explanations for my word-choice in such instances as New Mexico or *Nuevo México*, Azteca or Mexica, etc. are provided where appropriate.

## **Part One**

**Defining the Issue and the Setting.**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This thesis is based on the analysis of documentary sources relating to the sixteenth century definition, search and conquest of the Spanish kingdom of *Nuevo México* (maps 1 & 2) established in 1598 in the territory today comprised approximately within the North American states of New Mexico and Arizona.<sup>1</sup> As such it is an unusual type of anthropological work for instead of the field it draws upon the archive, which means of course that my argument was not developed through participant observation, generally considered since Malinowski (1978 [1922]) the characteristic feature distinguishing anthropology from other disciplines (Radcliffe Brown 1958 [1931]: 76-77, Cohn 1990: 21, Howell 1997: 106-107 & 115).

What I am writing here, however, is not traditional history or ethnohistory either, as the object of my study is neither the politico-military past of a colonial province nor the culture and social arrangements of its original indigenous inhabitants. My aims are at once more restricted and more comprehensive since my argument delves upon the cross-cultural dealings between Spanish conquerors and Native Amerindians in the process of constructing an "imaginary" piece of human geography. Specifically I trace the impact that certain forms of local, indigenous knowledge—namely, a corpus of narratives on ancestral past and origins—had upon the way in which Spaniards perceived the new land, grounded their expectations and devised their colonialist *modus operandi*. Thus although this thesis exceeds the geographic and temporal scope traditionally covered by scholarly work on the history and ethnohistory of New Mexico, understood as a concrete politico territorial

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis I consistently use the Spanish form *Nuevo México* when referring to the Spanish colonial province of that name, and its English translation when talking about the modern North American State of New Mexico into which the former evolved. Despite territorial and other overlaps these entities are not the same, even when the latter's name is simply the translation of the former's.



entity, it has a narrow point of focus that I shall describe summarily as the deconstruction of a toponym. That is, the detailed assessment of the social and cultural meanings such toponym codifies, the particular forms of social interaction that the process of its formulation reveals, and the theoretical challenge it poses to modern scholarly discourses on the Europeans' encounter with the "Others" they colonised.

Unlike other Spanish colonies in the American continent *Nuevo México* existed in the conquerors' imagination as a province within the rightful jurisdiction of the Spanish crown, named and imagined in elaborate detail long before it corresponded with any particular spot on the ground. The hypothetical territory was imagined through the allocation of place names, and what interests me is that this occurred in a way which was extremely untypical of Spanish colonial naming practices of this period. After Hernán Cortés baptised, in 1520, the territory he seized from the Aztec emperor "New Spain" (*Nueva España*) a novel mode of geographic naming emerged, designating the American new found lands as recapitulations of European locations (*Nueva Galicia*, *Nueva Vizcaya*, New England, etc.). But rather than a European place, *Nuevo México* —the only toponym of its kind among those formulated by Europeans in the colonial period— is a recapitulation of an Amerindian space, since it partly reproduces the name of the indigenous metropolis on whose destruction the birth of New Spain itself was predicated: Mexico-Tenochtitlan (map 3). This simple and apparently trivial fact, hitherto overlooked by historians and anthropologists alike, suggests that our interpretation of the New World colonial experience should pay more attention to the Europeans' cognitive response to human difference and the practical implications this had for the design of territorial expansion strategies.

### 1.1.- "The possibility of a conjuncture."

Early twentieth century scholars saw history and anthropology as hopelessly opposed, one defined as the reconstruction —through the hermeneutic analysis of original sources— of past events or chains of events as they did in fact occur (Cohn 1990: 23, 31-35), the other as the synchronic study of cultures and societies aiming to understand the functional and structural links of institutions, ideas and behavioural patterns in the ethnographic present (Radcliffe Brown 1958 [1931]: 76-77, 84).<sup>2</sup> But the once valid assertion that anthropology is more interested in regularities, less narrative and more classificatory, the notion that historical research belongs to the realm of contingency and particularity while anthropological thought pertains to the sphere of structure and general abstraction does not hold true anymore. Since the 1950s both disciplines have been increasingly perceived as less diverse in nature, for not only they have developed overlapping concerns but they also turned to share a number of methodologies and theoretical worries. Thus while Evans Pritchard argued some fifty years ago (1963 [1950]: 22-25) that the difference between history and anthropology is of a technical, not a methodological order insofar as both look for the general patterns that render a society culturally and sociologically intelligible, more recently Bernard Cohn noted (1990: 42) that despite their two different modes of practice, historians and anthropologists share a lot at the epistemological level, since the latter work in space and the former through time but they both construct "accounts of otherness."

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<sup>2</sup> Historical thought has never been entirely absent from anthropology. In fact E. B. Tylor, L. H. Morgan, E. Durkheim, M. Mauss and other founding thinkers of the discipline were concerned with a kind of chronology, comparing modernity with past and contemporary non-modern cultures and establishing historical sequences of social and cultural development (Moore 1997: 17-39, Douglas 1990). Kinship theory itself, the most emblematically anthropological speciality, originated from the consideration of the history of Roman Law, while the historically based work of sociologists like M. Weber, particularly his book on the Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism (1930), have been highly influential in anthropological scholarship. Nevertheless, towards the beginning of the twentieth century anthropology self-identity came to be abundantly reinstated by establishing a sharp border with other disciplines, history among them.

In the field of history this rapprochement has contributed to render irrelevant the classical notion that its practitioners aim, above all, "to discover how events were connected to each other and fix their chronological order" (Mandelbaum 1967: 414). Likewise, it has contributed to shift the focus away from the narrow consideration of the institutional aspects of the nation state and its inevitable stress upon the economic and public policy spheres,<sup>3</sup> or culture understood as the sum of individual achievements in the arts, science or thought in general. Its effects are most noticeable in the 1960s and 1970s French History of Mentalities (e.g. Le Goff 1974), and the subsequent emergence of Historical Anthropology (e.g. Ginzburg 1980, Darnton 1985), both a by-product of the methodological reorientation that had led historians of the Marxist School, the "New History" and the *Annales* School to distance from event-based history and ground the study of human past in socio-economic concerns, incorporating the quantitative methods developed in sociology and focusing upon "long duration" phenomena of the kind studied by contemporary ethnology (Cohn 1990: 64-66, Chartier 1995: 23-27).

Both the History of Mentalities and Historical Anthropology make the study of history "from the bottom up," focusing on the masses, the inarticulate and the deprived in their intent to view culture as the store of collective representations pervasive in everyday life, which pertain to the sphere of automatic, non-reflexive thought that regulates without going explicit people's judgement and behaviour in society (Cohn 1990: 39-40, Chartier 1995: 23). Both draw heavily upon Durkheim and Geertz. Nevertheless, while *mentalité* historians privilege quantitative evidence and methodologies, historical anthropologists have turned to a micro qualitative level of research more akin to ethnographic practice, applying Geertzian "thick description" to the study of specific cases and small communities which they analyse in terms of the

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<sup>3</sup> In recent years Benedict Anderson's anthropologically oriented revision of the nation state as an "imagined community" (1983) and the publication of anthropological studies on neo-nationalism and other fundamentalist movements (e.g. Tambiah 1996, Anderson 1998) seems to have renewed scholarly interest in political history.

"structures of signification" (Geertz 1993 [1973]: 9) embedded in the apparently trivial routines that enforce a particular world view. Thus they aim to render sociologically meaningful the particularities of unique historical settings, which they do not see as constituting bonds in a causal chain of events or circumstances but as particular instances of things generally human (etiquette, codes of conduct, marriage, the experience of death, etc.).

Geertzian thick description has been severely criticised in anthropological circles for reducing culture to the status of a text. An operation that merges, according to Talal Asad and Maurice Bloch, cognitive, ideological and communicative questions thereby obscuring "the ways in which discourse and understanding are connected in social practice" (Asad 1993: 31, see also 1979: 609) and leaving experience acquired through the interaction with the environment out of play in the game of social transformation (Bloch 1986: 178-181 & 1989: 106-108). I will come back to this in my conclusions. For now I just want to note that historical anthropology only informs my research insofar as it shows that it is possible to conduct ethnography in the archives, as long as we treat individual documents as concrete expressions of general idioms and search for what they reveal about socially shared responses to the world, which reside in the intersection of thought and practice (Darnton 1985: 3). Nevertheless, I do not simply aim to take a specific, past community as equivalent to any other ethnographic present. While historical anthropology turns history to synchronicity, adopting a holistic perspective that views societies at any given moment in their past as organic wholes, I move essentially in the diachronic dimension, the consideration of which has contributed importantly to a variety of post-functionalist auto-critical reflections within anthropology (Asad 1973, Cohn 1990, Dirks 1989 & 1992, Thomas 1991, Taussig 1993) reminding us that the world, as E. Wolf contends (1982), is not divided into atomistic societies or peoples. Every sociocultural

formation rather exists within extra-community relations of symbolic exchange, commerce, mutual dependence, dominance and subjection.

Rather than an ethnography-like depiction of an historical setting this thesis is an attempt to effect the conjunction of history and anthropology that Cohn (1990: 42) advocated when demanding an anthropological history that would reassert "an epistemology and subject matter common to the two disciplines," which he further defined as follows:

An anthropological history is not about a place being a place in the sense of being a bounded geographic location, or, for that matter, in the sense of what in the older anthropological literature was called a tribe, village or category of people. We might choose to study in a certain place, but the unit of our study is not a place. Nor is it a segment of time as a sequence of empirical events.

The units of study in anthropological history should be cultural and culturally derived: honour, power, authority, exchange, reciprocity, codes of conduct, systems of social classification, the construction of time and space, rituals. One studies these in a particular place and over time, but the study is about the construction of cultural categories and the process of that construction, not about place and time (Cohn 1990: 46-47).

In this sense the unit of my study, unlike that of most anthropologists and anthropologically informed historians, is not one specific community or category of people but many as mutually related in the process of transforming, through categorical construction and colonising practice, abstract geographic space into concrete socio-political place. As a body of empirical evidence it comprises a long period of happenstance and a geographically wide area, extending temporally from 1519, when Spaniards first arrived in the mainland North American territory that later became Mexico, to approximately 1600, when a different group of Spaniards re-founded a "New" Mexico in the Southwest of what is today the United States of America. As a theoretical reflection it explores a series of issues raised in the last thirty years by scholars devoted to analysing the process of accommodation undergone by peoples suddenly immersed in the kind of asymmetric cross-cultural confrontations that have characterised European colonialism. More particularly, it addresses recent debates regarding culturally specific modes of handling contingency and

comprehending alterity (Sahlins 1981, 1987 & 1995, Bloch 1989, Friedman 1988, Obeyesekere 1992, Todorov 1999 [1982], Mason 1990), thereby touching upon the age old problem of the conditioning power of culture and the bounded character often attributed to the particular sociocultural formations the anthropologist studies as relatively well integrated and stable wholes, organically structured to automatically reproduce themselves without the individuals' conscious intent.

A genuine conjunction between history and anthropology does not reside in the simple operation of bringing history to anthropology as context for the particular ethnographic present studied through a longer or shorter period of participant observation, or making sense of particular events occurred during the fieldwork with the aid of documentary evidence. Neither does it reside in widening the scope of our studies of past realities to incorporate the structural, often inarticulate aspects of everyday social life that do not qualify as high culture products, and which most documentary evidence tied to the economic and political processes of the State seldom enunciate or elaborate upon. Rather it entails a double approach at once processual and classificatory to the complex arena where social intersection between culturally diverse individuals occurs, aiming not to discover how the structural or functional coherence of kinship systems, gender identities, political institutions, technological and economic conditions that characterise particular sociocultural formations is upset by "cross-culture contact" but to understand how concrete people create cultural forms through social engagement across cultures. Needless to say this field, particularly visible in the colonial situation, exists in the past and in the present and may be accessed through direct observation within a presently extant setting, or, as I have chosen, through the indirect assessment of past happenstance as revealed in documentary evidence.

An anthropologically oriented reassessment of New World documentation that pays attention to both non-state determined forms of

power and non-power conditioned forms of perceiving and organising experience is fundamental, I think, in order to take late discussions of how cultural difference has been dealt with "colonially" a step further.

Since O'Gorman (1984 [1958]: 79-89) formulated America's unforeseen irruption into European cosmology as "invention," and even more so after Todorov (1999 [1982]: 4) proclaimed that America presented Europe with an entirely unanticipated human difference, sixteenth century New World scenarios have become the symbol of radical, incomprehensible alterity for scholars writing on the colonial representation of otherness (e.g. McGrane 1989: 7-42, Ainsa 1992: 67-71, Thomas 1994: 52, Greenblat 1991: 132-133). Yet as I show in this thesis America also confronted Europeans —or Spaniards at least— with the unexpected experience of witnessing Amerindian orders similar to their own. The conquerors' response to this often neglected circumstance testifies against the categorical imperviousness that recent alterity-taming hypotheses devised for the assessment of self-other relations attribute to Western cultural orders. A dangerous assumption that could be paralleled to Martial Sahlins' (1981, 1987 & 1995) treatment of non-Western peoples as entrapped in the over determinant webs of their symbolic systems, so severely criticised by Bloch (1989 & 1998), Friedman (1988), and Obeyesekere (1992). At the same time it challenges the fundamental pre-supposition of unidirectionality that most alterity-taming models share with more traditional notions of acculturation and cultural imperialism.

This assumption of one-way inflection has been recently denounced by Nicholas Thomas, who warns the critics of Orientalist and other associated colonial discourses against lapsing into the illusion "that prospectively or already colonised places are *tabula rasa* for the projection of European power and European representations" (Thomas 1991: 36). We should abandon the idea, as Thomas contends, that the effect of imperial intrusions upon the dominated groups has been so shattering and so pervasive as to render local,

precolonial forms of sociality and representation insignificant for the subsequent development of colonial societies (Thomas 1991: 36). And this is only possible if, beyond interpreting colonised responses in terms other than mere resistance and accommodation, we bring the European colonist and the indigene —as Cohn (1990: 44) advised— into the same analytic field. Recent studies concerning colony-metropole relations have gone a long way in questioning the imperviousness of colonial discourse and the homogeneity traditionally attributed to each of the two sides engaged in the colonial circumstance, exploring internal socio-economic diversity and competing agendas in both (e.g. Fabian 1990, Stoler 1989, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, Thomas 1994, Cooper & Stoler 1997, Radding 1997). Nevertheless they rarely address the intersubjective arena wherein a new society with cultural characteristics and agendas of its own is coming into being, perhaps because in the late modern examples they normally address colony and metropole remained more distinct than in sixteenth century America.

Unlike most literature on colonial encounters focusing on the effects of cultural and political imposition upon dominated peoples —often with a teleological view of the colonising individual as if his dominant position had never been at stake and his views were always untouched— this thesis is mainly concerned with the constitution of a new culture and a new society. Rather than the forceful accommodation, open or concealed resistance of the colonised, the wealth of routines and representations the colonists enforced and displayed, or the modifications that the Spanish imperial project underwent in adapting itself to local indigenous responses I intend to describe one among many forms in which the concrete Spaniards who came in the New World to stay became culturally naturalised.



## 1.2.- The facts: Portuguese bishops or Nahua ancestors.

The sequence of events constituting the factual backbone of my research took place over a vast territory that scholars in the field of Native American ethnohistory divide in three more or less distinct culture areas: Mesoamerica, Arid America and Oasis America (map 4).

Two regions within this extensive piece of land are particularly important for my overall argument because they represent respectively the starting and ending points of the "world making" process<sup>4</sup> I analyse, which I term "the quest for *Nuevo México*." One is Central Mexico (maps 5 & 6), stretching between the coasts of the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans across the south of the Central Highland Plateau of Mexico and roughly coinciding with the maximum expanse of the so called Aztec Empire, an area primarily inhabited in the contact period by Náhuatl and Otomí speaking peoples (Cline 1971: 170, 173). At its heart lays the lacustrine basin of Mexico within the valley of the same name, that together with the adjacent valleys of Toluca and Puebla-Tlaxcala, and the *tierra caliente* (hot land) of the present day state of Morelos, has always been the most densely populated spot in mainland North America. During colonial times Central Mexico became the main seat of government for the Viceroyalty of New Spain, and when the Spanish sway extended beyond its limits, the name New Spain continued to be primarily associated with it.

The second region I focus on is that encompassed within the nebulous boundaries of the colonial kingdom of *Nuevo México*. Before the Spanish conquest it was primarily inhabited by a number of linguistically diverse groups of sedentary, full-time farmers today known as Pueblo Indians and increasing numbers of immigrant hunter-gatherers. Several parties of conquerors, missionaries, and prospective colonists entered this area successively after Marcos de Niza first sighted the Pueblo villages in 1540, but

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<sup>4</sup> I take this concept from Nelson Goodman (1978). It will be further discussed in my concluding chapter.

for a long period the Spaniards addressed it as *Cíbola*, or The Seven Cities, and only in the decade of 1580 it was identified as the much ambitioned province of *Nuevo México* that several conquerors had been searching for elsewhere at least since the decade of 1560. Thus besides all those undertakings composing the traditional narrative of New Mexico's early history—which starts with the all too famous odyssey of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and finishes with Juan de Oñate's 1598 act of possession—I also review an additional set of conquering endeavours that did not reach, or aim at reaching, the Pueblo Indian country but were somehow devised against the horizon provided by personal memories of Aztec splendour and indigenous versions of Aztec past.

Central for the argument this thesis develops is the concept of "imaginary world" as defined by Peter Mason; that is, an imaginary accretion (1986: 43, 53-60) referring to the configuration of the world perceived but having no correspondence with any concrete empirical object, although it has "a certain reality effect" deriving from the fact that it is linguistically expressed as "an ensemble of names" which interlocks with other objectification systems empirically grounded (chronological, topographical, etc.) (Mason 1990: 17). As Mason rightly argues (1990: 15-27 & 1991), imaginary worlds have no concrete embodiment "in the material external world" but nevertheless inscribe specific attitudes towards the social and natural objects they address. Therefore, they are constitutive of the social practice of individuals within the world.

Attending to documentary evidence *Nuevo México* was indeed an imaginary world, constructed by Spanish conquerors and settlers, and their Indian allies throughout a period of approximately thirty years after the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. During this period a long series of verbal reports, generally vague, suggesting the existence of seven rich and populous cities lost beyond the northern reaches of New Spain were systematically put in connection with a widespread body of local Nahua traditions concerning a distant origin land: Aztlán-Teoculhuacan-Chicomoztoc. Towards the mid

sixteenth century this world making process had crystallised in the chimerical realm of *Nuevo México*, non-localised but conceived as the abundant, well populated original homeland of the ancient Mexicans, which successive parties of religious and lay adventurers then tried to locate.

Taking the semantic analysis of the toponyms *Nueva España* and *Nuevo México* as a vantage point, the thesis shows that the construction of *Nuevo México*, and its later reification, are closely related with the Caribbean phase of early colonial intrusion, the Spaniards' initial accession to the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico, and their subsequent arrival in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Indeed, the surprise that Spanish conquerors experienced before the complex, urban societies they confronted in Mesoamerica elicited a process of homological comparison that led them to grant authoritative status to certain forms of indigenous historical discourse. Thus the link I suggest between the Caribbean experience, the conquest of Central Mexico and the posterior search for *Nuevo México* consists of a line of interconnected epistemological ruptures with momentous practical implications as conquerors began to dream of the origin land of Nahuatl narratives, increasingly interpreting the human and natural scenery they came across as empirical evidence of their proximity to that place and of the trustworthy character of those narratives. Simultaneously the thesis argues against the widespread historiographic tendency to present the conquest of *Nuevo México* as yet another instance of the multiple figures of the European mediaeval imagery transplanted to the New World. An interpretation based on the equivocal thesis that conquerors who tried to reach the seven cities of Cibola that Niza described in 1539 believed to be on the right track to finding certain Christian cities that, according to a popular legend, seven Portuguese bishops had founded in the island of Antilla after having escaped the Moor invasion of the Iberian Peninsula taking a group of followers across the Atlantic Sea (Gandía 1929, Beck 1969, Weber 1987, Gil 1989a, Pastor Bodmer 1992).

Both arguments intend to demonstrate that Spanish conquerors did not simply experience the New World as the passive scenario for the enactment of their own power games and prejudices but actually underwent a process of self-transformation through their engagement with the cultural realities they intruded. This is not to say that colonised and European cultures were dialectically integrated in a harmonic synthesis. The debate that evolved around Fifth Centennial commemorations of the discovery of America (e.g. O'Gorman 1987, Aznares & Norma 1992, Estrada 1992) makes evident that such an argument, implicit in the notion of the "Encounter between the Old World and the New," is, at least, questionable, since Europeans and Amerindian peoples took part on these events in conditions of inequality. Nevertheless, when asymmetric power relations are inscribed in situations of cultural difference the oppressors, like the oppressed, often inhabit the alien discourse of the opposing "Other", building up hybrid representations that become the basis of much colonial practice.

### **1.3.- The theories: colonialism, cultural borrowing and the representation of "Self" and "Other."**

Scholarly models for the assessment of cross-cultural interaction between Europe and non-European societies are of two basic types. Either they focus on the European experience of "the Other," stressing Europe's imposition of her own cosmological premises onto the alien worlds she interferes, or they concentrate on the response of non-Western societies to European presence, addressing the form in which "the Other" perceives, appropriates and represents the West, and the ways in which it accommodates to, or resists against, the colonial intrusion.

### **1.3.1.- Europe confronts "the Other."**

Perhaps the most powerful and influential among the first group of models is that defining "Western systems of alterity." That is, the systematic store of images and discourses that individuals of Western culture deploy in constructing images of otherness. A fundamental category of experience and reflection in the humanities and social sciences since the 1980s and 1990s that emerged as part of a general shift of emphasis in scholarship which is a reaction against the most characteristic paradigms of modernist thought (evolutionism, structuralism, and functionalism), constructed along the lines of identity and unifying identification (Corbey & Leersen 1991: x, Rapport & Overing 2000: 9).

Most literature in this new analytic field is primarily concerned with the political significance and epistemological basis of difference, viewing Western images of otherness as products of a process of exclusion (e.g. Said 1995 [1978], Pagden 1982, Hulme 1986, Todorov 1999 [1982], McGrane 1989, Mason 1990, Karstens 1991, Ainsa 1992, Thomas 1994, Bhabha 1994) that assumes the essential superiority of Self before all external entities thus functioning as a strategy of disempowerment of "the Other." The argument draws heavily upon Emmanuel Levinas' contention that understanding difference in terms of "Self" and "Other" always entails reducing "the Other" to "Self," either by conceiving alterity as the reverse side of identity, or by constructing an alter ego simply defined as that which is not oneself (Levinas 1969: 40-42 & 215-236; 1987: 67-90). On the other hand it follows closely Foucault's analysis of the tactics of power implied in the changing perception of madness (Foucault 1967, Sheridan 1980), comparing the "Self-Other" opposition of Western cosmology to the "reason-unreason" partition Foucault studied insofar as "the Other," like "unreason," seems to be often defined in purely negative terms expressing the absence or privation of the qualities attributed to the defining Self (reason). As a consequence, so the argument goes, the properties of "the Other" thus deprived of a positive identity of its own are perceived as strange, hidden, frightful and

menacing therefore inviting physical suppression, confinement and marginalisation (Karstens 1991: 78-82, Mason 1990: 169-178, Ainsa 1992: 70-71).

The analysis of European perceptions of Amerindian civilisations in the early colonial period has been particularly important in this theorising, given the paradoxical value frequently accorded to the New World appearance in the European horizon. Thus Johannes Fabian (1983) and Bernard McGrane (1989), for instance, categorise the New World encounter as the quintessential experience of absolute human and geographic alterity but assert that at the same time it founded, with the Copernican revolution, the process of unifying identification culminating in the Newtonian and Cartesian paradigms that came to rule modernist thought. For as the theological heavens transformed into astronomical space in post-Copernican Europe turning the earth into just another planet—Bernard McGrane explains (1989: 30-37 & 43-52)—Europe also became just another continent in the post-Columbine world; and this initiated a process of categorical homogenisation both in the natural and the human domains that aimed to reduce the menacing properties of otherness to controllable intelligibility.

Of course this view on modernist thought as essentially rational is open to criticism, but this is another discussion. The point I want to make here is that several authors working on the conquest of the Americas from an alterity-taming perspective set out to demonstrate that physical conquest entails suppressive definition and so they contend that in colonial discourse Amerindians appeared as the exotic and pathological antithesis of what the conquerors thought themselves to be (e.g. Pagden 1982, Hulme 1986, Mason 1990 & 1991). Sepúlveda's position in his debate with Las Casas in 1550-1551—which described American Indians as brutish, irrational beings naturally born for slavery—has been taken to be the most prototypical example of this kind of representation (Pagden 1982: 117-118, Mason 1990: 52-53). Nevertheless it is also noted that generally speaking sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

depiction of New World peoples widely used all those derogatory references which had been devised to describe those social groups which, since antiquity, had stood outside the scope of hegemony.

According to Mason (1990, chapter two) the imagery of the exotic used for the American Indian was but a projection of the imagery signifying both lack and excess already in use by the European upper classes to define their own internal "Others." A language for alterity that allowed for the fixation of the natives' status at the lower echelons of the conqueror's own society, among the Jew, the mad, the child, the peasant, and which incorporated non European monstrous and fabulous races depicted in Greek and Roman travel lore and cosmography. For McGrane such a projection of European fantastic motifs and classical imaginations represents above all an epistemological strategy to bridge incommensurability by applying familiar notions of the unknown to comprehend unfamiliar settings. Arranging the inhabitants of the New World and the ancient Greeks on the same horizon sixteenth century Europeans could see the strange geography and alien beings of the present (savages) as elucidating and being elucidated by the strange geography and alien beings of the past, and so the unknown was not explained by the known but brought into the vicinity of another unknown, which suddenly transformed both unknowns into knowns (McGrane 1989: 16-23).

For all its illuminating contributions most of this literature admits without question the unlikely assumption that the American experience represented for Europeans a one sided process of cultural imposition, New World peoples being merely acted upon as the object of self inscription, whereas for indigenous peoples the European intrusion was an experience of cultural deprivation and submission to which they only responded in terms of open rebellion or concealed cultural resistance. The focus being the imposition of the premises of "Self" upon "Other," this insight seldom regards the alien forms of sociality and representation confronted by the dominant subject in the Euro-

American encounter as having any actual effect upon those discourses built by the dominant subject itself. Furthermore, in stressing the asymmetry between Indians and Europeans, as between any pair of conquered-conqueror, authors like Mason (1990: 164) assert that while examples abound of Indians who perforce adopt the values of their conquerors, there are few instances of the reverse. Thus the general picture we end up with is that of an endless monologue that allowed Europeans, through formulating representations (discourses) that contributed to maintain the asymmetric situation, to remain fundamentally European while the Amerindians increasingly adopted the ways and perspectives of their super powerful conquerors.

I object to the idea that the logic of exclusion totally pervade Western attitudes towards America, leading Europeans to dismiss local knowledge altogether. This unwillingness to recognise that Native representations were often incorporated to the invader's cognitive repertoire, bearing an authoritative status in the eyes of European individuals and institutions, also characterises a rather traditional and much earlier historiographic position that viewed Spanish conquerors as little more than a mystified and lustful lot unable to see beyond the fantastic realm of its own mediaeval imagination (Gandía 1929, Hanke 1959, Weckmann 1951 & 1984).

### **1.3.2.- "The Other" confronts Europe.**

Similar levels of stubborn intra-referentiality are implied in Martial Sahlins' (1981) structural theory of history, largely developed through the analysis of Captain Cook's death in Hawaii to explain the articulation of change and persistence in history and which is one of the most controversial models addressing non-Western responses to European intrusion.

After having conducted a series of scientific expeditions in the Pacific, Captain Cook was commissioned to search for the Northwest Passage —a navigable waterway that since the sixteenth century people had believed to cross North America from East to West. In November 1778 his ships came



across the hitherto unknown Hawaiian islands. On the 26 they arrived off Maui but did not anchor until the 17 of January 1779 at Kealahou Bay, after circumnavigating the island of Hawaii. Upon landing, Cook was escorted to Lono's temple and went through what he interpreted as rites of worship. Having made some barter transactions and a brief survey Cook and his men left on February 4, promising to return the following year but a few days later the *Resolution* sprung her foremast and the ships went back to Kealahou, arriving on February 11. Relations between Europeans and Hawaiians degenerated rapidly and Cook was killed in a skirmish while trying to take the chief as hostage against the return of a stolen cutter. Based upon the fundamental premise that culture encodes practical action, Sahlins explained Cook's killing as a by-product of the categorical accommodation that Hawaiians made of his unexpected arrival in terms of the received structure of their own culture, thus using the incident to prove that the empirical world of contingency is mediated by structures of significance, that is, notions and categories that find articulation through a culturally constituted consciousness (Sahlins 1981: 6-8).

Cook's arrival in Hawaii, Sahlins explains, fell within the annual celebration of the traditional Makahiki, a four lunar months rite dedicated to God Lono, who came every year with the winter rains to renew the fertility of nature causing the temporary suspension of the regular ceremonies involved in the worship of god Ku, closely connected to the legitimacy of political rule. Thus the Makahiki ritual cycle was as well a symbolic enactment of mythical notions concerning the advent of political usurpation and sacrificial cults. Ceremonially it involved the procession of Lono's image around the island following a right circuit, and a closing performance of human sacrifice. Chronologically its beginning was marked by the appearance of the pleiades on the horizon at sunset, which in 1778 was about November 18, one week before Cook's ships appeared in the horizon. Hence attending to the

remarkable correlation between the ritual movements of Lono's image and the historical movement of Cook in 1778-1779, and taking into consideration the ritualised treatment that Cook reported to have been accorded by Hawaiian natives, Sahlins concluded that the European captain was mistaken for, and treated as, the god Lono until he committed the ritual fault of returning unexpectedly and unintelligibly when the *Resolution* sprung her mast. The direction that Cook followed in circumnavigating the island before anchoring was, just by chance, the prescribed direction of Lono's yearly procession, and his initial departure coincided almost precisely with the final day of Makahiki, when Lono is supposed to leave as well. Therefore his unforeseen reappearance brought about his killing as a means to re-establish, ritually, the disturbed cosmological order (Sahlins 1981: 11-24).

This interpretation of the apotheosis of Captain Cook, and its attendant theoretical propositions have been the object of much debate and severe criticism, to which I will return towards the end of the thesis. At this point I just want to bring to the fore Obeyesekere's demonstration that Cook's killing was not reduced to his irruption, symbolically expected in the context of Makahiki rituals but was in fact the result of the interplay of practical power politics and Hawaiian symbolic values (Obeyesekere 1992: 84). His counter interpretation of Cook's apotheosis sustains convincingly that the local chief receiving the Europeans tried to enlist their aid against his Maui rivals, for which he gave their captain the dignity of a local chief and the name of a god, a usual practice among chiefs of high ranking that Cook entirely misunderstood. Consequently in returning after the sprung mast incident Cook did not behave as an ally but tried to impose himself, thereby stepping into the position of a violent betrayer deserving death (Obeyesekere 1992: 26-50). What this interpretation shows is that any analysis aiming to understand the killing of captain Cook must accord a fundamental explanatory value to the relationship between foreigners and Hawaiians. Seen from this perspective Cook's arrival in Hawaii becomes an

unforeseen event of which the natives took advantage of in a pragmatic way, though following all the ritual formalities imposed by local cosmologies (Obeyesekere 1992: 84-88). Beyond the particularities of the case, the relevance of this approach is to show that the study of cultural systems should not be informed by the study of language as an abstract system of signs (*langue*) but as communicative performance (*parole*), following the type of situational analysis Dell Hymes (1986) advocated in emphasising actual language use as circumscribed by the political and economic contexts surrounding the relations between speakers.

A different approach to non-Western experience of incoming Europeans is represented by a massive number of studies treating indigenous responses primarily in terms of acculturation (e.g. Redfield, Linton & Herskovitz 1936, Linton 1940, Benedict 1943, Beals 1952, Spicer 1981 [1962], Aguirre Beltrán 1970, Wachtel 1978), that is, the assimilation of imposed cultural traits by oppressed peoples in the process of their subjection to foreign political domination, more recently reformulated as "occidentalisation" (Gruzinski 1991).

The concept of acculturation, generally used in anthropology —since Redfield, Linton and Herskovitz 1936 definition— to designate all processes of culture change evolving from the contact between two or more autonomous cultural systems whose interaction results in an increase of similarity of each to the other (Barfield 1997: 93) is linked from birth to the study of colonial situations. Hence although it implies heterogeneity (Wachtel 1978: 136) it focuses on situations of inequality where one society is dominant and the other(s) weak (e.g. Benedict 1943: 207), frequently emphasising those forms of social reorganisation and cultural adaptation that entail the assimilation of the weaker by the stronger contacting group(s) while neglecting the production of distinctive successor cultural forms. Several authors, it is true, distinguish different forms of acculturation: a) controlled or imposed through violence and other means of enforcement, b) non-enforced or spontaneous among peoples

over whom no direct control is imposed (Linton 1940, Spicer 1981 [1962]), c) integrative in the case of indigenous systems that incorporate external elements in terms of their own schemes and categories, d) assimilatory in the sense of implying the total or partial abandonment of indigenous beliefs and traditions (Wachtel 1978: 142-146). All of these modalities, however, carry along the assumption that individuals or groups who take on the new culture necessarily compromise their own identity rarely ever enticing their oppressors into significant cultural adjustment.

### **1.3.3.- Europe in "the Other: The dialogic space of transculturation."**

All the models reviewed above, from "debasing othering" to "acculturation" share in the social scientist myth of "the Other" that Obeyesekere exposed (1992: 16), which presumes "a radical disjunction" between Western self and preindustrial peoples, generally seen as pre-logical, living in cold societies governed by rigid, relentless cosmologies that nevertheless dissolve into nothingness as the West projects itself through discourse, technology, management and merchandise. Thus while Robert Ricard, Lewis Hanke and other early Latin America specialists tended to see the introduction of things European into a relative vacuum, more recent authors like Mason (1990) and Todorov (1999 [1982]) see the imposition of European cultural and political hegemony in America as a matter of semiotic manoeuvre. All these analysts create, each in his way, a picture of unilateral inflection that the adoption of a dialogic perspective refutes.

In a classical but long disregarded (Coronil 1995: xxxvi-xxxviii) monograph titled *Cuban Counterpoint* Fernando Ortiz coined the term transculturation (1995 [1940]: 97-102) to express the varied phenomena that occurred in Cuba as a result of the confrontation and intermeshing of different cultures as different human streams, some forcibly dislocated, some migrants of their own will and some local, converged in the island:

I am of the opinion that the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another

because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. In the end [...] the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them (Ortiz 1995 [1940]: 102-103).

I have adopted Ortiz' term because, as Coronil contends (1995: xv) it apprehends at once "the destructive and constructive moments in histories affected by colonialism and imperialism," making operative the premise that culture contact affects all the groups engaged in cross-cultural interaction, whether hegemonic, marginal or subservient. Hence it is particularly pertinent for understanding the sort of cognitive and practical processes that the imaginary construction of *Nuevo México* implied.

Also Walter Mignolo's "colonial semiosis" (1994a, 1994b, 1995) and some recent disquisitions on the dynamics of mimicry in both "first encounters" and "second contacts" (Taussig 1993, Stoller 1995) offer powerful theoretical weapons for the analysis of the creative process of cross-cultural interaction. Both perspectives deal with localised, quotidian forms of negotiating power through representation and, as we shall see in due course, facilitate the formulation of dynamic models to understand how colonial societies live their cultural predicament underneath the apparently hieratical surface of what I shall call the "imposition-resistance-conformity" complex.

#### **1.4.- Thesis structure.**

The thesis is divided in two sections, each comprising three chapters. Part one analyses the semantic import of the toponymic practice developed by the Spaniards in the wake of the encounter with Mexico (chapter two); then it provides an ethnohistorical overview of the territory where the quest for *Nuevo México* evolved (chapter three) and a narrative story presenting the sequence of events I suggest it should be seen to comprise (chapter four). Part

two argues against the above mentioned hypothesis concerning the determinant character of mediaeval motifs in *Nuevo México's* early history (chapter five), it analyses the Nahua traditions of ancestral origin that I found to rule the enterprise instead (chapter six), and provides documentary evidence to support the overall hypothesis that Spaniards took the native stories as authoritative statements about the world ahead, reading the landscape through Nahua historical discourse (chapter seven). Finally, in the concluding chapter I turn to discussing the importance of defining colonial societies as intersubjective spaces where colonial semiosis and transculturation give raise to hybridity, and also dedicate some paragraphs to revisit, in the light of my case-study, recent anthropological critiques of the idea that culture, as a system of symbolic meanings, encodes practice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SEMANTICS OF PLACE NAMES: NEW SPAIN AND NEW MEXICO

In the beginning of November 1519 a group of nearly four hundred Spaniards under the command of Hernán Cortés entered Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the capital of the ancient Aztec state that occupied most of central present day Mexico. The intruders came from Cuba and were following the track to a vast and gold-rich land which, according to previous explorers, stood somewhere to the Northwest of the recently colonised "Islands of the Ocean Sea." The perplexity they experienced in confronting the city has been widely commented upon. However, few studies have explored the formal expression of such bewilderment in the toponyms formulated at the time.

In this chapter I will examine the picture that the conquerors drew of the physical and social scene they observed in Mexico and will relate it to the previous and later perceptions they had of other lands and peoples. My purpose is to underline —through the analysis of the subtleties observable in their descriptions— the epistemological import of a series of acts of toponymy performed in the wake of the encounter between Europe and mainland America. I refer specifically to the fact that in formulating the toponym *Nuevo México*, which they imposed many years later on a remote region inhabited by village dwelling farmers, the Spanish conquerors took the name from the first "civilised"<sup>1</sup> territory they subdued —Mexico— which they had previously renamed *Nueva España* (New Spain). As will become evident in the following pages this is an extraordinary fact: First because both toponyms are novel

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<sup>1</sup> The term "civilisation" in its modern sense as the ideal order of human society in general, accomplished through the exercise of rationality, was coined in France in the 1750's to designate the superior stage within a unitary and universal scale of progress that only a few societies —the French among them— had achieved. The term seems to have come into English around 1772 (Long 1977: 5, Sahlins 1995: 10-11) and probably entered Spanish in the same period. Yet similar notions about the ideal conditions of social life and the existence of an overall scale of human perfection, of which Christians occupied the pinnacle, began to develop among Western Europeans in the Age of Discovery given the exposure to deeply contrasting indigenous ways of life in the Americas. Documents of that period do not speak of more or less civilised peoples; they speak of peoples with more or less rational capacity, with or without instituted governments, organised religious cults, and *policía* (civility / urbanity).

formulations representing significant ruptures in the practice of geographic naming. Second, because although they seem to be of the same kind (New something), one has its referent in Europe (Spain) while the other has it in America (Mexico).

Place names are endowed with more semantic attributes than we usually tend to acknowledge. They are tokens that people establish to relate to geographic space. Hence, not only do they describe particular marks in a landscape—a physical characteristic or a contingent event—often they encode political arrangements and project on to the signified terrain all sorts of representations of social and cosmic orders. For this reason toponyms can be seen as empirical traces of cognitive operations; i.e., they illustrate some of the mechanisms whereby people make sense of the world.

As far as I know, Edmundo O'Gorman was the first author to discuss the epistemological implications of toponyms in a book titled *La invención de América* (1984 [1958]). However, his analysis was very much restricted to the term America itself and did not reach the level of regional or local toponymy. His argument that the New World was not "discovered" but "invented," and that the label "America" amounted to the categorical incarnation of such invention, has been lately rephrased in terms of colonial discourse. Several authors in the fields of anthropology and cultural studies have embraced O'Gorman's geographical criticism; nevertheless, if they devoted any attention to toponymy, it is just through their concern for the strategies of domination that might be embedded in words. Even though this perspective has proved illuminating in a number of ways, it assumes, misleadingly, that hierarchical relations always have the consistency of a monologue. As indicated by a more detailed analysis of local and regional place-names, the conclusion that the New World was totally constructed from Europe's own standpoint, which many authors have attained,<sup>2</sup> must be qualified.

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<sup>2</sup> Mason, McGrane and Todorov among others use examples from the conquest of America to develop arguments on cultural imperialism based on the notion of "alterity as defect". The



Early documentary sources concerning the Spanish conquest of mainland America suggest that the shift in the practice of geographic naming, which the couplet *Nueva España / Nuevo México* exemplifies, reflects a change in the order of knowledge of the sort Foucault (1967) recognised in the transformation of folly into madness, or in the birth of medicine as a science with anatomo-clinical rather than classificatory methods (Sheridan 1980: 37-40). That is, a radical transformation of the principles after which experience is codified, which configures novel forms of practice in a wide variety of ambits. As I will demonstrate this metamorphosis entailed the formulation of composite frames of conceptual reference which —precisely because of their transcultural nature— go against the currently popular thesis that, via colonialism, the New World was doomed to the role of blank paper for Western inscription.

It is true that European expansionism, as Corbey and Leersen contend, went "hand in hand with an attempt to subdue the strangeness of "the Other" in cognitive terms" (1991: viii). However, and this is precisely the main point of this thesis, many of the linguistic actions performed as part of the process of colonial appropriation —particularly the naming of geopolitical entities— reveal the opening of a space for cognitive negotiation between Indigenous and Spanish wisdom. A negotiation rooted in the conspicuous comparability perceived between Spain and New Spain that turned the local scene from a subsidiary reality, understood by reference to the subject's culture, into a referent to which new realities would be later referred. In this sense the toponymic chain I analyse in this chapter is a clear example, within the sphere of socio-geographic representation, of what Mignolo (1994b: 16) has termed "colonial semiosis":

a network of semiotic processes in which signs from different cultural systems interact in the production and interpretation of hybrid cultural

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main point in such theorising is that Western self-identity rests on a bipolar system of categorisation, which confronts "Self" and "Other" through a series of contrastive distinctions standing along a positive-negative axis. According to this view, America was defined in conformity with previously established notions of alterity and therefore underwent a process of inferiorisation, with the consequent deprivation of speech.

artefacts [and concepts]. In colonial semiosis the meaning of a sign no longer depends on its original cultural context [...] but on the new set of relations generated by communicative interactions across cultural boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.1.- The conquest of mainland America.

Before I substantiate the previous statements a few words on the pattern of colonial expansion are necessary to contextualize further assertions. The administrative structure of the Spanish empire shall also be briefly explained.

The subjugation of mainland America was accomplished by military forays that started off from the island of Hispaniola (today Santo Domingo) where Christopher Columbus established the first European colony in the New World. Due to new epidemic diseases and to the pattern of extreme exploitation enforced by the colonists the native population soon began to decline. A consequence was that slave raiding moved to new and more distant places such as the neighbouring islands of Puerto Rico and Cuba and from there to the continental shoreline (map 7). Thus, an ever larger area fell under Spanish control. As is well known, between 1492 and 1550 indigenous peoples were virtually extinguished in the Caribbean, a demographic disaster that was repeated in some portions of the mainland despite the gradual devising of official policies to prevent it. It has been calculated, for example, that in Central Mexico the Indian population dropped from around 25,200,000 in 1519 to 1,069,225 in 1608 (Cook & Borah 1971: 80-82).<sup>4</sup> Figures for north-west New

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<sup>3</sup> Mignolo's intention in coining this term, which encompasses that of colonial discourse, was to redraw the limits of a field of study mainly inhabited by texts alphabetically written by colonisers or in their languages, opening it up to a wider spectrum of semiotic interactions in Amerindian languages and non alphabetic scripts (1995: 336 n10). His own work places emphasis on the scriptural aspect of colonial semiosis; that is, on texts and the semiotic interactions they involve. Personally, I use the concept to describe an even wider set of semiotic interactions, those occurring at the level of certain categories irrespective of their placement within any specific text. The notion of colonial semiosis as defined in this quotation provides a sophisticated analytic tool which will aid in a better understanding of cultural hybridisation, more so than concepts such as acculturation or cultural synthesis.

<sup>4</sup> Ross Hassig (1985:155-159) provides an interesting analysis of the regional distribution of population decline in this area. He attributes the disparity in mortality between the coastal lowlands—which suffered a more precipitous drop—and the highland plateau to the patterns of settlement prevailing in each area and to the type of disease introduced by Europeans. Despite the criticism that Cook & Borah's estimates have undergone they are still the most widely accepted for Central Mexico.

Spain, an area corresponding roughly to present day Colima, Sinaloa and Sonora are just as dramatic: native population was reduced from 820,000 individuals in 1519 to 310,000 in 1600 (Gerhard 1982: 24).<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the Antilles two major lines of conquest can be identified. One, organised from Cuba, swept through Mexico between 1519 and 1522 and then raided both north and south of the Mexican Central Plateau. The other started in Panama in 1522 and after moving briefly up to Nicaragua, took the Pacific route southwards for the conquest of the Inca empire (1531-1533), the Amazon basin and Chile (1525-1549) (Elliott 1984a: 171-172, Gibson 1984: 384-385). The events that my thesis is concerned with fall in the Cuba-Mexico path, and can be divided into two phases. The first wave of colonial advance ended in 1542 with a fruitless expedition led by Francisco Vázquez de Coronado to the area known today as the American Southwest (Arizona and New Mexico); the second began in the 1550's and was over by 1693 with the precarious consolidation of *Nuevo México*, the northernmost Spanish possession in the Western Hemisphere.

Although I will not delve upon those enterprises that fall beyond the area of my concern, this overall colonising pattern must be kept in mind for this thesis' discussion regarding the way in which Spaniards reacted both to indigenous discourse and to regional variations in native social orders, material culture, and landscape.

The Spanish empire's administrative structure was defined early on. By the beginning of the sixteenth century two organisms existed at the metropolitan level to handle the affairs of the Indies. The *Casa de Contratación de Sevilla* established in 1503 to regulate trade and navigation "was responsible for organising and controlling the passage of men, ships and merchandise between Spain and America" (Elliott 1984b: 289), whereas the *Real y Supremo Consejo de Indias*, founded in 1524 to assist the King in the formulation and enforcement of

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<sup>5</sup> For the northern portion of New Spain the best demographic studies are by Carl Sauer (1935) and Peter Gerhard (1982).

global policies for the colonies, was vested with legislative and judicial functions. The spontaneous leaders of the early years, who performed as governors of the lands they had conquered, were gradually subjected to a complex bureaucratic apparatus consisting of a number of permanent legal tribunals or *Audiencias*, on which all regional governorships became dependent. The first *Audiencia*, established in Santo Domingo in 1511, was followed by eight more as the colonial domination extended over new regions. The system was completed with the creation of two viceroyalties to centralise the administration of large and distinct territories, New Spain in 1535 and Peru in 1546. The functionaries that occupied the higher offices of this machinery were appointed by the *Consejo de Indias*. Thus the Crown managed to consolidate its hegemonic control overseas, temporarily threatened by the entrepreneurial model that conquest endeavours adopted initially.<sup>6</sup>

At the turn of the fifteenth century as the Spanish monarchy could only engage scarce resources in overseas expansion it had to hand over the responsibility for settling and developing the new lands to private individuals who volunteered to fund, organise, and carry out conquest expeditions. Based on contractual relations, formally stipulated in the so-called *capitulaciones*, the Crown bestowed each volunteering captain with a series of privileges and the life-time title of governor of the lands he might subdue, reserving for the king only the ultimate sovereignty over the provinces thus established and a percentage of the booty and wealth they produced.<sup>7</sup> As part of the later bureaucratisation of the colonial rule governorships were transformed into short-term posts; therefore, although *capitulaciones* continued to exist, governors began to be periodically shifted, as were judges of the *Audiencias* and viceroys. Furthermore, a system of permanent scrutiny was set up for every functionary in America. Periodical inquiries (*visitas*) were conducted by

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<sup>6</sup> This administrative system, however, remained rather flexible in a number of ways due to difficulties of long distant control. On this issue see for instance J. H. Parry (1967) and J. H. Elliott (1984b).

<sup>7</sup> This was technically termed *Quinto Real* (Royal Fifth).

independent judges, and everyone in public office was submitted to a *residencia* trial at the end of his term, allowing aggrieved parties to state their case before a presiding judge. Written allegation flourished under this highly legalistic and bureaucratic regime; the abundant testimonies and reports it produced are filled with elaborate arguments and minute descriptions of places and events than frequently manipulated concrete information to suit the interests of the individual or group concerned.

## 2.2.- The process of homologation.

The foundation of the first municipality (*ayuntamiento*) of Veracruz and the subsequent fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan before the forces led by Hernán Cortés, on the 23 of August 1521, were the first steps in the creation of a Spanish colony in North America that received the name of *Nueva España* and became, in due course, the political centre controlling the kingdoms and provinces that Spanish settlers thereon established to the North (map 7). The toponymic choice is quite significant, for although this was not the first occasion when a section of the New World was named after a place in the Old, the referential value inscribed in this term was of a completely original kind. And it could have not been otherwise, given the unusual circumstance in which it was formulated.

The earliest use of the term as a toponym we know about corresponds to a certificate signed in August 1520 —after the Spaniards were temporarily expelled from Mexico-Tenochtitlan— whereby Cortés empowered Juan Ochoa de Lejalde to act as his attorney before the metropolitan authorities. Given the form in which the document incorporates the term —"... I Hernando Cortés, captain general and major judge of the **New Spain** of the Ocean Sea..."<sup>8</sup>— we may assume it was formulated before this date but after July 1519, since it does not appear in the letter then written to report on the events occurred from the

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<sup>8</sup> "... yo Hernando Cortés, capitán general e justicia mayor de la Nueva España del Mar Océano [...] otorgo todo mi [...] poder [...] a vos, Juan Ochoa de Lejalde." (*Poder que otorga Hernán Cortés a Juan Ochoa de Lejalde*. Tepeaca, August 6, 1520, in Martínez 1990-1992: I, 115).

moment the army had left Cuba.<sup>9</sup> According to Friar Juan de Torquemada (1975 [1615]: II, 23) it was captain Juan de Grijalva who, in 1518, devised the toponym while travelling along the coast from Yucatan towards Veracruz because he saw many things which resembled the Iberian Peninsula. As the expedition's chaplain, Juan Díaz, does not mention such an episode or term in his report —the only contemporary testimony we have concerning this expedition— there is no direct evidence to corroborate Torquemada's assertion.<sup>10</sup>

In any case, at the end of his second letter to the king (October 30, 1520) Cortés himself explains why the name was chosen:

From all I have seen and understood touching the similarity between this land and that of Spain, both regarding its fertility and grandeur and its cold climate, and many other things which make them alike, it seemed to me that the most suitable name for it was New Spain of the Ocean Sea, and so in Your Majesty's name I called it that.<sup>11</sup>

It is in those "many other things that make [Spain and New Spain] alike" where the extraordinary character of the circumstances that the toponym encodes must be searched, rather than in the mere physical resemblance that the passage remarks.

Where does the singularity of the encounter with Mexico lie? We only have to look at the accounts of soldiers involved to realise that, in contrast to previous experiences in the Caribbean, their feeling of alienation before native peoples was attenuated by partial recognition. Some features of indigenous attire and way of life resembled, however superficially or misleadingly, the

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<sup>9</sup> I refer to the *Carta del cabildo* (July 10, 1519), a report-letter signed by the officials of the municipality of Vera Cruz appointed by Cortés to legalise his conquest. He sent it to the King with two representatives, the *procuradores* Francisco de Montejo and Alonso Hernández Portocarrero (Cortés 1960: 3-22).

<sup>10</sup> *Itinerario de la Armada del rey católico a la isla de Yucatán, en la India, en el año 1518, en la que fue por comandante y capitán general Juan de Grijalva* (in Vázquez 1988: 37-57). The original manuscript, written in 1519 and published in Venice in 1520 is today lost. We only know the text through the Italian version used in this Venice edition (García Icazbalceta 1858, I: xiii-xvi).

<sup>11</sup> "Por lo que yo he visto y comprendido acerca de la similitud que toda esta tierra tiene a España, así en la fertilidad como en la grandeza y fríos que en ella hace, y en otras muchas cosas que le equiparan a ella, me pareció que el más conveniente nombre para esta dicha tierra era llamarse la Nueva España del Mar Océano; y así, en nombre de Vuestra Magestad, se le puso aqueste nombre." *Segunda carta-relación de Hernán Cortés al emperador* (Cortés 1960: 79).

Spanish universe of things and habits, as the private mail of a courtier of the Spanish monarch, Peter Martyr d' Anghiera,<sup>12</sup> makes clear:

They have brought numerous and magnificent presents for the king from Coloacana, Olloa, and Cozumela, where [...] people live in a civilised manner, under the rule of law.<sup>13</sup>

In writing these lines Martyr was just repeating what he had heard from a couple of Cortés' captains who had arrived bringing goods and letters from the newly discovered lands. The courtier wrote in March of 1520, before any news concerning the marvels of Mexico-Tenochtitlan had reached Europe —the messengers had already parted when the Spanish party entered the city at the beginning of November 1519. Nevertheless, Martyr's quotation reveals an early awareness of the radical contrast between Caribbean and mainland north American peoples, and shows that even before Tenochtitlan came into view, soldiers in the *field* and politicians in Europe regarded the local societies just encountered as comparable to their own. Like Spain, these societies had a ruling class that exercised full sovereignty, as Cortés made clear when he remarked upon the lengthy scope of Moctezuma's authority, "because in none of the places where he sent his messengers, two hundred leagues from his magnificent city in either direction, was his command disobeyed; even though he sustained war with some provinces within that area."<sup>14</sup> Likewise, they had a series of institutions and administrative routines which surpassed the

<sup>12</sup> Known in Spanish as Pedro Mártir de Anglería. His name was originally Italian, Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (Mignolo 1995: 171).

<sup>13</sup> "Desde las Indias han traído para el rey numerosos y magníficos regalos de Coloacana, Olloa y Cozumela, donde [...] se vive conforme a las leyes y civilizadamente." *carta a los marqueses*, March 14, 1520. The use of the term "civilised" comes from the Spanish translation here quoted (Mártir de Anglería 1990: 106). I ignore what is the word in the original Latin text but it most probably is a derivation of the term *civitas* signifying the existence of a body politic in the classical sense, essentially characterised by non-kin-based forms of political authority, law and urbanism. By Coloacana Martyr certainly meant Culúa or Colúa, name of a Nahuatl community in the valley of Mexico that, as we shall see in chapters three and six, the Aztecs had adopted as their own. The Spaniards who had explored the coast of the Gulf of Mexico in 1517 and 1518 had repeatedly heard the word used by natives who referred to Mexico, core of the Aztec empire. Olloa (Ulúa) was an island off the coastal village of Vera Cruz where Cortés founded the first municipality in New Spain, and Cozumela the island where he first landed, off the coast of Yucatan.

<sup>14</sup> "El señorío de tierras que este Mutezuma tenía no se ha podido alcanzar cuánto era, porque a ninguna parte, doscientas leguas de un cabo y de otro de aquella su gran ciudad, enviaba sus mensajeros que no fuese cumplido su mandato, aunque había algunas provincias enmedio de estas tierras con quien él tenía guerra." *Segunda carta-relación...* (Cortés 1960: 54).

apparently simple structures characteristic of the small chiefdoms that early accounts of the Caribbean and the North Atlantic coast of South America scarcely describe.

The conquerors made few comments on the social and political organisation of the first indigenous peoples they came across before the coast of Yucatán was discovered. Generally speaking the writings that pertain to the Caribbean phase describe nature and geography in detail, but when it comes to people's beliefs and customs, they focus on their "superstitions", the objects they worshipped (*zemes* or *cemís* in the Spanish transliteration of the local language), nakedness and the practice of cannibalism. The mention of "kings" (*reyes/reyezuelos*), "rulers" (*régulos*) and "principal men" (*hombres principales*), whom the Indians called *caciques*, appears constantly in early accounts such as the first *Decade* of Martyr's *De Orbe Novo Decades* (1530),<sup>15</sup> and in the writings by Columbus, by friar Ramón Pané (c. 1498) and by Hernán Pérez de Oliva (1525-1528). Nevertheless the fact that they provided no proper description of what to be a king or *cacique* meant indicates how far removed they felt from the societies they encountered.<sup>16</sup> This difficulty to relate to the native Caribbean world is manifest in the presumed "absence" of social and political order that Columbus reported in a letter addressed to the Sovereigns on March 4, 1493:

After I arrived at Juana [Cuba ...] I sent two men inland [...] so that they could see and determine if there were any cities or large settlements [...] They found many settlements and innumerable people, but no government of any importance [...] All these islands are densely populated [...] women

<sup>15</sup> An Italian translation of Martyr's first *Decade* was published in 1504, although the original Latin text was not printed until 1511 (Seville) and then again in 1516, together with the other *Decades*, in a volume titled *Decas Oceana* (Alcalá de Henares). In 1530 a new Latin edition appeared as *De Orbe Novo Decades* (see the introduction to Pané 1974 [c.1498]: 11). For this thesis I consulted the Spanish translation by Millares Carlo (Mártir de Anglería 1964-1965).

<sup>16</sup> In Columbus' diary, under the heading for December 17, 1492, we can read that in the island of Hispaniola "they saw a man the Admiral had for the governor of that province, whom [the natives] called *cacique*" (vieron a uno, que tuvo el almirante por gobernador de aquella provincia, que llamaban cacique). The entry for the next day says that "there the Admiral knew that in their language they called the king *cacique*" (allí supo el almirante que al rey llamaban en su lengua cacique). Quoted by José Juan Arrom in a footnote to his edition of the *Historia de la Invención de las Indias* by Hernán Pérez de Oliva, who glossed the episode as follows: "Columbus diligently pondered those people's manners as best as he could [...] and through sign language he knew that there were kings governing the island, one of whom was present" (Colón consideraba diligentemente la manera de aquellas gentes lo mejor que podía [...] y conoció por señales que había en aquella isla reyes que la gobernaban, uno de los cuales era presente) (Pérez de Oliva 1991 [1525-1528]: 46).



and men alike, go about naked [...] And I have not learned that any of them have any private property [...] Nowhere in these islands have I known the inhabitants to have a religion, or idolatry.<sup>17</sup>

The connection between the absence of a proper political order and the lack of religion or even idolatry that this paragraph establishes is consistent with the exclusive use of the indigenous word *zeme* for all sorts of objects of worship in other contemporary documents, which has its correlate in the proliferation of "vassals", "lords" and "idols" in most eye-witness accounts of the conquest of Mexico and the two expeditions along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico that preceded Cortés'; the first led by Francisco Hernández de Córdoba (1517), the second by Juan de Grijalva (1518).

Like the fetish for the Portuguese during their sixteenth and seventeenth century mercantile activities along the West African coast (Pietz 1985 & 1987), the Caribbean *zeme* of Spanish accounts escaped the definition of idol, which implied, according to Pietz, a "relation of iconic resemblance to some immaterial model or entity" (1985: 7). Distinguished from other objects of worship by its "irreducible materiality," the fetish was a god-object in itself, a material embodiment of a particular force or natural property (Pietz 1985: 7). Likewise, *zemes* were non figurative, venerated objects of direct worship used to induce beneficial effects, such as health or abundant crops, which exerted no moral authority and entailed no institutionalised ritual (Bernard & Gruzinski 1992: 190-191). Conquerors thus perceived them as the cultic counterpart of a lawless, disjointed society.

The portrayal of indigenous culture that Pané drafted in the report he wrote after living among the Taíno of Hispaniola for nearly three years includes only two references to the socio-political order. First he asserts that "their law is compiled in ancient songs, after which they govern themselves; and when they want to sing these songs they use a certain instrument [...]"

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<sup>17</sup> Translated into English by Margarita Zamora in an article published by Greenblat (1993: 3-8).

which the principal men play."<sup>18</sup> Then, in a different paragraph, he describes the secret consultations held by the "*hombres principales*," who used a certain powder to propitiate visions through which they could foresee the results of war (Pané 1974 [c.1428]: 42). Pérez de Oliva wrote his *Historia de la invención de las Indias* in Spain, based on Pané and Peter Martyr. Like the latter, he had never been to America and found it too easy to render into "kings" all the *caciques*, "*régulos*" and "*hombres principales*," while clearly stating that Caribbean people "knew no literacy and for law they followed nothing but custom."<sup>19</sup>

In New Spain things were different. Socio-political comparability was incontestably signalled by bare, observable facts. The new land was filled with cities, buildings were "constructed with lime and mortar,"<sup>20</sup> and people gathered periodically in large squares to "buy and sell" all the things they needed.<sup>21</sup> Of course there was idolatry as well, as "temples" could be seen all over the place; that is, "towers"<sup>22</sup> topped with rooms exclusively used for "devotional purposes." But as Bernard and Gruzinski contend, in the sixteenth century for the Spanish conquerors to say idolatry was to say civilisation, albeit civilisation plus the devil or without the true God. Like in Peru and in contrast

<sup>18</sup> "Tienen su ley compendiada en canciones antiguas, por las cuales se rigen [...] Y cuando quieren cantar sus canciones tocan cierto instrumento [...] y lo tocan los hombres principales" (Pané 1974 [c.1428]: 34).

<sup>19</sup> "Letras ningunas tenían, y por leyes guardaban sola la costumbre." (Pérez de Oliva 1991 [1525-1528]: 47).

<sup>20</sup> The same expression (*edificios de cal y canto*) repeatedly appears in official or personal letters and legal testimonies of the time. It was one of the first things noted in the *Carta del Cabildo* (Cortés 1960: 6, 17). Francisco de Aguilar, who participated in the assault on Mexico-Tenochtitlan also remarked the point in the *Relación breve de la conquista de la Nueva España* that he wrote around 1570 (in Vázquez 1988: 161-206). Other relevant documents include Juan Díaz' report on the expedition led by Juan de Grijalva from Yucatan to Veracruz in 1518 (*Itinerario de la Armada ...* in Vázquez 1988: 37-57) and an early letter by a bureaucrat called Alonso Zuazo, dated in Cuba November 14, 1521 (García Icazbalceta 1858, I: 358-367). It was on the grounds of the information gathered by Grijalva that the governor of Cuba decided to send Hernán Cortés to further explore the area. Mr. Zuazo held a judiciary post in the island and was among the most enthusiastic supporters of the enterprise. Later on he was sent to New Spain and he occupied Mexico's government temporarily when Cortés was absent in Honduras (García Icazbalceta 1858: I, xvii). The same remark about lime and mortar buildings is conspicuous in Martyr's account of the first expedition to sight Yucatán, that is, the one by Hernández de Córdoba in 1517 (see Wagner 1942: 33).

<sup>21</sup> *Segunda carta-relación...* (Cortés 1960: 33, 51-52), Conquistador Anónimo (1986: 147), Díaz del Castillo (1982 [c. 1555]: 192).

<sup>22</sup> This is how Spaniards described pyramids, which they also called "mosques" (mezquitas). The worship of idols in mosques is one of the most repeated themes in sixteenth century sources concerning New Spain; see for example the fragments of early chronicles on the first arrivals at Yucatan in 1517 reproduced by Wagner (1942).

with the Caribbean conquerors immediately identified a religion, which they compared with Islam and defined as idolatry. In both places they assumed that as a perverted religion idolatry could only exist within civilisation, since it replaces chaos and always appears when there is a constituted, superior authority to centralise power (Bernard & Gruzinski 1992: 14-17, 29-30, 40-56, 68-69, 190-191; Gruzinski 1994: 20-21).

The terminology employed by eye-witness accounts of the first three expeditions to the mainland is in itself revealing; the *Carta del cabildo* (July 1519) for example, is partly presented as a report on the "land's issues [...], the people that possesses it, and the law or creed, rites and ceremonies they live by."<sup>23</sup> It was in this geographic space that words like **market-place** (*mercado*), **priest** (*sacerdote*), **street** (*calle, calzada*), **law** and **administration of justice** (*ley, administración de justicia*), **governor** (*gobernador*), **vassals** (*vasallos*), **lords** and **lordships** (*señores, señoríos*), **ally** (*aliado*), **ambassador** (*embajador*), **citizen** (*ciudadano*) and **emperor** (*emperador*) were applied to describe native societies for the first time.<sup>24</sup> Rather than a mere coincidence this was a linguistic manifestation of a recognition of similarity that made Spaniards more open to indigenous views, a first step towards the establishment of communication across cultures. In this sense the Spanish encounter with Mexico/*Nueva España* is an early instance of what Joanna Overing (1987: 74-75), using as example the various translations of *Beowulf* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, calls "the power of labels in the conjuring up of new worlds," insofar as the possibility to categorise what they saw after landing in Yucatán according to their own labels gave the Spaniards a more clear idea of what they had previously seen. Paradoxically, the notion of *cacique*, a Taíno word initially used as synonymous with "indigenous ruler" in general, acquired a definite meaning

<sup>23</sup> "... que vuestras majestades fuesen informados de las cosas de esta tierra [...] y de la gente que la posee, y de la ley o secta, ritos y ceremonias en que viven" (Cortés 1960: 16).

<sup>24</sup> See for example the letters by Peter Martyr and also the fourth of his *Decades* (Mártir de Anglería 1990 & 1964-1965). See as well Cortés' *segunda carta-relación* (1960: 31-100); Díaz' *Itinerario de la armada...*, Aguilar's *Relación breve...*, and the two *Relaciones* by Andrés de Tapia and Bernardino Vázquez de Tapia (In Vázquez 1988: 40, 57, 79, 86, 93, 97, 140, 141, 142, 165, 171, 173, 174).

precisely in New Spain, as it gradually ceased to signify any type of ruler and became the specific term to designate local chiefs whose power was circumscribed.<sup>25</sup>

Politics and religion were the main locus where recognition led the Spaniards to bridge incommensurability because those were precisely the cornerstones of their identity. These natives, is the concluding remark of the *Carta del cabildo*, "live in a more political and reasonable manner than any of the peoples seen until now in this part" of the world.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the Spaniards admired most of what they saw among the natives of New Spain because they saw their dealings and cultural achievements—including even their idolatry—as a sign of civilisation, in the Roman-derived sense of a civic oriented community life.

Many of the soldiers enrolled in Cortés' army had already spent some years in the islands of Hispaniola and Cuba, and were now aghast at the presence of fortified cities, stone and lime buildings, formal marketplaces, cotton clothing, and book-like records. Cortés himself wrote that Tlaxcala had "buildings as good as Granada and many more people than that city had when it was taken," stating as well that the government of the province was "almost like in the lordships of Venice, Genoa or Pisa" because rather than one

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<sup>25</sup> Compare how this term was used before the Spaniards arrived in Tlaxcala (*Carta del cabildo*, in Cortés 1960) and after (Cortés 1960, *segunda carta-relación*). Consider the following statement by Díaz del Castillo as well: We explained to the Indians in Mexico that "we came from faraway lands and that we were vassals of a great emperor called Don Carlos, who has many great lords and *caciques* for vassals" (*veníamos de lejas tierras y éramos vasallos de un gran emperador que se dice Don Carlos, el cual tiene por vasallos a muchos grandes señores y caciques*). Note that emperor, lords and *caciques* are clearly differentiated as three hierarchical positions in the scale of ruling power. For the origin and indigenous meaning of the word *cacique* see Manuel Alvar (1970: 55-56), who quotes this passage. Haskett (1991: 133) asserts that *cacique* was the Arawakan word for leader (*kassiquan* - to have or maintain a house), and that having adopted it during the early Caribbean phase of settlement, the Spaniards later applied it to the *tlatoque* and other high nobles of central New Spain. Men described as *caciques*, argues Haskett, held the governorship with great frequency in sixteenth century New Spain though in many regions their status gradually eroded in the face of competition from aggressive figures of lesser status. Thus by the mid seventeenth century it was rare to find *caciques* in high public office. Haskett's sixteenth century governor/*caciques* had been *tlatoques* before the conquest but integrated into the colonial administration they occupied subordinate positions within the overall scale of rule. As a concept in the Spanish language, then, *cacique* implied circumscribed authority from the sixteenth century accession to Central Mexico on. Neither Moctezuma nor the *Cazonci* (Tarascan overlord) were ever labelled *caciques*.

<sup>26</sup> "Viven más política y razonablemente que ninguna de las gentes que hasta hoy en estas partes se han visto" (Cortés 1960: 18).

"overlord" there was "many lords" living in the "city," of whom the "peasants of the surrounding villages [were] vassals."<sup>27</sup> About Churultecal (Cholula) he said that every piece of land was cultivated and yet in many quarters people suffered from scarcity so "the poor beg among the rich in the streets, the houses and markets like the indigent do in Spain and other places where there are reasonable people."<sup>28</sup> Examples could be multiplied but the previous suffice to prove that the conqueror's amazement did not actually spring from facing an absolute oddity in the form of unrecognisable objects. It was rather derived from the fact that the human order they found was readable, or so they thought at least: "In the services they have and the manners they follow", said Cortés about Tenochtitlan "there is almost the same way of life as in Spain, with the same concert and order."<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, it is the paradox entailed in this particular combination of surprise and familiarity what makes the accession to Mexico such an extraordinary event, both for us (analytically) and in terms of historical actuality (for the individuals involved). Two propositions derive from this discussion. First, that this which I call the "Mexican paradox" established an epistemological precedent: the apprehension of the exotic entourage by means of its assimilation with familiar notions about society.<sup>30</sup> Second, that the name

<sup>27</sup> Tlaxcala tiene "tan buenos edificios y [...] muy mucha más gente que Granada tenía al tiempo que se ganó [...] La orden [...] que la gente de ella tiene en gobernarse, es casi como las señorías de Venecia y Génova o Pisa, porque no hay señor general de todos. Hay muchos señores y todos residen en esta ciudad, y los pueblos de la tierra son labradores y son vasallos de estos señores" (Cortés 1960: 33-34).

<sup>28</sup> En Cholula "ni un palmo de tierra hay que no esté labrada, y aun con todo en muchas partes padecen necesidad [...] hay mucha gente pobre y que piden entre los ricos por las calles y por las casas y mercados, como hacen los pobres en España y en otras partes que hay gente de razón" (Cortés 1960: 37).

<sup>29</sup> "...en su servicio y trato de la gente de ella hay la manera casi de vivir que en España, y con tanto concierto y orden como allá..." (Cortés 1960: 54).

<sup>30</sup> In a couple of recent studies James Lockhart has developed the concept of "Double Mistaken Identity" to define one of the mechanisms at the root of cultural interaction between Nahuas and Spaniards which corroborates the nature of the "paradox" I herein describe. According to him, the massive contact between indigenous and immigrant Spanish population entailed a good deal of misunderstanding between the members of two societies superficially resembling each other. Each side in this process assumed that certain forms and concepts of the other were essentially already known to itself and therefore operated in much the same manner as in its own tradition, and acted accordingly. As a result both cultural patterns affected each other and were partially preserved. Thus the Spanish conquest of Central Mexico—or for that matter New Spain—was possible, in a sense, precisely because there was a certain degree of coincidence between native and Hispanic practices and institutions. As he remarks, Nahuatl pre-conquest societies were surprisingly similar to their European counterparts, and for this reason a lot of apparently Hispanic structures could immediately be established (Lockhart

*Nueva España* imposed on these lands entitled the whole process.<sup>31</sup> Both propositions run against most recent interpretations concerning the link between conquest and knowledge of "the Other" in the New World, persistently described since the 1990s as a form of conceptual domestication entailing the reading of absolutely unfamiliar American realities against earlier European notions of alterity deriving from the Classical and Christian traditions.<sup>32</sup>

Toponymic practices during the initial Caribbean phase of colonial expansion were heterogeneous. Sometimes, colonists simply endorsed what they thought to be the indigenous name of a given place (Cuba, Paria, Urabá) seldom realising that, like in the case of Yucatan, the word they took for a territorial denomination actually conveyed quite a different message. According to Alonso de la Cruz, Peter Martyr and Francisco López de Gómara Yucatan was a mishearing of the Mayan expression *tectetan* meaning "I do not understand you" (quoted in Wagner 1942: 33, 42).<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the most frequent device, however, was to call locations after the Christian calendar according to the dates in which they were "discovered" or their inhabitants were reduced to political obedience (San Salvador, Santo Domingo, Trinidad, Corpus Christi). Finally, some places received the name of a European province or some other location back in the Old World in accordance with the provenance of the conquerors or with the perception of a certain geographic similarity (Cartagena de Indias and Castilla del Oro). Thus, upon applying a grammatical analysis we can say that a name, which particularises, almost became simply a noun and

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1992: 445 & 1999). In recent years Hugh Thomas has also pointed out the similarities between sixteenth century Spain and pre-conquest societies in Central Mexico (1992: 19-28 & 1993: xi-xiv).

<sup>31</sup> I take the concept of entitlement from Kenneth Burke (1966: 359-379) who used it to remark upon the capacity of symbolic action to confer particular identities to persons, things and situations.

<sup>32</sup> This point will be further discussed in chapters five and seven and also in the conclusions.

<sup>33</sup> Hugh Thomas (1993: 91) provides other alternative derivations for the word, like *ciuthan*, meaning "they say so."

therefore there are cities like Mérida which have three or more different embodiments in Spain and its colonies.<sup>34</sup>

Strange as it might seem, we cannot classify *Nueva España* as an instance of the latter kind of toponymic logic. A detailed analysis reveals a fundamental difference between the representational value attributed to individual words in this name, and others that seem equivalent at a first glance. *Cartagena de Indias*, for example, reproduces the name of a city located in the Iberian Peninsula supplemented with a distinctive companion that qualifies the main noun via specifying the geographic location (*de Indias*). The same can be said about *Castilla del Oro*: the name of a European territory is followed by a naturalistic qualification (*del Oro*). In both cases the qualifying particle is a further description that differentiates the Old World referent from the place it designates in the New World.

"*Nueva España*" works under different semantic principles. Once more we have a European name reproduced, this time that of the motherland itself. Again, a qualifying particle (*Nueva*) is added to distinguish the original from the double among the homonyms. But "new" only allows the distinction between **two** entities, and not many. The word "*España*" does not become a substantive but remains a name with two referents related almost in a symmetrical fashion. Thus, the distinctive particle in this toponym does not function as a modifier that changes the original meaning of the term. On the contrary, the adjective "*Nueva*" (New) remarks upon the meaning of "*España*", taking the body of the concept, intact, to the new territory. Compared to an example like *Cartagena de Indias*, it works through displacement and replication rather than by modification. This goes with the fact that "*España*" signified a political entity that articulated in one single legal order a number of different communities,

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<sup>34</sup> These naming strategies were also used in the later mainland phase of conquest, together with another modality which consists in using the names of Spanish kings and viceroys: Fernandina for Cuba in honour of king Ferdinand, the Philippine islands after king Philip II, Cape Mendocino after viceroy Antonio de Mendoza, etc. (Portillo y Diez de Sollano 1947: 110).

and even peoples, under the same sovereignty, like the empire that Moctezuma ruled apparently did to the eyes of the labelling intruders. It should be clear now that the link between this "new" sign (the newly coined toponym) and its referent (the lands and peoples formerly subjected to the Mexica state, or contesting its domination) is not restricted to the previous play of particular features resembling the metropolis. In this case the signifier, though altered by the new context, carries the connotations of its previous meaning, drawing a relation of **homology** between Spain and New Spain. After this moment circumscribed resemblance, incidental consonance or the mere acceptance of a native name gave way to a global and normalised conceptualisation, powerful enough to project itself as the principle operating in future circumstances.

Indeed, the term *Nueva España* gave rise to the centennial practice of mirroring the European sovereignties in their American dependencies: New France, New England, New Holland. It became a formula to establish rights of conquest against rival European powers, a legitimising device laid across the Atlantic Sea. However, despite its importance, I will leave the colonialist structure of New World toponymy aside as I intend to focus upon a different issue. Rather than reconstructing the consequences that the term *Nueva España* had over the imperial carrier of the European nations, I am interested in the cultural predicament from which it was born. That its coinage established a labelling code for imperialist endeavours is undeniable, yet this does not mean that it was primarily conceived as a signal of colonial appropriation. In this sense, New Spain stands in sharp contrast with that other name formulated by Christopher Columbus for the first island he claimed in favour of the Spanish Crown: *La Española*,<sup>35</sup> anglicised as Hispaniola. "*Española*" is a genitive

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<sup>35</sup> Columbus wrote to the Pope in 1502: "Esta isla es Tharsis, es Cethia, es Ofir y Ophaz e Cipango, y nos la habemos llamado Española" (This island is Tharsis, Cethia, Ofir and Ophaz and Cipango, and we have called it Española) (quoted by Ainsa 1992: 119).



grammatical form literally meaning "it that belongs to Spain;" actually the abbreviated form of "*La Isla Española*" (Spain's Island).<sup>36</sup>

We are so familiar with the linguistic overtones of the imperialist competition that we frequently dismiss the cognitive value inherent to the words of the conquistadors, which meaning we take for granted assuming they are just signs and therefore have a straightforward and unproblematic relation to the things they signify. Nevertheless, documentary sources testify to a linguistic process that runs parallel to that of colonial accomplishment but is not fully encompassed within it. There is in fact one instance, at least, in which the linguistic phenomenon seems dissonant with respect to the toponymic encoding of the Indian's subjection to the European metropolises. That is precisely the formulation of the toponym *Nuevo México*, and of course the constitution of its semantic content in the collective imagination. The issue is relevant because even though this toponym fits in the same mould as *Nueva España* and the like, we cannot possibly interpret it as a mere side effect of European appropriation. In this case the **homology** did not involve the projection of anything metropolitan; rather it was achieved via reproducing the name of a section of the land that was being colonised.

The semantic relation existing between *Nuevo México* and *Nueva España* provides substantial evidence to argue that in this portion of the American land-mass, the Spaniards granted authoritative status to indigenous understandings. As this constitutes the core issue of my thesis I shall return to it later on. In what remains of this chapter I will show that if we do not place conquest and colonial domination as the main or sole explanatory device, alternatively interpreting both place-names in relation to the cognitive process whereby they came into being, we get a different picture of the interactions occurred between the two main parties involved in the Euro-American

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Hulme (1994: 166-167) elaborates on the possible meanings and implications of this toponym, arguing that besides it being a literal way to represent the act of taking possession by naming it was a form of possessing the foreign in language through domestication and, in consequence, a device to familiarise the menacing exotic.

encounter (natives and intruders). As Stuart B. Schwartz recently noted (1995: 6):

if one views cultural encounters and evaluations as governed by a perspective of power and hegemony [...] there is the danger of falling into the reductionist argument in which ultimate goals determine cultural understandings in a somewhat simplistic fashion.

The birth of a naming practice entails subtle epistemological transformations. In this case the metamorphosis implied, first, the introduction of homological operations to mediate between *certainty* and *surprise*, two elements that in a way characterise Cortés' enterprise and are unique in respect to previous and posterior experiences in the New World; and secondly, the increasing recourse to analogies for which Spanish institutions and customs, and also the newly known aboriginal served as the source domain. Thus McGrane's contention that in the New World "the unknown was not explained by the known but brought into the vicinity of another unknown, which suddenly transformed both unknowns into knowns" (McGrane 1989: 16-23), is only partially valid; for after the encounter with Central Mexico —and this is precisely the epistemological innovation the term *Nueva España* incarnates— the exotic was often measured against the "self-constitutive."

The following section is an overview of those aspects of the indigenous political economy in Central Mexico that explain why the conquerors perceived the region as a "New Spain". For as James Lockhart contends (see note 30 above) they mistook superficial similarities for a systemic equivalence of concepts and institutions.

### **2.3.- The conditions for toponymic transference.**

Surprise was undoubtedly the first feeling that held Cortés and his men prey when they reached Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the political centre of the powerful empire that their Indian informants had been pointing to since they put ashore in Veracruz. According to their own testimonies, the size of the city

—extending over an area of 1000 hectares or 13 square kilometers (Noguera 1974: 67)— particularly surprised the conquerors. Diego de Ordaz, the first Spaniard to catch a complete glimpse of the valley of Mexico during a scouting mission to mount Popocatepetl in September 1519, declared in returning to the Spanish encampment "that he was astonished/frightened<sup>37</sup> at the scene he could see" from the summit: "another new world of large settlements and towers, and a sea, and a huge city built within it."<sup>38</sup> Cortés himself, describing the portent in his second letter to the king (1960: 51), said that Tenochtitlan was as big as Córdoba or Sevilla, two of Spain's largest urban settlements of the time (Martínez 1990: 54). But if size seemed overwhelming, the very location of the city —amidst the waters— was no less disturbing, as Ordaz' testimony and the ephemeral nickname of "*Venecia la Rica*" (Venice the Rich) that conquerors initially used<sup>39</sup> suggest.

Tenochtitlan stood on an island within a lacustrine basin in the centre of a broad valley (nearly 3000 square miles in size). Over time the natural island, located near the juncture of the salt and fresh waters of two of the five interlocking lakes constituting the basin (map 3), Tetzaco and Xochimilco, had been extended by an indigenous technique of land reclamation of marshy areas (Berdan 1989: 18-22, Noguera 1974: 66-7). Thus at the moment of the Spanish arrival most of the city was built atop a collection of artificial square plots (*chinampas*), laid out in a grid pattern criss-crossed by a system of streets and

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<sup>37</sup> The word in Spanish is "espantado," which can also be translated as "appalled," "staggered" or "scared." The definition for the word "espanto" provided by the 1732 Spanish Royal Academy quotation dictionary on the basis of its usage in different authoritative texts is the following: "Terror, asombro, consternación y perturbación del ánimo, que causa inquietud y desasosiego y altera los sentidos [...] Vale asimismo admiración y asombro, no causado de miedo, sino de reparo y consideración de alguna novedad..." (terror, amazement, a state of emotional disturbance and consternation, something that causes disquiet and alters the senses ... Also meaning admiration and awe, not out of fear but due to the realisation and consideration of some novelty) (Real Academia Española 1984).

<sup>38</sup> "Otro nuevo mundo de grandes poblaciones y torres, y una mar, y dentro de ella una ciudad muy grande edificada, y que a la verdad al parecer, ponía temor y espanto." (Francisco de Aguilar, *Relación breve...*, in Vázquez 1988: 176). It seems that captains Pedro de Alvarado and Bernardino Vázquez de Tapia, who were sent to have a look at Tenochtitlan around the same time but were only able to reach Tetzaco did not reach a point where they could attain a panoramic view of the whole valley (Vázquez de Tapia, *Relación de méritos y servicios*, in Vázquez 1988: 139-141).

<sup>39</sup> Mártir de Anglería, *carta a los marqueses*, March 7, 1521 (1990: 109)

canals leading towards all four cardinal points from a central walled-in precinct (map 8).<sup>40</sup> Here, within this enclosure stood the city's main ceremonial district. Most of the seventy-eight buildings that it contained, according to friar Bernardino de Sahagún (quoted by Noguera 1974: 56) were sacred, the most important being the great twin temple-pyramid dedicated to the gods Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. However, it was the multi-roomed palaces of rulers and nobles which provided the scenario for the luxurious court-life that chroniclers so vividly described. Moctezuma's palace, for instance was said to have a hundred rooms including dormitories, saloons and granaries, plus a number of magnificent gardens (Noguera 1974: 57). A series of causeways connected the island with three major cities ashore, Tlacopan, Tetzaco and Colhuacan, dividing the city in four cardinal sectors, or wards. Together with a dike that separated fresh and salt water, they also served as an hydraulic system to control the currents and prevent floods. All five lakes were constantly navigated by canoes of different sizes transporting people and goods and were surrounded by many towns and small cities, each with its own civic and ceremonial centre though subjected to the domination of Tenochtitlan or one of its two allies: Tetzaco and Tlacopan.

The lengthy descriptions contained in Cortés' second report-letter to the King and the accounts of some soldiers in his army such as the so-called Anonymous Conqueror, Andrés de Tapia, Francisco de Aguilar, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo give us a hint of the aspects that drew the Spaniards' attention.<sup>41</sup> The conquerors admired the city's layout just as much as cultivation

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<sup>40</sup> Ross Hassig (1985: 41-45) provides a detailed description of the valley including its size and topography, the hydrological conditions connecting the lakes, and the development of the *chinampa* agricultural system. Frances Berdan (1989: 29-32) also describes the valley with detail. For a more recent evaluation of the socio-political implications of *chinampa* agriculture see Elizabeth M. Brumfiel (1991) and Jeffrey R. Parsons (1991).

<sup>41</sup> This letter by Cortés, almost contemporary with the events, is the earliest testimony we have of the Spaniards' accession to Tenochtitlan. The other documents herein referred to are also eye-witness accounts but they were written from memory some years later. The account by the Anonymous Conqueror, first published in 1556 by Giovanni Batista Ramusio in an Italian translation, was written somewhere between 1531 and 1556 (Conquistador Anónimo 1986:13); the chronicle by Díaz del Castillo dates from c. 1555, Tapia's *Relación* (in Vázquez 1988) from 1539, and Aguilar's *Relación Breve de la Conquista de la Nueva España* (in Vázquez 1988) from c. 1570.

techniques. But it was two aspects of the political economy that they were most amazed by: commercial activity and structures of prestige. This is clearly attested by the disparately extensive passages they devoted to marketplaces and ruling class etiquette. Díaz del Castillo (1982 [c. 1555]: 192) wrote that in the market-square of Tlatelolco his fellow soldiers were deeply impressed to see "the multitude assembled there" to buy and sell their goods, and also that some soldiers "who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, Italy and Rome," said they had seen nothing similar before.<sup>42</sup> Equally impressed, Francisco de Aguilar (in Vázquez 1988: 180) noted that emperor Moctezuma behaved at every moment in a "very authoritative manner" (*con mucha autoridad*) and was served "like a great prince and lord" (*su servicio era como de gran príncipe y señor*).<sup>43</sup>

The enthusiasm transpiring in the Anonymous Conqueror's description of Tlatelolco's main square (1986: 147) shows that the Spaniards found marketplaces so appealing because they resonated with their own world and could be seen as microcosms revealing the complexity of the indigenous society at large. Like courtly routine, they unveiled the prevailing degree of productive specialisation, and the concomitant social stratification this implied. Therefore they stood as reminders of things left behind in the Iberian Peninsula:

Tenochtitlan has very large and beautiful squares where they sell everything they use; especially the great square they call the Tutelula [Tlatelolco], which may be three times the size of the great square of Salamanca, and is all surrounded by porticoes; from twenty to twenty five thousand people gather every day in this place to buy and sell; and in market-days [...even] forty to fifty thousand people. They have good order, both in that each class of merchandise is separately sold in its own section, and in their dealings. On one side of the square they sell gold; and in a nearby area [...] precious stones of various classes mounted in gold shapes of different birds and animals. In another section they sell beads and mirrors; somewhere else feathers and tufted crests of birds of all colours to adorn the cloths they wear at war and in festivities. Further away they are busy turning stones into knives and swords [...] Here they sell the grains they use, there several

<sup>42</sup> "... tornamos a ver la gran plaza y la multitud de gente que en ella había, unos comprando y otros vendiendo [...] y entre nosotros hubo soldados que habían estado en muchas partes del mundo, y en Constantinopla y en toda Italia y Roma, y dijeron que plaza tan bien compasada y con tanto concierto, y tamaña y llena de tanta gente, no la habían visto."

<sup>43</sup> See also Andrés de Tapia's comments on Moctezuma's meals and palaces (in Vázquez 1988: 105-106), and the descriptions of Tenochtitlan by Cortés (1960: 51-56) and by the Conquistador Anónimo (1986: 141-153).

kinds of bread; in one spot they sell pastry, in another hens, chickens and eggs, and in the proximity hares, rabbits, deer, quail, geese and ducks. Then, in a different area they sell wines of various classes, and in yet another all sorts of vegetables.<sup>44</sup>

Archaeological evidence for the pre-conquest urban network in the lake basin is scarce, since Mexico city is now built atop the main settlements of that period. For the central part, which was originally the island, we have isolated though significant findings<sup>45</sup> demonstrating that most descriptions recorded in chronicles and other documents from the early fifteen hundreds are fairly accurate regarding the extension and physiognomy of the urban area, the number of its inhabitants and their occupation.

The Anonymous Conqueror observed that Tenochtitlan was in circumference "more than two and a half leagues, or perhaps three."<sup>46</sup> Based on this and other testimonies, and also by means of projecting over a map of the modern city the ancient quarters, José Luis de Rojas (1986: 43) calculated its size at approximately 13.5 square kilometres. The same witness stated that most conquerors "estimate the city's population at seventy thousand inhabitants, rather more than less."<sup>47</sup> Given the fact that other chroniclers mention around sixty thousand houses rather than individuals it seems that the Italian editor of the now lost anonymous report mistranslated *vecinos* (neighbours) as *personas* (persons), which is probably incorrect because in the Spanish usage of the

<sup>44</sup> "Hay en la ciudad de Temistitan México grandísimas y bellísimas plazas, donde se venden todas las cosas que se usan entre ellos, y especialmente la plaza mayor que ellos llaman de Tutelula, que puede ser tan grande como sería tres veces la plaza de Salamanca, y todo su entorno está porticado; en esta plaza se reúnen ordinariamente cada día para comprar o vender veinte o veinticinco mil personas; y el día del mercado [...] de cuarenta a cincuenta mil personas. Tienen su orden, tanto en estar cada mercancía separada y en su propio lugar, como en el vender; porque en un lado de la plaza están aquellos que venden oro; y en otro lado próximo a este, están los que venden piedras de diversas clases engarzadas en oro con la forma de diferentes plantas y animales. En otra parte se venden cuentas y espejos; en otra, plumas y penachos de todos los colores para adornar y coser a los vestidos, que llevan en la guerra y en sus fiestas. En otra parte tallan las piedras para navajas y espadas [...] Aquí se vende el grano que ellos usan; y allá el pan de diferentes clases; en un sitio se venden pasteles, y en otro las gallinas, los pollos y los huevos, y allí cerca liebres, conejos, ciervos, codornices, ocas y patos. A continuación, en otra parte se vende el vino de diferentes tipos, y en otra las diferentes clases de hortalizas..."

<sup>45</sup> The most important were made in the 1970s and 1980s during the construction works of the underground transport system and in two major excavation projects held at the Great Temples of Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan.

<sup>46</sup> "puede tener esta ciudad [...] más de dos leguas y media o casi tres, poco más o menos, de circuito" (Conquistador Anónimo 1986: 141)

<sup>47</sup> "La mayor parte de aquellos que la han visto juzgan que tiene más de 60,000 habitantes, y antes más que menos" (*ibid.*).

period *vecinos* generally meant householders (Thomas 1993: 612). Twentieth century academia has engaged in long demographic debates. Total figures suggested vary widely; nevertheless, after examining all past estimates Rojas (1986: 65) concluded that total numbers for the moment of Cortés' arrival are most likely to fall within the range of two to three hundred thousand inhabitants. In any case it is clear that Tenochtitlan was the largest city in the American continent, and by 1519 it was also unusually large for the European standards of that age.<sup>48</sup>

Whatever the precise figures may be, we know that the amount of labour and resources visibly invested in the city, and the large quantities and variety of luxury goods and every-day consumption products that its inhabitants required, overflowed the productive capacities of the valley. This was as clear for the Spaniards as it is for us. Moreover, even when they did not entirely understand the particular social and political structures that articulated the relations of economic dependence between Tenochtitlan and its sustaining hinterland —thoroughly studied by Ross Hassig (1985)— they did realise that such a concentration of wealth and people entailed some sort of imperial control, thus corroborating the profuse reports pointing in that direction they had gathered from Veracruz. About this matter Mr. Zuazo commented:

Among the lords of these cities, villages and places some are more principal and others are less so; therefore they pay tribute to each other [...] enter each other's councils and assemblies, and hold consultation meetings, mainly regarding war.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the so-called Aztec empire was a military tribute state constituted by numerous heterogeneous, self-contained polities, subject to the domination of a confederation of three city-states in the valley of Mexico: Tlacopan, Tetzaco

<sup>48</sup> Hugh Thomas (1993: 609-614) provides an excellent summary of twentieth century demographic debates concerning New Spain, and the valley of Mexico in particular. Compare the figures quoted from Rojas with the contemporary population of Greater London, that is, London with Westminster and suburban environs (about 50 to 60 thousand inhabitants in the 1520s) and Paris (about 200,000 inhabitants at the end of the sixteenth century) (Corfield 1990: 39 & Benevolo 1993: 140).

<sup>49</sup> "Destos señores destas cibdades y villas y lugares, hay unos más principales y otros menos principales que pagan unos a otros tributos [...] e entran en sus cabildos e ayuntamiento, y hacen sus consultas, mayormente en cosas de guerra." (Letter by Mr. Zuazo, November 14, 1521, in García Icazbalceta 1858: I, 366).

and Mexico-Tenochtitlan linked in a triple political and military alliance under the leadership of the latter. Rather than a territorial domination system of the kind that characterised the late Roman empire, however, the Aztec system, like the early Roman did not entail the physical occupation of the conquered territories or the replacement of local officials. In this sense it was a hegemonic empire (Hassig 1985: 92-103) which attained its political dominance without direct territorial control, via clientelism, tribute imposition and military threat.

For ninety years before the Spanish arrival, the Aztec state had secured its growth and material well being through war and forced alliance but had not deprived the defeated opponents of their political autonomy and local customs. Instead it subjected all conquered territories to the payment of annual tribute, usually consisting of products of the land although instalments were sometimes replaced with a supply of auxiliary troops and the obligation to provide "peripheral security against low-intensity threats" (Hassig 1985: 93). War and conquest had not only turned the Mexican rulers into the overlords within the valley but had also secured their regular access to the varied resources the Spaniards saw in the market-place, which came from three distinct ecological milieus: the tropics, near both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans; the temperate zones beyond the volcanoes, and the fairly cold mountainous area nearby.

• Tribute to Tenochtitlan included agricultural, game and mineral products and raw materials such as maize, beans, chilli, cacao, amaranth, honey, maguey syrup, wooden planks and beams, cotton, rubber, amber, lime, salt, gold, turquoise, deerskins, jaguar skins, and feathers, as well as manufactured items like feather-work dresses, tunics, standards, shields and head-dresses; cotton cloaks and clothing; gold, jadeite and turquoise shields, diadems, and necklaces; copper bells and axe heads; bulrush seats, mats and crates; pottery and gourd bowls; *maguey* and *amatl* paper.<sup>50</sup> Hernán Cortés was well aware of this tributary structure almost from the time of his landfall, and he took advantage

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<sup>50</sup> Codex Mendoza (see Berdan 1997) lists the tribute collected from four hundred towns between 1516 and 1518.



when he occupied the position of the ruling lord. More than the brilliant mind of the "hero," this attitude (repeated by subsequent administrators) illustrates the extent to which he granted native institutions and cultural achievements with authoritative value.

Chapters three and six provide further detail on the structure and history of the Aztec empire. Here I just want to insist that although resemblance with the Iberian Peninsula was determinant in the Spanish conceptualising of mainland North America from the very beginning, the significant resemblance expressed in the toponym *Nueva España* did not pertain to the realm of nature but to the sphere of urban life and politics, despite the remarks on the similarities concerning landscape, climate, plants and animals contained in the *Carta del Cabildo* (Cortés 1960: 16), Cortés' second report-letter (1960: 79) and other early accounts. Yucatan, coastal Veracruz, Tlaxcala, and Mexico were the first American sites where the Spaniards found societies they could consider analogous to their own; having, as it were, a high degree of labour specialisation and a ruling class totally detached from productive activities. No other people in the portions of the American continent explored until then had an administrative apparatus linking such a number of lands and villages, located several days of horse-riding distance apart from each other. Not a single instance of the previous Caribbean experience had led Europeans into proper urban centres, walked by people dressed in handsome garments and living in houses as permanent as brick and stone can guarantee. Reason why Juan Díaz concluded his *Itinerario de la armada...* asserting that in the land of Ulloa (Ulúa) people "go about dressed in cotton, they display a lot of civility and live in stone houses, and they have their laws and ordinances and public places reserved for the administration of justice."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "...gentes que andan vestidas con ropas de algodón, que tienen harta policía y habitan en casas de piedra, y tienen sus leyes y ordenanzas y lugares públicos disputados para la administración de justicia." (In Vázquez 1988: 57).

#### 2.4.- Hernán Cortés and Christopher Columbus.

Contrary to what had been the case with Columbus twenty-seven years before, when Cortés and his men left the village of Veracruz heading inland towards the valley of Mexico, in August 1519, they had a fairly clear idea of the scene awaiting at the end of the journey. This is hardly surprising, for Cortés had two enormous advantages over Columbus: means for establishing efficient communication with aboriginal population and the precedent of previous experiences that had secured significant knowledge about the land.

Columbus, as we all know, attempted to reach Asia heading West across the Atlantic in a time when Europeans ignored the existence of the American continent. All geographical notions orienting his steps derived from textual sources predicated upon an opposite route to the one he chose to follow. Hence the languages that Luis de Torres, his only interpreter spoke: Hebrew Amharic, and Arabic (Hulme 1986: 20), nothing of course that could be of any help before Amerindian interlocutors. The marginal annotations Columbus wrote in the books he carried along (Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, an Italian version of Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis*, a copy of Aeneas Sylvius' *Historia Rerum Ubique Gestarum* and a Latin version of Marco Polo's travels) and the comments he made in his Diary show that he was constantly relating his findings to kingdoms known in antiquity, the Bible, or Marco Polo, like Tarshish, Ophir, Sheba, Cathay, Mangi and Cipangu (Pastor Bodmer 1992: 12-13).

In contrast, Cortés' notions were empirically rooted in two expeditions preceding his own that explored the coasts of Yucatan and the Gulf of Mexico. A small party under the command of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba had accidentally "discovered" the region in 1517, driven astray by the force of non-mastered currents during an expedition originally planned for slave raiding in the vicinity of Cuba.<sup>52</sup> Since natives whom they were not prepared to confront

<sup>52</sup> Testimonies concerning this expedition were compiled, translated into English and published by Henry R. Wagner in 1942. These include the *Carta del Cabildo*, Martyr's fourth decade of

expelled them violently, these adventurers had but a small taste of the land; enough, however, to engage the governor of Cuba in the preparation of a second journey that he entrusted to Juan de Grijalva (1518).<sup>53</sup> As for the language, Cortés at an early stage could rely on the translating services of two Maya Indians that Henrnández de Córdoba had captured, a Spanish survivor of a 1511 shipwreck —Jerónimo de Aguilar— whom he rescued at Cozumel, and a bilingual (Maya/Náhuatl) woman —Malintzin— that he received in Tabasco as part of peace settlement arrangements (Martínez 1990: 121, 157, 161-162).

The brief comparison above suggests that if exploration in the times of Columbus —as O'Gorman 1984 [1958]) and Pastor Bodmer (1992: 20-23) insist— was based on the systematic transposition of concepts that allowed empirical data to fit into a preconceived scheme of the world, direct observation and personal dialogue with indigenous individuals was far more important for conceptualising "the Other" twenty seven years later, once the identity of the new-found-lands was established as a theretofore unknown continent. As Cortés and his men traversed the would-be land of New Spain for the first, second or third time —many had participated in Grijalva's, and some, like Díaz del Castillo, even Hernández de Córdoba's expeditions (Martínez 1990: 129, Díaz del Castillo 1982 [c. 1555]: 7-29)— they came across several indigenous groups holding different types of relations with the Aztecs, from total independence and perpetual confrontation to partial or complete subjection. Thus when Cortés came in touch with Moctezuma's ambassadors in Veracruz (April 1519), he already possessed valuable first-hand information on regional conflicts and allegiances. He knew that numerous peoples exploiting a wide variety of resources were subjects to Moctezuma's empire, to which they

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*De Orbe Novo*, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia General de las Indias*, and Francisco López de Gómara's *Historia de las Indias*.

<sup>53</sup> The Aztec emperor, Moctezuma, may have been informed of the presence of strange people since the ships of Hernández de Córdoba were seen. He certainly was when Grijalva came, for he sent messengers that the Spanish captain received near San Juan de Ulúa. By this time the Spaniards had already heard tell of the rich and powerful country of Culúa-Mexico (Martínez 1990: 120-122).

paid tribute but whose domination many resented. He also knew that an extraordinary commercial network allowed Aztec merchants to reach places far away in the South, for not only did they travel frequently to Yucatan but they also sustained regular trade in what is now Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama. He knew, in brief, that he was heading for a densely populated and highly urbanised settlement, the navel of a complex society with highly centralised administrative structures.

Of course Mexico's conquerors, like those of the Caribbean, applied the terminology they knew from their own cultural tradition to the new environment; we have seen that their testimonies are filled with "temples," "priests," "merchants," "lords," and "vassals." Nevertheless, these terms were no longer defined through the structure of self reassurance that Hulme (1986: 20-36) identified in Columbian discourse because, having lost the specific identities to which they were tied in Columbus' *Diary* —Cipango, Quisnay, or the Terrestrial Paradise— they could assume new semantic relations. And I will indulge in a metaphoric argument to close the present discussion.

While the concepts that Columbus used in creating a picture of the land and people he encountered were like the pieces of a gigantic puzzle, in the sense that they could only match according to previously existing images of the far Eastern Asiatic empires, Cortés' concepts rather resembled the bricks of children's building blocks, for they did not determine in advance the precise shape of the construction they were used for. Reason why Columbus kept on looking for alternative explanations to salvage his geographical notions, whereas Cortés could adopt certain flexibility of interpretation that enabled him to put the structural features of Spain and the society he was first encountering in connection with each other. Ironically for Columbus, who thought to know the realities he was exploring, surprise resulted in progressive uncertainty as he attested, day after day, the collapse of his ideas, crushed by the weight of evidence. Conversely, an increased feeling of certainty

accompanied the continuous surprise felt by Cortés and his men, who had prepared themselves to live an experience for which European conceptual frameworks were insufficient. But even if Cortés and his army could anticipate some of the things they would see in the Aztec capital, reality surpassed any expectation they might have possibly held; and this re-appearance of the unprecedented resulted in a complete epistemological re-arrangement. From now on, Mexico and the Caribbean frequently substituted Spain as the conceptual frame to which new geographic and ethnologic representation would be referred.

## **2.5.- Repetition: Cíbola as a New Mexico.**

Names are not always fortuitous. This is the lesson the evidence analysed in this chapter teaches. Forty years after *Nueva España* was carved out from original Mexico, a series of expeditions quickly lined up in what we may call the quest for *Nuevo México*, an ill defined entity which as yet only existed in the imagination but was finally reified, at the turn of the century, in the form of an actual province.

The spread of effective Spanish occupation in mainland North America was conditioned by the indigenous existence of two different types of cultural and economic complexes. One, covering a smaller geographic area but having more demographic significance, was an agricultural and mercantile economy that prevailed in northern Central America and southern Mexico, where urbanisation had developed hand in hand with advanced cultivation techniques. The other was a predominantly hunting-gathering and fishing economy, practised by the sparser nomadic and semi-nomadic population of the steppes and deserts of the North, many of whom the Spaniards came to regard as crude savages similar to the Caribs and Arawaks of the Antilles. Once the Spaniards achieved sufficient control over Central Mexico they entered the

realm of these "uncivilised" *Chichimeca* Indians,<sup>54</sup> more efficient in resisting domination. Thereon, the rhythm of penetration slowed down, becoming almost stagnant by the decade of 1550, despite the enormous breath of the explorations conducted north-westward between 1529 and 1542.

Most elements later to be central to the process of geographical formulation that gave birth to *Nuevo México* were amassed precisely during these thirteen years of hectic exploration; namely, a series of rumours and eye-witness reports regarding a wealthy province, deep in the North, where merchants traded in gold and turquoise and people wore cotton clothing. The seven marvellous cities, with multi-storied, stone houses of these reports were actually the settlements of the so-called Pueblo Indians living in Arizona and New Mexico. The Spaniards referred to them as "the Seven Cities of Cíbola" since 1539-1540 but was later known as *Nuevo México*.

The earliest, or at least most influential reports concerning a marvellous northern country had reached Mexico City with four survivors of a shipwrecked expedition to Florida who arrived in 1536.<sup>55</sup> Viceroy Mendoza commissioned the verification of these rumours to a certain friar Marcos de Niza, who claimed in his written report that Cíbola was larger than Mexico City and also the doorway to other provinces of no less grandeur further ahead.<sup>56</sup> On this basis Mendoza launched an elaborate expedition of conquest that he entrusted to the command of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado. Nevertheless, since this colonising attempt (1540-1542) ended in a complete failure, systematic, official efforts to penetrate the North were abandoned until

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<sup>54</sup> The term *Chichimeca* is complex and ambiguous. I will discuss it in chapter two but here I am using it in the sense it most commonly had during the colonial period; i.e., as the generic name which designated all part-time agriculturists and hunter-gatherers living in the arid environment of what is today northern Mexico.

<sup>55</sup> None of the written testimonies they produced themselves mentions the province but there are letters by viceroy Antonio de Mendoza and the chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo suggesting that in the context of informal conversation they did say to have heard the rumour among some of the natives they came across. For further detail on this expedition and the attendant reports and chronicles see chapter four.

<sup>56</sup> Marcos de Niza's 1539 report (in Mora 1992: 158).

around 1560. From then on people explicitly formulated the aim of discovering *Nuevo México*, an ideal kingdom that was at last identified with Cíbola.

I describe this chain of events in further detail in chapter four. As of now, my purpose is to show that an overall pattern of projection and repetition links this experience with Cortés' initial accession to the heart of Moctezuma's empire. According to the sources I reviewed in section 1.2, the toponym *Nueva España* was carved out of the original Mexico sometime between June 1519 and August 1520. Forty years or so later, a Franciscan friar named Jacinto de San Francisco set out from the capital of the viceroyalty in search of *Nuevo México*, an enterprise that other Spaniards soon took over. Hence if Mexico had invited the conceptual reflection of Spain, the semantic void in which its original name was left led to an after-story: the longing for a "New Mexico."

Putting together the essentials of the two conquest periods under discussion, the pattern of repetition stands as follows: A) the Spaniards settle in the Caribbean; B) vague rumours about more sophisticated societies to the Northwest spread through Indian voices; C) verbal rumours are empirically confirmed by three expeditions that reach the Yucatan peninsula; D) information about even greater provinces to the West is gathered along the coastline; E) the Spaniards settle in Veracruz; F) once again the information provided by native informants is verified in Central Mexico; and G) rumours about magnificent cities and kingdoms to the North spread through Indian voices convincing soldiers, state officials and individual adventurers, who were increasingly using the term *Nuevo México*, to attempt the new verification. Needless to say, they expect this province to be substantially similar to Mexico /*Nueva España*, almost a replica, but perhaps one that slightly surpasses their expectations, as happened once before when they first came to Tenochtitlan.

Repetition is also expressed in the Spanish use of ethnic categories. A number of late sixteenth century documents literally describe *Chichimecas* as being "Caribs" by definition. Once again a grammatical perspective is

illuminating: North of New Spain the ethnonym *Caribe* became an adjective, conveying a sense of uncontrolled aggressive instincts, disorderly customs and duplicity. But rather than an equalising comparison, the taxonomic connection thereby drawn between Caribbean and northern New Spain's population, points to the use of analogy as a fundamental epistemological tool. It is difficult to know whether the Spaniards realised that Caribs and Chichimecas were culturally very different. It is clear, however, that in calling the *Chichimecas* "*Caribes*" the conquerors not only drew an analogy concerning the natives they were thus comparing (Carib : European :: Chichimeca : Mexico), the operation also made reference to their own lived-in experience. Many among the Spaniards who occupied leading positions in the expeditions heading North from Mexico City (or their kin) had performed as conquerors in the Caribbean as well and no doubt perceived similarities in the circumstances they now went through. Both in the Caribbean and northern New Spain, conquerors confronted societies they considered uncivilised in relation to the world they had left behind —Spain and Mexico-Tenochtitlan respectively— and in both cases the barbaric interlocutors insisted upon the existence of a much more sophisticated society somewhere further ahead.

The series of repetitions piling up before the Spaniards drove them to think that, if the rumours gathered among the islanders found confirmation in Mexico Tenochtitlan, the same could be expected to happen with Chichimeca reports about the wonders of the North. Ironically, *Nuevo México* turned out to be a difficult place to live in. Being sparsely populated by self-sufficient, autonomous communities who stubbornly resisted against submission, and lacking in gold and silver, it did not produce much wealth that idle intruders could appropriate. Although disenchantment was temporarily overcome by the prospect of further military conquests that seemed to offer, at least, opportunities for ransom, barter and fame, the increasing attacks of Apache Indians convinced the settlers that it was not worth staying in a place where



individual prosperity demanded the investment of hard personal labour. Therefore, by 1602 they began to abandon the province, taking their few belongings with them as they returned southwards.

The disconnection between facts and fancies cutting through the New Mexican adventure opens a big question mark about the cornerstones upon which the glittering dream of the Spaniards rested. Expectations aroused by the overwhelming experience of the Valley of Mexico do not provide a complete answer. In order to develop into feasible projects, these expectations needed the further support of reputed evidence that could counter-balance the risks implicit in the pursuit of a dream. I suggest that Aztlán-Chicomoztóc, the mythic place of ancestral origin of the Mexica and other Náhuatl speaking peoples from the central highlands, worked as the most fundamental catalyst in the formulation of imagined geographies that this thesis explores.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **MEXICAN, CHICHIMECA AND PUEBLO INDIANS**

This chapter is an ethno-historical overview of the portion of mainland North America conquered by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. It pays particular attention to those areas associated with the construction and search for *Nuevo México*; namely, the north-western and central portions of present day Mexico and the south-western section of what is today the United States of America. The main purpose of this account is to provide contextual information indispensable to understanding the cultural transactions and adjustments entailed in the confrontation between European conquerors/settlers and local Amerindian population. It covers a long period of pre-conquest autochthonous development, and is organised as a summarised assessment of key academic debates concerning the definition of the regional boundaries that modern scholars have drawn to divide the American continent into "culture areas," particularly those labelled as Mesoamerica, Aridamerica and Oasisamerica.

I will discuss the relevance of culture area classifications later but a general point needs to be established here: To a large extent this classification of Native American peoples, like the categories of tribe or caste or the very ideas of India and Africa (Cooper & Stoler 1997: 4), rests in the "colonial knowledge" that European invaders produced in the process of mapping and surveying the people they expected to subdue. Therefore, despite its extensive incorporation of material evidence elicited from modern archaeological research, it largely depends on the comparison between economic, political and cultural traits that those intruding observers chose to emphasise. Such "reproduction" of colonial knowledge in academic analysis may be problematic for some scholars, but if the focus of our interest is precisely the way in which colonising parties conceived the territory they came to occupy, it seems reasonable to take this value-laden culture area taxonomies as a vantage point.

There is yet another good reason to opt for this choice. Recent literature shows that the 1860's bureaucratic classifications of people leading to the fixation of notions of caste in the British Raj (Dirks 1989: 61, 71-72; Cohn 1990: 238-247), correlates with the formulation of the notion of tribe by different colonial administrations in Africa (Iliffe 1979: 323-324, Ranger 1983: 247-254, Chanock 1985: 20-21 & 219-239). Both were colonial constructs which defined the constituents of colonised societies according to static categories so as to facilitate the control of otherwise fluid and confusing social and political relationships. Yet both were re-elaborations of a set of pre-existing local categories collected among elders or pandits<sup>1</sup> rather than the pure invention of astute European officers. Something similar had occurred in New Spain more than three hundred years before. Certain indigenous discourses concerning the classification of human groups, namely the partition that sedentary farmers from Central Mexico drew between themselves and the peoples they called *Chichimeca*, became the template of the colonial administrative classification for the aboriginal population. Although in the pre-conquest era this term—*Chichimeca*—was generally used with reference to hunter-gathering lifestyles and peoples of northerly provenance, it carried along a great deal of ambiguity that was lost in its colonial version, which, as in so many other instances of colonial labelling (e.g. Taussig 1984, Stoler 1985, Scully 1995) set up high levels of killing, raping and dispossessing permissiveness.<sup>2</sup>

I do not bring this up merely to provide yet another example of how, under colonial circumstances, social taxonomies work to allow for different intensities and specific forms of violence. Rather, I am interested in highlighting the successive transfer of "ethnographic" taxonomic principles from pre-conquest folk taxonomies to colonial representations, and then to modern "culture area" classifications such as the one that organises this chapter. Keeping

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<sup>1</sup> Hindu "law officers".

<sup>2</sup> A full discussion of this term and the ambiguities it carries along comes later in this chapter.

in mind this connectedness between indigenous, colonial, and modern academic modalities of ethno-cultural representation will prevent us from lapsing into easy depictions of colonising-dominant-ruling parties as internally coherent bodies impervious to tensions and influences emanating from the encounter with the colonised Other. This is a simplified perspective that various recent studies on colonialism oppose (e.g. Fabian 1983, Stoler 1989, Cooper and Stoler 1989 & 1997, Comaroff 1991 & 1997, Thomas 1991 & 1994).

Rather than displaying an itemised inventory of the Amerindian peoples that Spanish colonisers gradually incorporated into the viceroyalty of New Spain, the broad ethno-historical panorama I draw in the following pages is meant to show that the geographical distribution of certain socio-cultural features, ranging from diet and clothing to cosmology and government institutions, was decisive to the Spanish construction of *Nuevo México*. My strategy, therefore, is to emphasise those regional contrasts that led conquistadors to believe that another Mexico existed in the North and to decide, many years later, that they had finally found it in the Pueblo Indian villages of present day New Mexico and Arizona. The same contrasts, albeit for very different reasons, were picked up by scholars who developed the culture area classification.

One of the most characteristic features of North America in the contact period was the extreme cultural diversity of its inhabitants, partly derived from a long process of regional adaptation to the wide variety of natural environments prevalent across its uneven topography. All along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico from Yucatan to Veracruz, and on the inland route the conquistadors took into the Mexican highland plateau lied a series of centralised, urban societies of an ever increasing degree of complexity. Most had a farming economy based on advanced agricultural techniques, and thus contrasted deeply with the groups living beyond the reach of Aztec control. Under the harsher environmental conditions prevailing in the North, people

with a more rudimentary way of life based their subsistence on variable combinations of primitive farming, hunting, fishing and gathering. However, small groups in some ecologically fit areas cultivated the land on a regular basis.

Only against the background of this long-standing divide between people for whom agriculture represented the basic form of livelihood and people who depended on hunting and gathering can we comprehend the response of both Spaniards and Indians to their mutual challenge. The multiple social and political arrangements found in association with these two contrasting modes of subsistence, and their combination, entailed different degrees of resistance and collaboration on the part of the Indians. This not only means that the Spaniards were forced to develop a multiplicity of strategies for domination, they were also variably enticed into cultural borrowing. Cross-culture contact in Hispanic North America, therefore, evolved into a process of change far more complex than that implied by the notions of acculturation and resistance often applied to assess the indigenous experience of colonialism. Native Americans, as the quest for *Nuevo México* demonstrates, were not always forced to choose between imposed adaptation and complete rejection; neither were European understandings and behavioural patterns in the New World unaffected by the impact of indigenous customs and ideas.

Since the 1980s extensive appraisals within the fields of anthropology, history and literary studies have been increasingly concerned about the intricacies of colonial relations. The extent and manner in which particular colonising projects are inflected by the indigenous societies they come across, as well as the degree of accord and efficacy one could attribute to the colonisers' agency have been reformulated. To the point that nowadays it has almost become commonsensical to affirm, as Cooper and Stoler do (1997: 1), that "Europe's colonies were never empty spaces to be made over in Europe's

image or fashioned in its interests; nor, indeed, were European states self-contained entities that at one point projected themselves overseas."

Nevertheless, most of this literature tends to focus on how the stability of particular colonial regimes, and the accomplishment, or failure, of their projected aims was often conditioned by: a) the complexity of non-Western reactions to European dominance; b) the existence of competing agendas and strategies of control within the colonisers' "social field"; and c) a series of unforeseen, disruptive forms of social configuration and political alignment resulting from the reproduction of class distinctions among colonisers overseas, the enacting of coloniser supremacy in all sorts of every-day behaviour, and certain policies originally devised to maintain the hierarchies of rule. Thus Reynaldo Ileto (1979), Vicente Rafael (1993) and Jean Comaroff (1985), for example, examine how Christianity was made local in the Philippines and South Africa, turning into a form of resistance against the colonial institutions of church and state. On the other hand, Karen Fields (1985) and John Comaroff (1997) discuss respectively the undermining effects that missionization had upon the legitimacy of the system of indirect rule that British administrators negotiated in Central and South Africa. So far I have not come across any study that explores the naturalising transformation that colonisers undergo in the process of cross-cultural intercourse at the level of every-day, personal experience; that is, beyond (or shall I say beneath) the grand sphere of metropolitan politics or colonial-project enforcement. The following account has the single purpose of enabling the reader to follow me in this attempt.

### **3.1.- The land forms and climate of New Spain.**

Looking over a map of North America it is impossible to avoid posing a basic highland/lowland divide for the territory that former New Spain occupied. It is located on the south-western side of the continental mass, structurally constituted by an almost uninterrupted cordilleran system running southwards

from Alaska to Central America, that represents mostly folds originated in recent geological time (Jaffe 1992). Biotic and climatic zones in this part of the world are very much dependent on the altitude variability that a turbulent geological history impressed on the terrain: A series of more or less parallel ridges with elevations ranging from near sea-level to approximately 5700 meters alternating with valley basins and fairly flat highland mesas (Lipe 1978: 328, Hall 1989: 34; Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 9-12).

Besides the partly submerged line of volcanoes that forms the peninsula of Baja California, with a northern extension in parallel ranges that fall beyond the area of our interest, four mountain chains of major proportions shape the provinces that physiographers identify in this territory (Gerhard 1982: 3, Kelley 1966: 95). From north to south they are, first, the Southern Rocky Mountains, extending south through central Colorado into north-central New Mexico. Second, a couple of parallel ranges, the Sierra Madre Oriental and Sierra Madre Occidental, that run across Mexico in a south-east direction and both along the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean descend abruptly to lower ridges, piedmont slopes and coastal plains. Third, the Cordillera Neovolcánica that, in south-central Mexico, interlocks with the Sierra Madre Oriental and Occidental.

A physiographic province in their own right, the Rocky Mountains are rich in coniferous trees and large game; but they have always been sparsely populated because they have little arable land and a short growing season due to the heavy winter snows that contribute much of the waters to the Colorado, the Rio Grande and the Pecos rivers. Towards the west its forested ranges descend into a transitional province, the Colorado Plateau, interrupted by volcanic intrusion and lava flows that give the landscape its characteristic deeply cross-cut canyons and steep-walled mesas; except for the Colorado River the province has few permanent streams. On the opposite direction lay the High Plains, a vast grass and shrub area, home of the bison and bison

hunters, which in central New Mexico include the drainage of the Pecos River (Hall 1989: 35-36, Woodbury 1979: 25, Cordell & Smith 1996: 207-210).

As elevation decreases to the north-west and south-west of the Colorado Plateau, isolated but numerous mountain chains of reduced extension mark the terrain, scattered throughout basin areas that once contained shallow lakes but are now deeply filled with eroded alluvial material. Physiographers call this area Basin and Range province, drawing an internal division between a higher and cooler section in western Utah and Nevada —generally known as Great Basin— and a south-east ramification, mainly consisting of hot, extensive deserts stretching from lower Arizona and New Mexico across the international frontier on the eastern and western sides of the Sierra Madre Occidental. The Rio Grande river that flows approximately 3000 km from the Rocky Mountains into the Gulf of Mexico cuts through this zone in the north-eastern extreme (Bonine 1970: 7, Lipe 1978: 328-332, Woodbury 1979: 25, Hall 1989: 35). The highest temperatures and lowest rainfall levels of the whole province occur on the western rim of the sierra in Sonora and Sinaloa, although large rivers (Sinaloa, Fuerte, Yaqui and Sonora) flow across the desert creating narrow and fairly fertile valleys. East of the sierra the environment is probably harsher due to the combination of extreme day-night temperature variations and a very low precipitation (Bonine 1970: 7, Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 18-19).

Further south stands the Mesa Central, a rather flat elevated plateau flanked on the east and west by the Sierra Madre and composed of low, hilly areas and wide basins of volcanic origin, some containing shallow lakes (Chapala, Pátzcuaro, Yuriria, Cuitzeo) and others the dissected beds of extinct lakes (e.g. Mexico, Puebla, Toluca, Guadalajara). Due to its plentiful level, arable land and very fertile soils it is, and perhaps always was, the most densely populated area in North America. The Cordillera Neovolcánica forms the southern rim; its landscape dominated by a row of volcanoes that stand at elevations ranging from 3800 meters to 5747 meters (Bonine 1970: 7, Carmack,



Gasco & Gossen 1996: 13). Much of the plateau lies in a temperate zone but climate is cold in its higher portions; rivers are few although it has three major drainage systems: The Lerma-Santiago and the Balsas, flowing west to the Pacific, and the Pánuco-Moctezuma, running from the north-eastern edge into the Gulf of Mexico.

Other mountain chains that follow south from the Mesa Central create the so called highlands of Oaxaca and Guerrero, often cut by mountain peaks and deep valleys. Separated by the Isthmus of Tehuantepec are the Chiapas-Guatemala highlands, rich in mountain forest; and to the north-east, the flat, mainly limestone peninsula of Yucatan immersed in vast extensions of tropical forest. Finally, narrow strips of lowland stretch along the coast in both the east (Gulf of Mexico) and the west (Pacific Ocean), forming distinct zones of hot climate where moisture, soil fertility and vegetation vary widely, from tropical forest and savannah in the humid areas to scrub and cacti in the arid ones. On the western side the terrain is traversed by relatively short, fast flowing rivers with small delta depositions whereas in the eastern side slow descending rivers create offshore barrier beaches that enclose lagoons and tidal swamps (Bonine 1970: 7; Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 9-10, 14).

### **3.2.- The Relevance of Culture Area Classifications.**

The culture area taxonomy that I chose to frame the following discussion—developed in the first half of the twentieth century (Wissler 1938 [1917], Kroeber 1948 [1923], 1936 & 1939, Krickeberg 1946, Kirchhoff 1943a, 1943b & 1954) and variously modified ever since—is in its origins a side product of the Boasian critique of Edward Tylor's comparative method and the sort of evolutionary classifications of "society types" it engendered. As a matter of fact, the concept of "culture area" tackled precisely what Boas had considered to be the major shortcomings of Tylor's evolutionism: the lack of historical and geographic specificity, the notion of a unitary human civilisation developing

along uniform channels all over the globe, and the poor empirical basis from which general laws of cultural evolution were abstracted (Stocking 1974).

The concept of "culture area" (Wissler 1938 [1917]) was aimed at providing an alternative principle for the definition of distinct, coherent units of study that could allow for a sufficient degree of generalisation without lapsing into the extremely loose abstractions typical of late nineteenth century systems of human classification. Hence it was based on the systematic comparison of lavish amounts of empirical evidence, generated during an intensified period of ethnographic and archaeological research. If, on a purely linguistic basis, North American peoples seemed overwhelmingly diverse,<sup>3</sup> the results of these investigations showed that a series of cultural patterns and modes of social and political organisation could be identified cutting across language boundaries. It was in accordance with the spatial distribution of these trans-ethnic similarities that Clark Wissler coined the term to designate a distinct geographic region in which a common set of traits is found shared by a number of individual societies. The notion was also meant to challenge two other principles to which most systems of classification current at the turn of the nineteenth century adhered: the simple adoption of the boundaries set by geographers in demarcating physiographic provinces, and the explanation of cultural difference in terms of race and biology.<sup>4</sup> This theoretical stance is clearly expressed in Paul Kirchhoff's assertion (1954: 531) that individual societies occupying contiguous geographic settings usually share "so many cultural traits and are organised along such similar lines that they appear as variants of one regional culture or culture area."

Some anthropologists like Daniel G. Brinton —and Tylor himself— had preceded Wissler in discarding race and biology as relevant categories for the analysis of cultural diversity. Brinton's (1891) ethnographic-based classification

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<sup>3</sup> One of the most comprehensive taxonomies of Amerindian languages ever done (Brinton 1891) registers more than 2000 languages for the moment of first European arrival.

<sup>4</sup> For a complete and well balanced summary of early classifications of Native American peoples see Pericot y García (1961: 161-166).

of North and South American Indians had shifted the focus away from the consideration of cranial shape, height, skin colour and complexion variability. However, the five continental super-areas that he established (North Atlantic, North Pacific, Central America, South Pacific and South Atlantic), though subdivided according to the regional distribution of language differences and modes of livelihood, still corresponded to basic directional indications and geomorphology. The refinement of Wissler's ideas introduced by Alfred Kroeber (1939) emphasised the historicity of culture area configurations, leading to the gradual replacement, in the task of area definition, of continental shape, bordering oceans, and topography for economic, artefactual, institutional, and cosmological criteria. Although no general agreement exists concerning the number and limits of the areas into which America should be divided, most proponents today assume that these are neither changeless nor ever-existing; rather, they come into being through the sustained contact of the societies that constitute them and their limits undergo continuous modifications.

Many area demarcations have come to light since 1946, when Walter Krickeberg promoted a binary opposition of complex or cultured societies—like the Aztec, the Maya, and the Inca—against simple ones. As a general rule they all attribute primary importance to patterns of settlement (temporary encampments, permanent or semi-permanent villages, and cities), forms of food production and appropriation (hunting, planting, fishing, gathering), and socio-political orders (clans and tribes, simple or complex chiefdoms, and states) (Pericot y García 1961: 165-166).

Apart from this basic agreement other points of consensus exist, the definition of Mesoamerica being perhaps the most important for the northern section of the continent. This area, and the central Andes of South America were the two major centres of plant domestication in the New World during prehistoric times. In the period immediately preceding the arrival of Europeans

they housed numerous individual societies sharing a series of attributes generally considered as indicative of civilisation. Alongside a well developed agriculture capable of supporting a large population —often concentrated in compact urban settlements— an increasing specialisation of productive and non-productive activities resulted, in both areas, in a very sophisticated social fabric. Nevertheless, the combination of organised trade and markets, centralised political structures, a highly organised religion with elaborate priesthood and ritual, and the presence of a mixed system of pictographic and phonetic writing is uniquely Mesoamerican;<sup>5</sup> for neither formal market exchange nor "painted books" seem to have existed in the Andean area before the establishment of the colonial regime.<sup>6</sup>

The Spanish quest for *Nuevo México* began in the heartland of Mesoamerica around 1540 and ended, more than half a century later, in the core of another area that Kirchhoff (1954: 550) called Oasis America, comprising a portion of south-western United States and north-western Mexico. Some problems arise from the fact that the implicated territory goes beyond the border presently separating these two nations. Unfortunately the methodological tools that academia develops are often bound to current configurations of political geography. Therefore, although Mexican and North American scholars occasionally extend across the border the limits of the culture areas they establish, they label them differently, even if their size and

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<sup>5</sup> For this general characterisation of Mesoamerica and the more detailed description of the following pages I consulted a wide variety of specialised and non specialised literature. Most information I include is now of common knowledge, therefore I will often omit specific references, but I rely essentially on the following authors: Armillas (1964a & 1964b), Braniff (1994), Bernal (1977), Carmack, Gasco & Gossen (1996), Carrasco (1971a, 1971b & 1977), Chapman (1990), Cline (1971), Kirchhoff (1943b), Lorenzo (1977), Lorenzo (1995), Matos (1994), López Austin & López Luján (1996), and West & Augelli (1976). Authors quoted to discuss certain specific issues who I do not include in this list will be fully referred in each particular case.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that Andean cultures were less developed. They simply found different means to satisfy their needs. Although the Inca system of data recording by means of knotted strings (*Khipu* or *Quipu*) was very sophisticated, and it may have served to register other than merely quantitative knowledge, the semantic principles under which it worked are not the same as those of writing. Brief and suggesting discussions on market issues in pre-conquest Andes can be found in J. V. Murra (1995) and S. E. Ramírez (1995); for a classical and more extended discussion see Polanyi (1957). As for the *quipu* system see Ascher & Ascher (1981), Cummins (1994), and Urton (1997).

shape roughly coincide. The ensuing discussion follows the categories and terminology that Kirchhoff proposed and which the Mexican school of anthropology usually follows (e.g. Matos 1994, Nárez 1994, Guevara 1995, López Austin & López Luján 1996).

I am aware of the fact that culture-area classifications are deliberately artificial in the sense that they do not necessarily reflect Native American identity formulations. This, however, is characteristic of most explanatory devices aimed at providing panoramic views to facilitate the understanding of complex phenomena. On the other hand, the analytic boundaries drafted by culture area advocates over the territory herein concerned do coincide vaguely with certain categories applied in folk taxonomies, as we have seen for the term *Chichimeca* that I shall subject to a closer examination later in this chapter.

### **3.3.- The concept of Mesoamerica.**

The literal meaning of the term Mesoamerica (Kirchhoff 1943b), refers to the geographic position of a vast area roughly comprising the southern half of present day Mexico from the northern edge of the Mesa Central; the complete territory of Guatemala, Belize, and El Salvador; and some portions of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (map 9). Rather than a fixed piece of land, however, the label denotes a cultural-territorial complex. Essentially, it is understood as the geographic span of a somewhat definite kind of civilisation, based fundamentally upon a farming economy and expressed in the collection of objects, beliefs, and practices that a number of peoples, organised in multiple socio-political units of variable extension and durability, used and entertained between the second millennium BC and the sixteenth century AD. In recent years some authors have extended the scope of the term to embrace post-colonial and modern communities of indigenous and mestizo composition showing manifest continuities with the traditions established in that early phase of history (López Austin 1990; Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996). Nevertheless, I

shall restrict this description to the pre-conquest and contact periods for which the term was originally devised.

Agriculture is notably the first element quoted in all definitions of Mesoamerica, with maize, beans and squash usually grown in the same plot<sup>7</sup> as the overall fundamental food crops. Adapted through long domestication processes to flourish nearly in every type of soil and weather, these products were later introduced in various extra-Mesoamerican areas such as the Pueblo country. Almost ninety additional species, including fruits and plants for purposes other than food,<sup>8</sup> were cultivated throughout Mesoamerica fostering agricultural complementarity across regions. Some —like cotton and cacao— could only prosper under certain environmental conditions and therefore constituted important articles for trading and tribute (Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 12). Despite the existence of advanced farming techniques, including the systematic fallowing of permanent fields, terracing and irrigation, the most extended tillage system was migratory slash-and-burn cultivation and farming implements were rudimentary; basically the planting stick with a sharp, fire hardened point, and the *coa* —a kind of dibble with a copper or wooden blade parallel to the handle. Depending on the conditions of each particular milieu, Indians supplemented their mainly vegetable diet by fishing, hunting small rodents or birds, and gathering insects and their larvae. Finally, a distinctive characteristic of Mesoamerican livelihood was the widespread breeding of dogs, turkeys, and small stingless bees for honey and wax.<sup>9</sup>

While most of these elements were common to many areas in the continent, certain traits present elsewhere, such as the use of poisoned weapons

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<sup>7</sup> This technique continues to be applied in many locations falling within the limits of ancient Mesoamerica and has even been adopted elsewhere. Tall maize stalks serve to support the climbing bean vines, which enrich the soil with nitrogen, while the soil beneath is protected against erosion by the creeping groves of squash (West & Augelli 1976: 229).

<sup>8</sup> Cotton and agave were the main sources of vegetable fibre used for weaving cloth. Tobacco and *copal* (a tree that produced an aromatic resin) were grown for ceremonial purposes, and a plant called *achiote* for its red dye.

<sup>9</sup> In some areas other two semidomesticated insects were kept: the cochineal bug for a scarlet dye, and the *aje* bug for a special wax used as base for paint, lacquer and for burnishing pottery.

and the existence of matrilineal clans, were completely absent in Mesoamerica. Likewise, a number of attributes have been identified (Kirchhoff 1943b: 99-102) as exclusive to this area:

- Advanced architectural knowledge expressed in the construction of large ceremonial centres with truncated pyramidal temple bases, ball courts, and palaces built of stone, lime and mortar.
- Restricted application of metallurgy, primarily used for the production of ornaments and other luxury articles.
- Combined pictographic and hieroglyphic writing systems that, by the time of the Spanish conquest, had some phonetic elements although they never turned into full alphabetic script.
- A calendar based on the combination of two major cycles, a ritual-divinatory one made up by the combination of 13 numbers and 20 day-names intermeshing to create a 260 day sequence, and a one solar-year cycle of 365 days, divided into eighteen months of twenty days plus five additional ominous days.
- A distinctive type of social organisation based on self-contained kinship-territorial units, often patrilineal in descent, whose members shared a residential quarter and had a common economic activity and a common tutelary god. This micro-community, only comparable to the *ayllu* of Andean societies was called *calpulli* in Náhuatl, *siqui* in Mixteco, and *amak* in Maya Quiché (López Austin 1995c: 447-450).

In the last three decades this definition of Mesoamerica, abstracted from the conditions existing by the time of the Spanish arrival, has been significantly enriched, as archaeology rendered more precise and abundant data and put into diachronic perspective the score of diagnostic traits that originally served to characterise the area. Furthermore, a parallel shift in focus from the search of common features to the analysis of local peculiarities—which is to say that the emphasis is now made on diversity rather than similarity—brought about the

usage of different theoretical models to explain how these peculiarities interlocked.

Eduardo Matos (1982 & 1994: 56-57), for example, applied the Marxist notion of mode of production to re-define the area in terms of the long standing presence of complex, stratified societies with reduced ruling classes in control of the labour force of masses of commoners. According to his interpretation this mode of production, that established the double exploitation of one class over another within the same society, and of the ruling class of one society over other societies upon which tributary obligations were imposed, appeared in the coast of the Gulf of Mexico with the consolidation of the so called Olmec civilisation (c. 1200 and 400 BC) and it expanded gradually until reaching the limits that Kirchhoff marked (1943b: 94-98) for sixteenth century Mesoamerica. Other authors (Olivé 1985; Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996) took up Immanuel Wallerstein's 1974 "world system theory" to explain the same phenomena; claiming that since Mesoamerican societies linked by domination-dependence relations did not have a common political governing structure and were not even always the same, the area, like Renaissance Europe, can be defined as a diverse but integrated stratified world.

In stressing the fact that it is difference which puts individual societies in connection with each other, sometimes via pacific forms of exchange and collaboration, sometimes through violent confrontation or forced dependence, scholars have reached the conclusion that Mesoamerica is a unit, not because all the people within it shared a fundamental guise but because they were linked through complex supra community webs of interaction in a common historical process that might be conditioned by ecological, cultural, or political factors (Litvak 1975; López Austin 1976: 199-200 & 1990: 28-29; López Austin & López Luján 1996: 62-63; Chapman 1990; Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 5-36). We must understand Mesoamerica, then, as the territorial embodiment of a network of inter-group relations. Its extension, as Armillas (1964a) rightly



pointed out, varied from time to time according to the changing scope and nature of those relations, although it had a fundamental core that remained fairly stable in size since the area first began to take shape.

By the time of Spanish contact regional dynamics had crystallised in the formation of various sub-areas within Mesoamerica, each characterised by a predominant language and a distinctive cultural pattern promoted by regionally hegemonic groups. Relations within and between these sub-zones were determined by the flow of luxury goods such as cotton garments, jade stones, cacao beans, animal skins, feathers, and gold ornaments that circulated via ceremonial gift-giving, mediated trade, outright conquest, and tributary demands (Berdan 1976 & 1992). Particularly relevant to us are Central Mexico, comprising the modern states of Hidalgo, México, Tlaxcala, Morelos, Puebla and the Federal District; and the West (Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Michoacán and Guerrero).<sup>10</sup> In the sixteenth century Central Mexico was culturally rather homogeneous, with the Otomangue linguistic family fairly well represented by Otomí, Mazahua and Matlatzinca speakers but mostly dominated by peoples who spoke Náhuatl—in terms of numbers of speakers the most important of the Yutoazteca family that includes as well languages from present day south-western United States and north-western Mexico. Contrastingly, the West was culturally, and perhaps linguistically, the most heterogeneous Mesoamerican region, with numerous unclassified languages today extinct spoken alongside various Yutoaztecan languages, and Tarascan, seemingly unrelated to any other tongue (Bonine 1970: 54-55, Carrasco 1977: 169-170, Lorenzo 1995, Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 83-84).

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<sup>10</sup> The internal division of Mesoamerica is also a matter of much debate. Here I follow López Austin & López Luján (1996: 75)

### 3.4.- The Constitution and History of Mesoamerica.

The domestication of maize and its succeeding general adoption were the decisive factor for the integration of Mesoamerica since it provided the foundation for a sustained demographic growth and created an entirely new form of settled village life. Recent studies have demolished the formerly widespread assumption that the knowledge and practice of agriculture invariably correlates with sedentism. Indeed, archaeologists have documented several examples of non-farming sedentary communities within the bounds of present day Mexico, as well as some instances of hunter gathering groups sufficiently acquainted with the process of plant germination as to occasionally cultivate certain species during seasonal periods of rest. Permanent settlements belonging to mollusc gatherers, for example, have been found in coastal areas, and in the lake basin of the valley of Mexico an incipient development of sedentism before agriculture was practised with any regularity has also been detected (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 24). Conversely, remains of domestic squash dated at about 8000 years BC have appeared in shelters occupied by nomadic hunter-gatherers in Oaxaca (Flannery 1986). Nevertheless, neither the settlements of mollusc gatherers nor the modest pre-agricultural hamlets of the valley of Mexico could achieve high population densities, let alone the nomadic groups who practised occasional cultivation of squash or any other short term growing vegetables. This changed with the domestication of maize, a plant that yields abundant, storable crops but requires complete sedentism as its cultivation and processing demands regular, intensive work all-year round.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest evidence of cultivated maize we have for North America was uncovered at cave sites in Tehuantepec. Although it was originally dated,

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<sup>11</sup> Theories about the factors leading to the development of full-time agriculture vary widely. For general assessments see Flannery 1973 and Mc Clung de Tapia & Zurita Noguera 1994: 211-219.

according to its archaeological context, at around 5000-3500 years BC, more recent datings practised on the ears of corn themselves show their antiquity does not go back beyond c. 2700 years BC. Similar adjustments have been made for stored evidence from Tehuacán and Tamaulipas, originally dated at around the year 5000 BC (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 26). Despite this shortening of the proved antiquity of existing samples, Bruce D. Smith (1995: 150-160) estimates that the process of domestication must have occurred in the Balsas river area between the years 4000 and 3000 BC. He states that the wild predecessor of maize grows abundantly in that region and time must be calculated for the genetic changes it underwent and the subsequent spread of the fully developed domestic variety into both Tehuacán and Tamaulipas, where no trace of the wild variety has been detected.

Whenever the initial domestication may have occurred, the fact is that the earliest evidence showing a clear association between maize cultivation and sedentism corresponds to three sites in the lowland regions adjacent to the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, which contain clay housefloors and other remains of permanent pre-ceramic settlements dated at about 3000-2500 years BC.<sup>12</sup> Five hundred years later the village farming tradition was firmly established in many areas, from the Mexican central plateau to the Central American Isthmus. We can only begin speaking about Mesoamerica at this point in time because only then permanent settlement dwellers sought to establish permanent forms of exchange, alliance, and domination among each another.

Early stages of Mesoamerican development are known through scattered archaeological remains which allow only a few inferences regarding social and political organisation. In some regions the so called Formative or Pre-Classic period (2000 BC - 200 AD) saw the amalgamation of neighbouring clusters of villages into more cohesive communities that, by the year 1200 BC, had grown in size and complexity to become distinct polities usually termed chiefdoms.

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<sup>12</sup> Puerto Marquez, in the state of Guerrero; Tlacuachero, in Chiapas; and Palo Hueco, in Veracruz (Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 47-48).

Evidence from the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, where the Olmecs evolved into the most powerful polity of the period, and from the highland valleys of Oaxaca and Central Mexico, shows that around this time public structures were built and craft specialisation was well developed.

Scholars consider that a ruling and ceremonial elite must have emerged in those areas along with a dependent class of artisans (Bernal 1977: 129-136), and that a permanent priesthood probably existed as well, because there are representations of human sacrifice (Pasztory 1995: 484) and large ceremonial centres, which implies high degrees of ritual specialisation. Furthermore, the elites of some among those polities seem to have been in contact with one another through trade networks and, perhaps, personal visits, for they used a common system of emblems and religious symbols to proclaim their power (Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 52). In fact, long distant exchange increased between 1200 BC and 400 AD; Olmec styles and artefacts from the Gulf coast and from the West, found as far as Guatemala and the valley of Mexico, indicate the existence of established trade routes,<sup>13</sup> if only used by noble emissaries of the priesthood who had apparently full control over the accumulation and redistribution of goods (Manzanilla 1985: 101). Although it is likely that tribute existed at this stage, it must have been of a very limited scope, merely involving the surrender of surplus produce by local commoners to local elites. Other minor chiefdoms also appeared between 1200 and 1400 BC in the lowlands of Chiapas, Belize and Guatemala. However, they do not seem to have participated in the network of interacting chiefdoms that linked the Gulf Coast, Oaxaca, and Central Mexico.

The beginning of the Classic period (AD 200 - 900/1000) is marked by the emergence of state societies, archaeologically noticeable in the growth of many

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<sup>13</sup> Artefacts from Tlatilco, El Arbolillo and Zacatenco, sites in the north-west of the Basin of Mexico that developed between 1500 and 400 BC show clear Olmec elements typical of the Gulf coast Olmec culture. Excavations during the 1970s demonstrated that such Olmec elements were intrusive in the Basin and that in fact there was also elements from the West of Mesoamerica, particularly Colima, El Opeño and Michoacán. Thus during the Pre-Classic in Tlatilco there was a fusion of local, Olmec and Western cultural elements (Cyphers 1981: 74, 77-78).

villages into veritable urban centres where public architecture, civic and ceremonial, acquired unprecedented massive dimensions. Defensive walls and fortifications also appeared all over the place and irrigation systems were significantly perfected and expanded. Changes that all in all reveal a more centralised control over resource allocation and labour. On the other hand, the concentration of items of regionally circumscribed production in the big cities indicates the existence of a well organised, stable tributary system entailing far flung structures of subordination absent in the Formative period.

Two civilisations dominated the Classic world: Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico, and the Maya in Guatemala, Yucatan and Chiapas. Nevertheless, other areas like the valley of Oaxaca and the Gulf coast also supported large states. Although the specific nature of these political systems is obscure given the lack of written sources, it is clear that in due time a dynamic of trade, war, and migration gave way, during the so called Epiclassic period (AD 650/800-900/1000) to a process of political fragmentation and considerable widening of pre-existing spheres of cross-cultural interaction (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 99-164). A number of small communities emerged when the largest Classic polities collapsed due to causes that are still unclear to us. The ensuing socio-political re-organisation, characterised according to López Austin (1985a: 320-325 & 1990: 29) by the gradual replacement of ancient forms of leadership based on ethnic or lineage affiliation with territorial forms of domination and political legitimacy, created a broadened network of intensified cultural relations extending over the coastal fringe of the Gulf of México, the Mesa Central, Yucatán, and probably present day Chiapas and Guatemala.

In contrast to former periods of Mesoamerican history, the Post-Classic (AD 900/1000 - 1519) is quite well known. Indigenous historical traditions recorded in the sixteenth century combine well with archaeological evidence to draw a picture of deep instability and extreme population mobility which resulted in continuous wars and frequent settlement relocation. Complex multi-

ethnic aggregation and desegregation within fairly centralised political units, that constituted a continuum ranging from chiefdoms to city-states, was accompanied by the constant alternation of city-states and city-state confederations in the position of hegemonic power.

In Central Mexico the Post-Classic began with the rapid growth of Tula to a position of hegemony; this was a city state in the north of the Valley of Mexico, composed by a mixed population that included an important proportion of local groups formerly within Teotihuacan's domain, and various sets of immigrants from northerly regions. The slow dissolution of Tula's power and its abandonment (c. 1250-1350) was accompanied by the penetration of new migrant groups from the North, who established themselves primarily in the highland valleys of México, Puebla and Tlaxcala, founding the city states that would dominate the final phase of pre-Hispanic history in the area. As we shall see later on, Náhuatl speaking peoples—who dominated a large portion of Mesoamerica since the late fourteenth century and exerted the most significant influence in the colonial world—claimed to be Tula's cultural and ethnic heirs.<sup>14</sup> In the West, the Post-Classic was characterised by the presence of multiple minor polities engaged in continuous wars; some controlled small irrigation systems and had medium-scale monumental architecture. Towards the end of the period, however, the Tarascan state developed a fairly wide domination sphere that was beginning to collide, when the Spaniards arrived, with the so called Aztec empire to the east.

### **3.5.- Marginal Mesoamerica: The movable frontier**

The northern frontier of Mesoamerica that Pedro Armillas (1964a: 62-63) outlined in detail follows roughly the course of the Moctezuma and Lerma rivers south-westwards across the Sierra Madre Oriental and the Mesa Central;

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<sup>14</sup> As we shall see in chapter six, Náhuatl speakers did not consider themselves to be one single people. They were segmented in several groups, each with its own identity and internal cohesion.

and, after making a north-westerly turn near lake Chapala, it continues along the Sierra Madre Occidental to meet and thence follow the Sinaloa river down to its drainage in the Pacific Ocean.

At the time of European arrival and during the preceding three or four centuries most of the land extending north of this line into present day south-western United States, where due to prevailing environmental conditions seasonal agriculture is not feasible and irrigation is barely possible without modern technologies, was primarily inhabited by hunter-gatherers dwelling in small semi-permanent settlements. Nevertheless, in a few reduced and slightly more humid ecological niches people did cultivate the land (Nárez 1994: 75; Guevara 1995: 329-331), albeit only since the beginning of the first millennium BC when agricultural products and techniques were introduced from the South (Kirchhoff 1954: 531 & 533; Wills 1989: 139-140; Hall 1989: 41; Braniff 1994: 125). While outside these farming enclaves material culture was very basic (personal attire, tools, dwelling, and household paraphernalia), in the socio-political sphere the whole area was characterised by a particularly low degree of centralisation, the absence of wide structures of domination, and the scarce development of social stratification (Gerhard 1982: 3-4). Because these societies produced few prestige goods and their economy generated scarce accumulable surplus, neither of the two Mesoamerican hegemonic powers of the late Post-Classic —the Tarascan state and the so called Aztec empire— extended their sway over the region (Nalda 1996: 256).

Cultural frontiers, however, are not solid, unchanging boundaries. Throughout most of the Classic period the limit of permanent agriculture that marked the northern edge of Mesoamerica stood about 250 kilometres north of the Lerma and Sinaloa rivers, cutting across the Mesa Central through the north-eastern extremes of present day Durango, Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí, from the mouth of the Mayo river in Sonora to the Tamesí and Pánuco rivers in Tamaulipas (Braniff 1994: 120, López & López Luján 1996: 125-126). Thus the

demarcation line that Kirchhoff (1943a & 1943b) and Armillas (1964a, 1964b & 1969) drew for the sixteenth century, as they acknowledged themselves merely represents the final point in the process of contraction of an ambit that, between the first and eleventh centuries of the Christian era at least, seems to have been also occupied by groups of Mesoamerican culture (Carrasco 1971b: 459; West & Augelli 1976: 223; Hers 1989: 13 & 38-39; Braniff 1994: 117-120).

Precise interpretations concerning the causes and dating of this oscillation vary. However, there are some general agreements: First, the initial spread of agriculture-based civilisation over the desert culture that had prevailed beyond the Lerma and Sinaloa rivers for several millennia until about the year 500 BC, was the result of migrant flows from the South (Kelley 1971 & 1974, Woodbury 1979: 26, Di Peso 1979a: 152-154), probably originated in such diverse regions as the lowland coast of the Gulf of Mexico; the Teuchitlán-Etztatlán area of present day Jalisco;<sup>15</sup> Chupícuaro, in southern Guanajuato; and Zacatenco, Tlatilco and Cuicuilco in the Valley of Mexico (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 126, Braniff 1994: 116-117, Jaramillo Luque 1995: 173-175, Kelley 1966: 100-101). Second, the U-shape strip of land thus overlaid with farming village life reached its point of maximum expanse and efflorescence between the third and ninth century. Third, the successive waves of immigration that marked the beginning of the Post-Classic period in Central Mexico were part of the final retreat of full-time farmers from that region, generally known as Marginal Mesoamerica (map 9). Fourth, the cultural pattern developed there constitutes the source of

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<sup>15</sup> Several authors regard the presence of circular architecture and burial chambers of the crypt variety (*tumbas de tiro*) in south-west Zacatecas as fundamental evidence for the penetration of western influences, and perhaps migrants, into Marginal Mesoamerica (Cabrero 1986: 108). This characteristic architectural pattern was originally developed in the west of Mesoamerica between the years 200 BC and 700 AD (Weigand 1995: 159-160, Jaramillo Luque 1995: 173-176, Jiménez Betts 1995: 38-39). Hypotheses regarding the other possible sources of direct Mesoamerican diffusion mentioned here (e.g. Hers 1989: 48-51) are more speculative and also more dispersed in the literature. Kelley (1966: 100-104) asserts that the Chupícuaro culture of the late Pre-Classic and early Classic periods in the Michoacán-Guanajuato borders shows strong ties with the Pre-Classic of the Valley of Mexico, and later some of its features diffused north into Zacatecas-Durango to become part of the cultural heritage that the Anasazi culture —considered precursor of the Pueblo peoples— received through the intermediary Hohokam culture. This link between the West and the valley of Mexico has been also discussed by Cyphers (1981).



many characteristic elements of the Puebloan cultures of New Mexico and Arizona (Haury 1945, Kelley 1966: 95-97 & 100-102, Woodbury 1979: 26).

Fundamental debates concerning the changing position of this frontier are centred around the so called "Chalchihuites culture," a chain of related farming societies most probably speaking Yutoaztecan languages which developed between the first and ninth centuries along the eastern rim of the Sierra Madre Occidental, from what archaeologists identify as the Malpaso-La Quemada cultural complex, in northern Jalisco and Zacatecas, to the Chalchihuites-Loma San Gabriel cultural complex, in Durango and Chihuahua (Kelley 1966: 99-100, Jaramillo Luque 1995: 173-176, López Austin & López Luján 1996: 27 & 125-130). This, of course, does not preclude the use of evidence obtained elsewhere, but a paradigmatic value is indeed accorded to the "Chalchihuites culture." First because its most impressive settlement, La Quemada, constituted the most developed city of Marginal Mesoamerica; second because the Toltec cultural pattern that became dominant over Central Mexico in the Post-Classic Period apparently originated there (Hers 1989 & 1995, Jiménez Betts 1995: 58-60); and third because it seems to have been the major channel through which farming village life, ceramics and other elements were introduced in the Pueblo area (Kelley 1956: 128-132, 1966: 99 & 1974, Jaramillo Luque 1995: 173-176).

Interestingly enough this "ready made cultural corridor" as Kelley called it, was not only the main avenue "along which trade items, descriptions, ideas, and wandering travellers moved" in the pre-conquest era (Kelley 1966: 99-100), it was also a major passageway for the penetration of Spanish colonists into the North. Maria Teresa Cabrero (1986: 108-109) notes, for instance, that the region of south-west Zacatecas and northern Jalisco was an important point in the routes followed by Nuño de Guzmán and his lieutenant Pedro Almíndez Chirinos in their conquest of Nueva Galicia, first province beyond the Aztec domains to the north that fell under Spanish control.

Two scholarly views concerning the "Chalchihuites culture" prevailed from the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1950s. Some authors conceived of it as a transitional zone where central Mexican and Puebloan influences combined with local developments, but the most popular interpretations saw it as the product of either Tarascan or Toltec expansionism in the early Post-Classic Period. Interdisciplinary research carried out in the early 1960s at La Quemada and surrounding areas under the supervision of Armillas, however, indicated that peasant communities and stone architecture existed there before the Tarascan and Toltec states consolidated, which could suggest that Tula was the recipient of northerly influences rather than the centre from which cultural patterns radiated northwards (Hers 1989: 24-29).

To make sense of this evidence Armillas (1964a & 1964b) proposed that major climatic changes, roughly coinciding with the collapse of Teotihuacan (AD 500-600), and later the collapse of Tula (c. 1300), caused the successive enlargement and shrinkage of Mesoamerica. A modified version of the farming culture initially introduced in the North could have therefore easily been imported into the valley of Mexico many generations later. It was his view that after the downfall of Teotihuacan whole groups of sedentary farmers poured North into an up to then extremely arid territory that, for meteorological reasons, became transitorily suitable for agriculture (c. 600-1200). As a result, peasant communities were established in the area of La Quemada under the military protection of local lordships, whereas in the valley of Mexico the position of the regional centre of power shifted slightly north when Tula emerged as a dominant state around AD 800-950. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, however, a climatic reversal caused the index of aridity to increase dramatically, thereby prompting a massive exodus of full-time farmers from Marginal Mesoamerica, possibly followed by the readoption of former hunting-gathering lifestyles among the people who did not join the southward flight (Armillas 1964a: 67-76 & 1964b).

Most specialists nowadays accept the main propositions of this "oscillatory frontier thesis," even though its chronological aspects have been adjusted to fit archaeological evidence obtained north and south of La Quemada. Excavations by Román Piña Chan and Beatriz Braniff in 1962 indicated, for instance, that the frontier's advance in the Mesa Central occurred earlier than Armillas had suggested. On the other hand, Charles Kelley and Ellen Abbott demonstrated that Mesoamerican features had almost completely disappeared from Durango and Zacatecas by AD 950 (Hers 1989: 29-31, 35-36). This is the case even for La Quemada, whose reputed flourishing period (AD 900-1000) was originally miscalculated by mixing evidence from various constructive phases together with the remains of later, momentary re-occupations occurred after the site's original dwellers had abandoned it (Hers 1989: 42-43). The current consensus is that Mesoamerican occupation in the "Chalchihuites culture" area initiated around the beginning of the Christian era, and by the early eleventh century sedentary farmers had nearly deserted the central and eastern portions of Marginal Mesoamerica.

What matters to us here is that early Spanish missionaries and explorers who came across the architectural vestiges left by the temporary enlargement of Mesoamerican lifestyles did not hesitate to attribute their construction to the ancestors of "civilised" Indians from Central Mexico during the migrations to which their historical traditions abundantly referred. Friar Juan de Torquemada, for instance, wrote in his *Monarquía Indiana* (1975 [1615]: I, 117-118) that many years back he had found the ruins of magnificent and very old buildings —undoubtedly La Quemada— seven leagues south of the city of Zacatecas.<sup>16</sup> Certainly they were the fabric of the Aztecs and other Náhuatl speaking tribes he affirmed, since according to ancient pictographic records and oral traditions they had migrated into the valley of Mexico from a northerly

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<sup>16</sup> This is the only possible site he could have referred to. As Eduardo Noguera remarks (1970: 21-23), no other major archaeological site fitting his description exists in or around the area he alluded to.

country. The same opinion regarding the presence of sophisticated architecture amidst a territory mainly occupied by nomadic tribes of hunter-gatherers appears in the writings of friar Antonio Tello (1973 [1650]: 24-30) and Francisco Javier Clavijero (1964 [1781]: xvii, 68).

In recent years M. A. Hers has demonstrated these testimonies were somehow correct, based on new archaeological evidence and the "oscillatory frontier thesis" as her main interpretative framework. Not that wandering Aztecs actually built La Quemada on their way down to the valley of Mexico. Up to now and despite all efforts<sup>17</sup> the place of origin of Náhuatl speakers has not been unequivocally located; furthermore, the first constructive phases of La Quemada antedate —various hundreds of years— the moment when the Aztec migration began according to the same historical traditions quoted by Torquemada, Tello and Clavijero. Nevertheless, excavations practised in the Nayar sierra between 1974 and 1981, suggest that some of the groups who fled from the "Chalchihuites culture" area, together with the Nonoalca —a Mesoamerican group established in Central Mexico long before— were indeed the creators of the Toltec culture (Hers 1989: 14-15).

Pivotal to Hers' argument is the fact that some typically Toltec elements existed in various "Chalchihuites culture" sites at least five hundred years before they appeared in Tula and other Post-Classic Mesoamerican sites, such as Chichén-Itzá and Mexico-Tenochtitlan. That is, specifically, the type of ceramic that archaeologists label *pseudo-cloisonné*, copper and turquoise objects, rectangular precincts with colonnades enclosed by surrounding walls; and, most importantly, two particular structures associated with human sacrifice. One corresponds to what the Nahuas called *tzompantli*, a skull rack for the public exhibition of the severed heads of sacrificed warriors; the other is a characteristic altar piece in the shape of a half laying human figure, apparently

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<sup>17</sup> For more detail see chapter six.

used to place braziers with the burning hearts of sacrificial victims.<sup>18</sup> All of these elements she contends, were carried along by the migrant farmers that poured back into Central Mexico causing Mesoamerica to shrink (Hers 1995: 106-109 & 1989: 39-52, 106-118). Following Braniff (1994: 118-119) we can distinguish three principal waves of immigration reflected in the foreign elements present in Tula. The first, of reduced proportions, happened after the collapse of Teotihuacan (c. AD 650), the second took place during the early Post-Classic, and the third coincided with the collapse of the Toltec power around the year 1200.

### 3.6 .- Arid America and Oasis America.

While the concept of Mesoamerica enjoys an almost universal acceptance among Native America specialists, the categorisation of the territory extending North of it across the present-day United States-Mexico border is controversial. North American scholars know the area by two labels: "Southwest" and "Greater Southwest," the first encompassed in the second as a sub-area where primitive part-time farmers and late-coming tribes of hunter gatherers coexist with unstable horticulturist societies of a segmentary kind, settled from about 500 BC in the proximity of natural wells and rivers. Mexican scholars, following Kirchhoff, usually prefer the term "Oasis America" for the farming cultural-economic complex developed in the "Southwest," and "Arid America" for the hunter-gatherer one that continued to prevail in the remaining portion of the "Greater Southwest" until the late colonial period.

Rather than two different sets of terminologies referring to one and the same empirical object, these are two analytic models with divergent assumptions and implications that do not even apply to the same geographic space. Both, it is true, refer at least to the dry-lands that cover most of Sonora,

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<sup>18</sup> This type of sculptural piece is commonly known as *chacmool*. The Chalchihuites Culture example to which Hers refers is an earlier prototype bearing the essential characteristics of the classical form but not yet fully developed.

Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas, on the Mexican side of the border; and nearly all of Arizona and New Mexico, the southern and western extremes of Texas, and southern California, in the United States. Yet only the Arid/Oasis model is systematically inclusive of the peninsula of Baja California and the middle part of the Mexican Mesa Central that comprises the states of Zacatecas, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí and Querétaro (Nárez 1994: 77-81 & 92-93; López Austin & López Luján 1996: 19-54).<sup>19</sup>

In my opinion the Arid/Oasis model has several advantages over the Southwest/Greater Southwest model. The most obvious is that rather than using positional terms defined in relation to modern national units —namely the United States of America— it rests on the contrast manifest between local forms of livelihood, as well as the evaluation of environmental constraints that have conditioned regional historical processes.<sup>20</sup> A brief comparison of the principles and intellectual history articulating each of these models will demonstrate my point better. Simultaneously it will bring into the picture the principal indigenous groups that sixteenth century Spaniards came across as they ventured North.

The concept of the "Southwest" as a native culture area was initially based on evidence drawn only from peoples north of the international frontier

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<sup>19</sup> Volume 9 of the *Handbook of North American Indians* includes an article by Charles Di Peso (1979a) on the Southern Periphery of the "Southwest", which covers the Mexican areas herein outlined down to Zacatecas, Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí. In the same volume, however, the general introductory articles by Ortiz (1979) and Woodbury (1979) are much less inclusive. Usually when scholars speak of the Southwest, or even the Greater Southwest, they imply the south-western fringe of the United States of America and an indeterminate but rather small portion of the adjoining Mexican regions (e.g. Kroeber 1928 & 1939, Spicer 1981 [1962], Lipe 1978, Dutton 1983, Hall 1989, Minnis & Redman 1990, Cordell & Smith 1996).

<sup>20</sup> My argument about the fitness of this model rests on the definitions Kirchhoff provided in his seminal articles of 1943 and 1954, as well as the way in which recent literature uses the terminology, but few authors elaborate on the model as such. Therefore I might be adding meanings that particular authors do not subscribe. From the Mexican school I also used the following literature: Martínez Caraza 1983; Guevara 1985 & 1995; Nárez 1994; López Austin & López Luján 1996. Most of these authors circumscribe their investigation to the Mexican territory, where archetypal Oasis American societies had disappeared long before written records were done in the area; therefore their accounts only include pre-historic developments that left archaeological traces —usually stopping around the year 1500 AD. Since the scope of my interest here goes beyond the international border I supplement my review of Oasisamerican societies with North American authors who look ahead into the historical period, even when they rather speak about "the Southwest". I also rely on some authors like Braniff (1975, 1989 & 1994) who reject both taxonomies herein discussed.

between Mexico and the United States of America. In fact, it was only until present-day Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and upper California became part of the United States, as a result of the 1846-1848 war with Mexico, that the region became the subject of modern ethnographic and archaeological interest. All of these lands underwent extensive governmental inspections as they were incorporated into the North American Union. Military teams accompanied by technicians went around measuring, mapping, and recording the resources they had and classifying the people they sheltered; a research aimed among other things at instrumentalising the Indian Reservation policy that federal authorities were already enforcing elsewhere in the national territory. Thus in a very literal sense the anthropological knowledge of the area was in its origins a by-product of Anglo-American colonialism.<sup>21</sup>

But if the comprehensive swing of this official survey tried to cover most of the newly acquired territory so as to furnish policy-makers with sufficient information, the focus was certainly narrower in academic circles. North American scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century paid particular attention to the more or less tightly organised groups of horticulturists living in what T. O. Mason (1907: 427-430) and Pliny E. Goddard (1913, quoted by Kirchhoff 1954: 535) called the Pueblo Indian Country, roughly comprising southern Utah and Colorado and most of Arizona and New Mexico.<sup>22</sup> Actually, as a scholarly category, "the Southwest" was initially restricted to this reduced area; the only spot within present-day United States where compact masonry settlements of non-European manufacture ever

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<sup>21</sup> This is a clear example of the link between colonialism and anthropology to which critics like Talal Asad (1973) and James Clifford (1988) have referred. The policy of isolating Indians in government reservations that gave rise to a great deal of early ethnographic research had one main purpose: to insure that Anglo expansion could proceed unimpaired in the remaining areas.

<sup>22</sup> As Keith H. Basso comments (1979: 14) research conditions regarding Native American culture were privileged in this region. Unlike many other areas in the United States where Indian populations had been destroyed or forcibly removed from their original homelands, south-western societies had persisted in situ relatively untouched since pre-colonial times. People like Frank H. Cushing, John W. Powell, Adolph F. Bandelier, Jesse W. Fewkes, Cosmos Mindeleff, and Alfred V. Kidder embraced this restricted notion of the Southwest. Their work undoubtedly set the foundation for the modern study of Pueblo peoples and other neighbouring groups (Schroeder 1979).

existed. Spanish colonists had called these settlements "pueblos" because, unlike the rather diffuse and mobile "*rancherías*" of hunter-gatherers and part-time farmers who lived in the neighbouring regions, they resembled the towns that Spaniards inhabited themselves back in the motherland and in New Spain. Whence the misinterpretation that Mason and Goddard incurred in using the word "Pueblo" as an ethnic name.

When the Spaniards first arrived in the area (1539/1540) they found around seventy inhabited towns, as well as the ruins of several others.<sup>23</sup> Each was a self-contained autonomous community, governed by its own elected chiefs and with its own internal organisation. Although they maintained fairly regular trade relations,<sup>24</sup> they were linguistically diverse and made no political alliances among each other except temporarily and for exceptional defence reasons. Nevertheless, it has been recently suggested that formal systems of political and economic alliance, possibly involving managerial elites, did exist among some pueblos but were destroyed with the massive depopulation that European disease and violent conquest provoked (Cordell & Smith 1996: 204).

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<sup>23</sup> M. Junquera (1989: 10) asserts that there was between seventy and eighty inhabited towns in the Southwest at the moment of European intrusion but D. J. Weber (1992: 18) and F. Eggan (1979: 230) say they were ninety or more. Documentary sources from the period provide different figures. Castañeda Nájera (1992 [1560-1565]: 123-124) says that all the towns in the provinces visited by Vázquez de Coronado and his army (1540-1542) sum up sixty six, but those included in the itemised list he provides are seventy one. The 1541 anonymous *Relación Postrera de Sibola* (in Mora 1992: 177-178), also referring to the same expedition, mentions twenty four towns that the author personally saw but makes no general statement on the total number of towns found in the province. A pair of witnesses from Francisco Sánchez Chamuscado's 1581 expedition reported that the party saw sixty one "pueblos" housing altogether about 130,000 inhabitants (Philippe d'Escalante & Hernando Barrando "Relación breve y verdadera del descubrimiento del Nuevo Mexico...", c. October 1583. In *Cartas de Indias* 1974: I, 230-233). Baltasar de Obregón (1924 [1584]: 281) repeats this information but asserts that it refers only to the towns along the Río Grande, while excluding the towns that Vázquez de Coronado, Francisco de Ibarra and Antonio de Espejo visited to the West, North and South. At the end of his book Obregón (1924 [1584]: 303-304) lists the provinces visited by Espejo in 1582, counting a total of seventy eight "towns". Although Pueblo demography in the pre-conquest period is difficult to establish it seems that the figure of 60,000 individuals provided by Oñate in 1598 is consistent with archaeologically based studies of the human carrying capacity of the region (Palkovich 1985: 408).

<sup>24</sup> The wide distribution of marine shells in south-western archaeological sites, the extensive network of salt exchange that Spanish settlers took over (Woodbury 1979: 25), and the distribution of particular types of ceramics in northern Chihuahua, New Mexico and Arizona for the period between c. 800-1600 AD (Di Peso 1979b: 93-94, Cordell 1979: 146) suggest that in pre-conquest times Pueblo villages maintained interlocking networks of economic relationships, usually interpreted as trade (Cordell & Smith 1996: 202). Regular commercial routes along well established trails have been identified, some extending beyond the limits of the Pueblo region into Mesoamerica, coastal California and the Great Plains (Ferguson 1990: 53-55).



This proposition coheres with the fact that in the Spanish perception all Pueblo Indians seemed to be one people with "the same ceremonies and customs, even when certain particular things existed in some towns and not in others."<sup>25</sup> They all grew maize, beans, chilli, squash, cotton and tobacco in irrigated fields, and kept domesticated turkeys and dogs; they dressed in cotton blankets and animal skins; they resided in compact stone and adobe houses clustered together in hive-like compounds which rose for several stories and were centred around open plazas; they were monogamous and had no governing lords (*señores*), although they did have priests and by way of law they followed the elders' advise (Castañeda Nájera 1992 [1560-1565]: 118-119, Gallego's Journal, c. 1581, in Hammond & Rey 1966: 82-86).

Modern scholars also consider that Pueblo Indians "form a unit in comparison with neighbouring groups," since their culture is highly distinctive and fairly uniform "in its externals" (Eggan 1979: 224). Closer observation, however, reveals important differences regarding ecology, language, and social organisation. Thus a basic division is generally recognised today between the eastern pueblos of the Río Grande and its tributaries, and the western pueblos of west New Mexico and Arizona (Eggan 1979: 226, Dutton 1983: 14-15).

Linguistically, Pueblo peoples represent four different stocks, three of which correspond to western groups: The Hopi (or Moqui) of the Tusayán province in north-east Arizona, between the River San Juan and the Little Colorado, speak a language of the Shoshón family closely linked with languages spoken in the Great Basin; the language of the Zuñi people (province of Cíbola in western New Mexico) was considered until recently an isolate but is now thought to be distantly related to Penutian languages of California; finally the Keres (or Queres), partly living in the west and partly in the Río Grande valley, have no known linguistic affiliations. The fourth linguistic stock

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<sup>25</sup> "Todos estos pueblos en general tienen unos ritos y costumbres, aunque tienen algunas cosas en particulares que no las tienen los otros" (Castañeda Nájera 1992 [1560-1565]: 119-120).

among Pueblo Indians, the Kiowa-Tanoan, is represented in the Río Grande by three subgroups, Tiwa Tewa and Towa, each comprising several dialects, some extinct today. Both the Shoshón and the Tanoan languages, together with Náhuatl from Central Mexico, belong to the Yutoaztecan family (Pericot y García 1961: 666-669, Eggan 1979: 226-227, Dutton 1983: 14-16, Junquera 1989: 11, Hall 1989: 37-39, Weber 1992: 18-19, Lamar & Truett 1997: 63, Cordell & Smith 1996: 202-203).

The most conspicuous contrast between eastern and western pueblos concerns their kinship systems and attendant social structures. All western pueblos, based upon matrilineal exogamous clans and matrilocal households, follow a Crow kinship system that treats a woman's brother and her son as equivalent in reckoning kinship. The eastern pueblos of the Río Grande are more heterogeneous. Most have essentially patrilineal non-exogamous dual organisations, each moiety respectively associated with summer and winter (or North and South). The Keres and the Towa, however, also have matrilineal exogamous clans, while instead of clans, the Tewa and the northern Tiwa have bilateral extended family structures and an Eskimo kinship system that emphasises seniority and reciprocal relations (Eggan 1979: 227, Dutton 1983: 18, 32-34).

Pueblo Indians were not the exclusive inhabitants of the so called "Southwest" at the time of the Spanish contact. Athabascan speaking groups of hunter-gatherers, generally known as Apaches, also lived in Colorado, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. They had migrated south from the basin of the Mackenzie river in Canada following the slopes of the Rocky mountains and had arrived in the "Southwest" around AD 1400.<sup>26</sup> Early in the twentieth

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<sup>26</sup> It is not clear when did Athabascan groups began to migrate but there is evidence that by the first half of the sixteenth century they were already in Colorado and northern New Mexico. Once established in their southern locations they divided themselves in seven tribes: Chiricahua, Jicarilla, Kiowa, Mezcalero, Western Apache, Lipan and Navaho. While most of them continued to be specialised hunter-gatherers well into the colonial era the Navaho quickly adopted agriculture and a semi-sedentary residence pattern of a Puebloan style. The chronicles of the first Spanish expeditions in the area (1540-1542) make little reference to people who may be identified as such but by the 1580's and 1590's Spanish reports do frequently mention nomadic hunter-gatherers, sometimes identified as *Querechos* and

century they too received much scholarly attention, completing the image of the "Southwest" as a compound of sedentary farmers and roaming hunter-gatherers living close to each other in a semi-arid environment.

The national bias of the "Southwest"/"Greater Southwest" model is noticeable in that groups of simple farmers similar to the Pueblo who lived south of the international frontier, like the Cahita, Pima-Opata and Tarahumara, were either totally disregarded or placed together with North Mexican hunter-gatherers and Mesoamerican peoples in a different area also comprising Central America. As the native peoples and archaeological remains of north-western Mexico began to be studied in the early twentieth century, a re-definition of the original "Southwest" seemed imperative. Subsequent reformulations included portions of the Mexican states of Sonora, Durango, Sinaloa and Chihuahua. A region where a pre-conquest Puebloan culture developed leaving impressive remains in the archaeological site of Paquimé: a large city —also known as Casas Grandes— with planned, multistoried, adobe-walled buildings, ball courts, streets and plazas that flourished as a regional trading centre between AD 1200 and 1490 (Radding 1997: 28-29, Cordell & Smith 1996: 228). Specialists think that simple farmers such as the Cahita and Tarahumara are the remnants of that culture (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 53).

During the time that North American scholars centred their attention on the Pueblo Indians, intensive agriculture was their paramount criterion for defining the "Southwest" as a culture area. Wissler (1938 [1917]: 241) and Kroeber (1928 & 1939) had argued that farming was the predominant form of livelihood in the region, and that the presence of a few hunter gatherers of late

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sometimes as *Apaches*. In the late seventeenth century other band societies, the Ute and the Comanche, entered the region from the North (Martin, Quimby & Collier 1947: 157-158, Dutton 1983: 63-66, 105-120, López Austin & López Luján 1996: 36, Hall 1989: 38-39). Lamar & Truett (1997: 63-64) affirm that the first Athabascans migrated between AD 800 and 1500, being the ones we presently call western Apaches (Mezcalero and Navaho), while those we know as eastern Apaches (Jicarilla, Kiowa and Lipan) arrived in the Southwest by 1700. The best known by the Spaniards were the Apache de Navahu (Navaho) who raided and traded with the Spanish and the Pueblo. They called themselves Diné, meaning the people. The word Apache is Pueblo and means enemy (Lamar & Truett 1997: 73)

arrival did not change its general outlook. Nevertheless, once the category of the Southwest was extended to include Sonora, Durango and Chihuahua, the agriculture/non agriculture division ceased to be pertinent (Kirchhoff 1954: 536, 537-539). The hunting-gathering societies of the area shared important attributes with the farmers, such as pottery styles, weaving techniques, and intense ritualism. At the same time many gatherers and hunter-gatherers living elsewhere in northern Mexico showed striking similarities with simple farmers from Sonora and Chihuahua —like the Huichol (Kelley 1966: 97)— upon whom the extended notion of the "Southwest" had been predicated. In response Ralph L. Beals (1943) came up with the concept of the "Greater Southwest" that incorporated north-central and north-east Mexico, southern California and most of Texas alongside the North American states of Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico, traditionally included in the "Southwest" (Kirchhoff 1954: 536, 542). In this manner, North American scholarship ended up with the problematic model of a super-area, the "Greater Southwest", composed of farmers, part-time farmers, and hunter gatherers who practised no agriculture at all. A circumstance that could only be accounted for in terms of an encompassed area, the "Southwest", and by an overall definition as vague as the one Beals provided:

[The Greater Southwest is] a region in which similar [environmental] conditions exist, and over which at one time in the past there spread a relatively homogeneous culture or succession of cultures upon a pre-farming level, with the farming cultures [of the Southwest] forming a later overlay. (quoted by Kirchhoff 1954: 542).

This patchy concept of the Southwest is still widely used by the American Anthropological establishment, progressively challenged by the Arid/Oasis America model which I consistently use throughout this study.

Among other things, this model acknowledges the homogeneity that, according to Beals, is likely to have prevailed in the area prior to the complete establishment of agriculture. At the same time, it accords a greater analytic importance to the fact that for nearly two thousand years before European

penetration, the social structures, pattern of settlement, and daily customs of one portion of its inhabitants "grew out of, or developed around, farming as the principal basis of subsistence" thus giving way to the emergence of a separate culture —"Oasis America"— at certain enclaves within the territory occupied by the "Arid America" culture (Kirchhoff 1954: 543 & 546; Guevara 1995: 329-331).

In spite of the vague geographic correspondence existing between "Oasis America" and the first rendition of the "Southwest", the former is not fundamentally a spatial category; it rather denotes a cultural form i.e., a particular combination of social and material structures scattered in a series of geographically disconnected spots throughout present day Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico in the USA; and Chihuahua, Sonora, Durango, and Zacatecas in Mexico (Nárez 1994: 92). Similarly "Arid America" comprises those groups of people evolved from prehistoric cultures of "desert tradition", who lived in the draughty area herein discussed, both sides of the current international border. Until the European arrival they did not practice agriculture, nor did they build permanent settlements (Braniff 1975: 218-220; Nárez 1994: 80). Once geographic boundaries are blurred a more flexible approach to the land is possible, and it is easy to think of places where Arid and Oasis American cultures overlap without having to circumscribe them within one or the other fixed areas (map 4).

Oasis America's main features are sedentism; dry-land intensive agriculture as a principal food source, characterised by the use of irrigation through simple stream diversion and floodwater control (Gutiérrez 1991: xxi; Hall 1989: 39-40; Nárez 1994: 92, 94, 97, 98, 107); compact villages consisting of stone and sun-baked brick houses clustered together, wall to wall, forming unitary, hive-like compounds (Gutiérrez 1991: 14; Nárez 1994: 102-107; Guevara 1995: 334-335); and a kin based social structure of segmentary lineages upon which, in some places, a network of cross-cutting esoteric associations and task

groups was superimposed as a means to foster town wide integration (Keesing 1975: 64-66; Gutiérrez 1991: xxii-xxiii & 24-25; Whiteley 1985: 364-367).

Indeed, Pueblo societies have been characterised as consisting of dispersed segmentary lineages with high tendency to fission, held together through higher units that cut across the primary segments integrating each town as a whole, such as work groups, esoteric societies or all encompassing cults that promote ritualised reciprocal exchanges across segmentary units (Gutiérrez 1991: xxii-xxv). Individual Pueblos (towns), then, were collections of exogamous matrilineal clans, each being a land holding corporation with a central role in the ceremonial life of the community. As no hereditary leadership along the lines of household or lineage existed, relations of superordination and subordination were based on age and personal characteristics (Gutiérrez 1991: 12-16). These features, according to Keesing (1975: 64-66), are typically found in predominantly agricultural societies of high productivity based on matrilineal descent systems, where women perform key agricultural tasks.

Remote antecedents of Oasisamerica can be traced back to various sites that show vestiges of groups mainly living from gathering, whose prototype is the so called Cochise culture. By the year 700 of the Christian era many had developed agriculture and lived in semi permanent villages. From this point on they began to diversify. Some became fully sedentary and, during some periods, organised chiefdom confederations. Three regionally distinct cultures derive from this root. They began to differentiate from each other around AD 200 with the appearance of the first ceramics, slowly developed in the previous century as a solution to the demands imposed by the adoption of agriculture. To the south-east, in the so called Mogollon area, sedentary farmers created the Paquimé culture, which had its developmental peak between AD 1060 and 1340. Its major settlement was Casas Grandes. To the west the Hohokam region was marked by the appearance of pit-houses and the later presence of

ball-courts (c. AD 500), suggesting contacts with Mesoamerica. Finally, in the region known as The Four Corners, where Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona meet, the Anasazi culture eventually evolved into the commonly called Pueblo culture (Guevara 1995: 329-341; Martin, Quimby & Collier 1947: 100-130 & 168-216).

Despite the disappearance of the southernmost advanced societies of Oasis America by the sixteenth century, groups of rudimentary farmers practising migratory slash and burn cultivation continued to live contiguous to Mesoamerica until the Spaniards arrived, from the coast of the Pacific Ocean to the edge of the Mexican Central Plateau (Armillas 1964a: 63-64). In the Sierra Madre Occidental the Tarahumar and the Tepehuan were the largest groups of simple farmers, but they lived in scattered seasonal dwellings and relied mostly on hunting and fishing, whereas the Cahita, the Yaqui, and the Papago lived in small permanent villages on the coast. Outside the Pueblo area irrigated fields and terraces only survived in Oasis America among the Pima and the Opata, in Sonora (West & Augelli 1976: 241). Confusion might arise from the fact that agriculture and sedentism have also been posited as key attributes of Mesoamerica. The division that sets Oasis America apart, however, becomes clear when we consider that social organisation was much simpler there, for it was based on kinship and it completely lacked social classes, large cities, and state institutions, typical of Mesoamerica (Kirchhoff 1954: 548).

Contrastingly, in the Mesoamerican North and Northeast, sedentary farmers were directly confronted with the nomadic and semi-nomadic, tribal peoples of Arid America (Armillas 1964a: 63-64). Unlike Prairie Indians who lived primarily on hunting, most Arid American groups like the Seri, Zacateco, Pame, Huachichil and some Apache were specialised gatherers (Kirchhoff 1943a & 1954), although important fishing communities also lived in California and Baja California. In Sonora, Chihuahua and Coahuila groups of primitive

farmers like the Conchos lived side by side with other Apache groups who hunted deer and other animals (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 28-37).

### 3.7.- Settled Mesoamericans vs. unsettled Chichimecas.

Historical sources since colonial times subsume under the general label of Chichimeca most of the groups from Arid America. The term was of current use in Central Mexico when the Spaniards arrived but its original meaning is now obscure. This is partly due to the semantic layers it acquired in the colonial context, but also to the ambiguous character it already had in the pre-conquest era. Náhuatl speaking Indians often used the word Chichimeca with reference to their own ancestors, whom they proudly defined as immigrants from the North that lived primarily on hunting but knew how to cultivate the land and were ruled by sovereigns called *tlatoque* (sing. *tlatoani*) (Martínez Marín 1971: 250-252; Castillo Farreras 1972: 33; Reyes García & Guemes 1995: 243), whereas the Spaniards always spoke about Chichimecas with a derogatory accent, meaning those resisting tribes of "primitive" and unsettled hunter-gatherers that hampered their northward advance.

As early as 1525, for example, a Spanish soldier reported to have heard from Indians in Aguacatlán that peoples living further north were Otomís, or even "*Teules Chichimecas*, who are like beasts."<sup>27</sup> Much later (1574) a colonist in the mining town of Llerena, in Nueva Galicia, used the expression likewise in a petition addressed to the King:

I Melchor de Alava neighbour of the village of Llerena and mines of Sombrerete [...] declare that I have been in the service of Your Majesty for a long time conquering and subduing the road-robber Chichimeca Indians that roam the surroundings of the said village [...] and many other places and royal roads, causing plenty of damages [...], and since there is no captain or any other person entitled by Your Majesty to take on the defence against those Chichimecas they get whatever they like without confronting any resistance.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> "Son otomís y aún dicen que son teules chichimecas, que son como bestias" (quoted by Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 205n).

<sup>28</sup> "Melchor de Alava vezino de la villa de Llerena y minas del Sombrerete [...] digo que yo e andado mucho tiempo en servicio de Su Majestad conquistando y sugetando los yndios chichimecas salteadores que andan en la comarca de la dicha villa [...] y otras muchas partes



Finally, viceroy Martín Enríquez wrote a similar complaint in 1580:

some Indians they call Chichimecas around here together with others from different nations whom are all still to be conquered [...] have been a plague that has given a good deal of trouble to these kingdoms, because they live in its widest and roughest lands, and not even the joint efforts of all the Spaniards living here would be enough to punish them, because they neither settle down, nor have a fixed place to be found, rather with bows and arrows (which is the weaponry they use) they constantly wonder from one place to another, living like deer only on herbs and roots and animal powders they keep in gourds.<sup>29</sup>

Several tribal groups that spoke different languages fall within the Spanish usage of the category Chichimeca as exemplified in these quotations; particularly the Guachichiles (Huachichil), the Guamares, the Zacatecos, and the Pames, against whom the Spaniards waged a prolonged series of wars in the middle of the sixteenth century (Driver 1963: 4-5; Hall 1989: 63-65; Reyes García & Guemes 1995: 227). But using the term in this manner to signify all the nomadic, hunter-gatherers of Arid America as opposed to the sedentary agriculturists of Mesoamerica was not a mere whim of Spanish conquerors; actually, they were only applying one of several meanings attributed to the word by Indian discourse at the time they arrived.

In his *Historia de los Indios de Nueva España* friar Toribio de Benavente (1969 [1565]), also known as Motolinía, noted that before the conquest Indians from Mexico-Tenochtitlan kept the record of their history in a pictographic book they called the "Year Count Book" (*Libro de la cuenta de los años*), according to which the Chichimeca were the first and most ancient of three kinds of people to inhabit Central Mexico. Unlike the Colhua and the Mexican themselves —the other two sorts of people that pictographs referred

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y caminos reales los quales han echo y hazen muy grandes daños [...] y por no aver capitan ni persona que con titulo de vuestra Alteza ande en la defensa de los dichos chichimecas salen con lo que quieren sin tener resistencia en ello..." (*Petición de Melchor de Alava para descubrir y poblar Quivira*. AGI, Indiferente General, 1384).

<sup>29</sup> "Unos indios que acá llaman chichimecas a los que les juntan otros de otras naciones que todos quedaron por conquistar [...] han sido una plaga que ha dado bien en que entender a estos reinos, porque estos avitan en la tierra más larga y fragosa que hay en él, por lo qual entendiendo que si para castigarlos se juntasen todos los españoles que hay aca no bastarian porque [...] ellos nunca tienen asiento, ni lugar cierto donde los pueden hallar, sino que con sus arcos y flechas que son las armas que huzan andan de una parte a otra, y como venados, sustentándose de sólo yervas y raizes, y polvos de animales que tienen en unas calabazas..." (*Ynstrucción que por mandado de SM hizo el virrey Martín de Enriquez para el conde de Coruña, su sucesor*. 25 / 09/ 1580. Varios papeles tocantes a Yndias. BNM, signatura 8553, f. 29).

to— Chichimecas "had no way of writing or figuring because they were barbarous and lived like savages," although they recognised one leader to whom they rendered complete obedience. In fact, they were "not known to have built houses or towns, to have worn clothes, to have had corn or any kind of bread or other cereals. [Rather], they lived in caves and mountains, [and] they subsisted on wild roots, and on deer, hares, rabbits, and snakes." Interestingly enough the friar also mentioned as marker of a state of primitive simplicity the fact that they "did not perform bloody sacrifice and had no idols," worshipping only the sun whom they considered their god.<sup>30</sup>

If we compare this passage with chapter 29, book X of *Codex Florentino*<sup>31</sup> where friar Bernardino de Sahagún (1989 [1588-1577]: 2, 650-676) described the population of New Spain, serious ambiguities appear making of the Chichimeca issue a very complex one.

For Benavente the distinction between Chichimeca, Colhua and Mexican was clearly of an ethnic and historical character; it implied a differentiation between three groups that, having achieved different states of development, successively migrated to Central Mexico (this land/*esta tierra*). Furthermore, contemporary Chichimeca appear in Benavente's text via his own comparison between the ancient Chichimeca depicted in the Indian documents he saw and certain groups "known by the same name" during his own days. Contrastingly,

<sup>30</sup> "...y por lo que de este libro se ha podido colegir de los que esta tierra poblaron, fueron tres maneras de gentes, que aun ahora hay algunos de aquellos nombres. A los unos llamaron Chichimecas, los cuales fueron los primeros señores de esta tierra [...] No tenían manera de escribir ni figurar, por ser gente bárbara y que vivían como salvajes [...] Estos chichimecas no se halla que tuviesen casa, ni lugar, ni vestidos, ni maíz, ni otro género de pan, ni otras semillas. Habitaban en cuevas y en los montes; manteníanse de raíces del campo, y de venados y liebres, y conejos y culebras. Comíanlo todo crudo o puesto a secar al sol; y aun hoy día hay gente que vive de esta manera [...] Tenían y reconocían estos chichimecas a uno por mayor, al cual supremamente obedecían. Tomaban una sola por mujer y no había de ser parienta. No tenían sacrificios de sangre, ni ídolos; mas adoraban al sol y teníanle por dios..." (Benavente 1969 [1565]: 2-3). A very similar passage is contained at the beginning of the *Memoriales* (Benavente 1996 [1541]: 122-123).

<sup>31</sup> Bilingual encyclopaedic compilation of indigenous history, beliefs and customs made by Sahagún in close collaboration with native Náhuatl speakers. The Spanish fraction of the document, taken from a sixteenth century copy found in the convent of Tolosa, Spain, was published under the title of *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España* in the early nineteenth century. Although the origin of this manuscript is not clear it is the one from which nearly every modern edition of the *Historia*... derives. The complete palaeography of the Spanish text written by Sahagún in the *Codex* was not published until the 1989 edition by García Quintana and López Austin —which is the one I am using here (Sahagún 1989 [1558-1577])— appeared.

Sahagún organised his account around the distinction between nine groups of people, described in different sections in such a way that no clear cut ethno-linguistic principle of classification can be discerned, which suggests that he was faithfully reporting his informants' classification rather than trying to make sense of the people he observed. Thus the Toltecs, who occupy the first paragraph, are characterised as highly cultured peoples that spoke Náhuatl and were the first to arrive in New Spain, founding the city of Tula that was abandoned in a later period. Paragraphs two to four are dedicated to the Chichimeca, which Sahagún's informants divided into three main types: the Otomí, farmers of a relatively low cultural development; the Tamime, meaning "arrow shooters", mainly hunters who built no towns but occasionally cultivated the land and had some sort of organised rulership; and the Teuchichimecas, or "authentic Chichimecas", described as completely wild and uncultivated peoples who practised no agriculture at all, lived on hunting and had no fixed places of residence. Ensuing paragraphs are devoted to other peoples. However, the Náhuatl speaking groups (paragraphs 5, 11 & 14), the Mazahuaque (paragraph 9), and the Micchuaque (paragraph 13), all characterised as advanced farmers with complex forms of social organisation, are also said to have been Chichimeca.

Without going into thorough detail, we can summarise the conclusions that scholars have drawn from these and other testimonies as follows: In a very general sense, Chichimeca, which is a Náhuatl word, worked as a broad cultural characterisation frequently used to denote unsettled, hunting-gathering lifestyles that stood in opposition to archetypal forms of civilisation, represented by the Toltec society of bygone times and understood as the sum of arts, urbanism, institutionalised rulership and ritual—including human sacrifice (Sodi 1962: 55; Noguez 1995: 197-198; Reyes García & Guemes 1995: 226-227). This application seems to cover the ancient Chichimeca mentioned by Benavente, and also Sahagún's Teuchichimeca and Tamime. In a more specific

sense, the term was applied to the descendants of those farming groups that moved temporarily to Chichimeca lands during the period of enlargement of Mesoamerica, and who migrated back south at the beginning of the Post-Classic. This usage includes the Otomí, the Mazahuaque, and the Micchuaque, as well as all the Náhuatl speaking peoples, including the Toltecs (or at least one of their constitutive branches) and the Mexicans (Driver 1963: 4-5; Carrasco 1971b: 462 & 1977: 173; Guemes 1990: 453-458; Reyes García & Guemes 1995: 241-244). As Hers has demonstrated, being farmers of a well established Mesoamerican tradition, the forefathers of some of these peoples lived for generations under constant threat, struggling to defend their settlements from the attacks of groups of hunter-gatherers whom they displaced. In consequence they developed a war centred culture that became generalised in the Mesoamerican heartland when their descendants returned. Contrasting with both types of Chichimeca were the Olmec, the Huixtotin, and the Nonoalca that, according to Sahagún's informants (paragraph 12), never received that name.

Measured against the documents hitherto referred, this interpretation seems correct. As is confirmed by the expression "*Teules Chichimecas*" that early Spanish expeditionaries distortedly recorded in Aguacatlán in 1525 (*vid supra*), Sahagún's category of Teuchichimeca comprised all northern hunter-gatherers living beyond Mesoamerica during the Post-Classic period, totally uninfluenced by the farming culture prevailing South of their territory up to the very moment of the Spaniards arrival.<sup>32</sup> Contrastingly, Benavente's ancient Chichimeca can be identified with a particular invading group from the North, mentioned in other sources,<sup>33</sup> that swept down into the valley of Mexico led by

<sup>32</sup> Paradoxically later indigenous sources like Alvarado Tezozómoc (1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 3) and Chimalpahin (1998) apply the term *teuchichimeca* to the Aztec or Mexica, which, according to the hypothesis herein suggested, were not considered "authentic Chichimeca." This poses a problem of interpretation I will not discuss. Nevertheless I think the answer should be sought in the type of reelaboration that Indian historical discourse underwent in the colonial situation, and which has been studied in detail by López Austin (1985a & 1994a: 46-71).

<sup>33</sup> Several codices painted in the mid sixteenth century like *Codex Xolotl* and the so called *Tlotzin* and *Quinatzin* maps. Also written histories like the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca*, and

a chief called Xolotl in the early thirteenth century. These indeed were the first migrants to reach the area when the frontier of permanent agriculture dramatically shrank, shortly after the collapse of Tula, preceding all Náhuatl speakers except the Toltecs. Unlike Otomís, Mexicans or Micchuaques, the Chichimecas of Xolotl were not retreating Mesoamericans, they were hunter-gatherers who spoke a language other than Náhuatl and Otomí (Jiménez Moreno 1943 & 1944: 6; Carrasco 1976 [1950]: 244). By the sixteenth century, however, their descendants had adopted a Mesoamerican farming culture and already mixed, via marriage exchange, with the local population they had even dropped their own language taking up Náhuatl instead (León Portilla 1967; Carrasco 1971b: 465). Like them, the Tamime were immigrated hunter-gatherers, but they arrived much later and had not yet completely adapted to the Mesoamerican way of life. The same goes for the Otonchichimeca, the Nahuachichimeca and the Cuextecachichimeca, briefly mentioned in the fourth paragraph of Sahagún's text as acculturated hunter-gatherers who spoke their own Chichimeca language but had learnt their neighbour's: Otomí, Náhuatl and Huasteco respectively.<sup>34</sup>

Some authors like Charles di Peso, and Beatriz Braniff after him, use the term "Gran Chichimeca" to identify the extra-Mesoamerican area generally described as Oasis and Arid America. They argue that both during the period when sedentary Mesoamerican farmers pushed its original dwellers north of the Tropic of Cancer and after they finally retreated south of the river Lerma, it was inhabited by cultures so different that they cannot be incorporated in one single area, the "Greater Southwest", nor can the territory be split in two "like Kirchhoff suggested" (Braniff 1994: 114). Others, like Phil Weigand have proposed to include Oasis American peoples within an extended notion of

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the works by Chimalpahin and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl. I will discuss them in chapter six.

<sup>34</sup> I think that Reyes García & Guemes (1995: 226) make a wrong interpretation of Sahagún's text when they take this as an overall linguistic classification of Chichimeca groups corresponding to the cultural classification that divides them in three types: Tamime, Otomí and Teochichimeca.

Mesoamerica (map 5), given the fact that the Pueblo Indians had intensive contact with Mesoamerica through a trading corridor stretching along the slope of the Sierra Madre Occidental (Weigand 1978: 212). Despite their internal diversity, and notwithstanding the channels that connected them in one or another sort of relation, I prefer to keep the treble distinction between Arid, Oasis, and Mesoamerica. I think the partition holds true for the pre-conquest era, as long as we do not stick to rigid geographic boundaries or historically undifferentiated lists of attributes. I am particularly interested in this model because the Spaniards clearly distinguished between the peoples that each of these "culture areas" comprised, granting them different statuses and treating them differently. Furthermore, from the Spanish perspective the Pueblo Indians were indeed an Oasis amidst "barbarians", and in a sense this was an important reason to call the place *Nuevo México*.

These remarks bring us back to the discussion on classifications as theoretical constructs that opened this chapter. Boundaries drawn by culture-area taxonomies that have a significant value for the scholar sometimes find no equivalent bearing among the societies they help to study. But in some instances regional historical processes and local forms of categorical discourse fully endorse academic frontiers. Thus the limit between Mesoamerica and Arid/Oasis America had actual meaning for the sedentary peoples of southern Mexico in pre-conquest times, vaguely coinciding at least during the late Post-Classic with the geographic scope of such categories as "Chihimeca", which despite its elusive meaning appears to have had some relation to the changing span of permanent agriculture. Furthermore, it also kept remarkable importance throughout the colonial regime, and is still perceptible today as a transition zone between the predominantly Mestizo-European way of life, characteristic of northern Mexico, and the Indian and Mestizo culture, pervasive in the south of the country. This is partly due to the fact that in Arid America the process of European colonisation, with its frequent policy of Indian

extermination, accentuated the already extant pattern of demographic dispersal and relatively low population density.

On one level of the analysis, the contrast distinguishing Mesoamerica from Arid and Oasis America determined both the pace of the Spaniard's advance in the North, and the general direction of the routes followed by exploring and conquering parties. Not only did particular forms of indigenous civilisation require the conquerors to practice different types of warfare. As it is well known, in areas where indigenous forms of hegemony had developed, and certain groups had managed to impose their power over a class of commoners mainly dedicated to cultivate the land, Indians were somehow easily subjected to the Spanish domination. Conversely, those groups living outside the areas controlled by the aboriginal "high cultures", be they regular or seasonal nomads or primitive agriculturists that periodically relocated their settlements, were much more difficult to subdue as they had a flexible relation with the territory they occupied and the loose political structures that bound them together were not based in permanent subservience (Benedict 1943).

On the other hand, and closer to the point pursued by the general argument of this thesis, the Spaniards anchored their northward expansion on both the man-power and the local knowledge of already conquered Indians from Central Mexico. From a very early point in time, Nahuas from different cities and villages in the central highlands were massively incorporated into some expeditions as "auxiliary" troops and almost without fail, one or two of them were taken as guides, scouts and interpreters. Indigenous perspectives, therefore, were inevitably adopted when strategic decisions were to be made. Consider the revealing statement that Nuño de Guzmán, one of the first captains to test his luck in the northern provinces, made in a letter he wrote to the King in July of 1530:

From Michoacán I wrote to Your Majesty [...] that I had come with one hundred and fifty horsemen and a similar quantity of foot soldiers [...] and also seven or

eight thousand allied Indians to discover and conquer the province of the *teules chichimecas* that is contiguous with New Spain.<sup>35</sup>

This is just one among many examples of the recruitment of native warriors. The decisive collaboration of Tlaxcalan allies to topple Moctezuma in 1521 had set a very convenient precedent for such a practice, which continued throughout the sixteenth century. Beyond the indisputable practicalities entailed in this immediate level of co-participation, Spanish expectations regarding further lands to be conquered were significantly shaped after Indian notions, including empirical information on land and people, cosmological conceptions about the world at large and local historical traditions. In the letter quoted above Guzmán adopts, however distorted, the term provided by his Mesoamerican warriors to identify the local groups he fought against: "*teules chichimecas*." The operation reveals deep levels of communication between the Spanish captain and his Indian auxiliary troops and points to the possibility that, along with ethnic taxonomies, the Spaniards absorbed other indigenous views and customs through their tireless ventures in the North.

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<sup>35</sup> "Desde Mechoacán screví a Vuestra Majestad [...] como venia con ciento y cincuenta de a cavallo y otros tantos peones [...] y con siete u ocho mil yndios amigos a descubrir la tierra y conquistar la provincia de los tebles chichimecas que confina con la Nueva España..." (Nuño de Guzmán, *letter to the king*, Omitlán, July 8th, 1530. In Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 205).



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE CONQUEST AND EXPLORATION OF THE NORTH AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF NUEVO MEXICO**

Since the rise of the nation-state, political geography has become the dominant mode in which history is imagined; scholars have become so accustomed to the power of the map, indeed, that the artificial frontiers imposed by modern politics are often mistakenly projected back onto the past. It is as a result of this kind of misconception that historians and anthropologists specialising in the so-called "American Southwest" have created a coherent narrative for the history of New Mexico, organised around the institutional and military events occurred within its boundaries as they stand today (Bancroft 1889, Hodge & Lewis 1907, Bolton 1916 & 1921, Beck 1969, Weber 1979, 1987 & 1992, Gutiérrez 1991, Cutter 1992, Lamar & Truett 1997).<sup>1</sup>

For the period of conquest and initial settlement this well-established narrative considers only the scores of Spanish prospectors who, since 1539, penetrated (or attempted to penetrate) the region inhabited by the Pueblo Indians; as it was there that Juan de Oñate founded the colonial kingdom of *Nuevo México* in April 1598. Sixteenth century sources that talk about *Nuevo México*, however, do not necessarily refer to the territory comprised within the nebulous limits of this province. Initially called Cíbola in accordance to the report of its first Spanish visitor, Marcos de Niza (in Mora 1992: 150),<sup>2</sup> the area only came to be known as *Nuevo México* in the decade of 1580; yet the name already appears in earlier documents applied to other well populated places as the colonial expansion progressed, each in its turn misinterpreted as the Aztec

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<sup>1</sup> Early historical writing about the American Southwest created an epic image of the Spanish colonisation, based on hundreds of journals, diaries and other documents reviewed and edited between 1900 and 1950. D. J. Weber (1979 & 1987) and later works, including the documentary collections by Hammond & Rey (1940, 1953 & 1966) contributed to a more critical vision.

<sup>2</sup> *Relación del descubrimiento de las Siete Ciudades*, September 2, 1539.

ancestral homeland of Nahua origin myths. Thus in accordance with the documentary evidence, I propose an alternative approach that does not depend on any frontier, either past or present. Rather than a politico-geographic entity we must understand *Nuevo México* as a "transcultural imaginary world" that, until 1580, was not clearly identified with any concrete place, although it sometimes comprised the region onto which this toponym was finally imposed.

Under this perspective we ought to revise the facts that traditional historiography considers part of early *Nuevo México's* history. As we shall see below, several conquering expeditions that never trod upon the confines of the Pueblo Indian country, or even aimed at reaching it, were nevertheless fundamental to the creation of the "imaginary world" that Oñate's foundational act turned into the northernmost Spanish possession in North America.

Most authors since the nineteenth century begin their historical review quoting the famous odyssey of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and three other survivors of the expedition that Pánfilo de Narváez led to Florida in 1528. After their ships went down off the coast of Texas, these men spent almost a decade wandering across the continent in the search for Spanish settlements. According to several witnesses, upon reuniting with their compatriots they asserted to have heard tell of a supposed group of large cities at some point along the route they were following in their intent to find other Spaniards, but they dared not attempt to verify these reports as they dreaded to lose their way (Bancroft 1889: 15-19, Ocaranza 1934: 15-17). Whether the Pueblo settlements are the cities that the lost excursionists referred to, as it is generally sustained, their amazing stories did entice the general belief that a promising urban world lay hidden north of New Spain.

The episodes that traditional historiography calls upon next are the scouting journey that Marcos de Niza conducted along the coastal rim of the Sierra Madre Occidental until reaching the vicinity of Zuñi (1539), and the

conquering expedition that Francisco Vázquez de Coronado commanded over the whole Pueblo area between 1540 and 1542. It is clear that viceroy Antonio de Mendoza commissioned Niza's excursion to verify the rumours spread by the survivors of the Narváez shipwreck, thereby anticipating the intrusion of other possible claimants such as Hernán Cortés. The phrasing that the friar used to describe his findings—an urban settlement "bigger then Mexico City" amidst a province that was "the greatest and best among all the lands hitherto discovered"<sup>3</sup>—prompted a colonising frenzy that has few parallels. As a personal letter by bishop Juan de Zumárraga testifies,<sup>4</sup> numerous people volunteered to push on Niza's discovery, enthusiastically enrolling in the army that Mendoza entrusted to the command of Vázquez de Coronado. Much to their dismay, however, Pueblo villages were insignificant compared to ancient Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Therefore, they deserted the place after having unsuccessfully explored the Great Prairies in the search of Quivira, a marvellous kingdom that Tewa prisoners described.

Despite the forty years oblivion that surrounded Cíbola after Vázquez de Coronado, the dream of discovering another Mexico did not extinguish. Rather, it became more complex as it became entangled with indigenous traditions of ancestral origin. Indeed, by the decade of 1560 Spanish explorers did not simply aspire to find a place that equalled the abundance, population density, and sophistication of ancient Mexico. Francisco de Ibarra and his cousin Diego, for example, searched for the very "original homeland of the *Culgua Mexica*" throughout the region they named Nueva Vizcaya, and at least once they thought to be at the door of this other *Nuevo México*.<sup>5</sup> Historians

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<sup>3</sup> "...la mayor y mejor de todas las [tierras] descubiertas" (Niza [1539], in Mora 1992: 158).

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Juan de Zumárraga to his nephew, México, August 23, 1539 (García Icazbalceta 1889: II, 281-283).

<sup>5</sup> A soldier in Francisco de Ibarra's army, Baltasar de Obregón, wrote a chronicle on this expedition. There he asserts (1924 [1584]: 39-41) that at least Diego de Ibarra was determined to "discover the New Mexico, then known as Copala" (descubrir el Nuevo México, que por entonces llamaban Copala) from where people generally suspected that "the ancient Culgua Mexica came" (habrían venido los antiguos culguas mexicanos). The *Relación de lo que*

frequently dismiss this episode, leaping directly from the discoveries of mines during the 1540s and 1550s in Nueva Galicia, to the three or four non-authorised excursions into the Pueblo area that religious and secular adventurers carried out during the decade of 1580.<sup>6</sup> Usually they attribute particular importance to friar Agustín Rodríguez and Juan Sánchez Chamuscado's 1581 expedition, perhaps because they were apparently the first Spaniards to visit Cíbola since 1542, but also because it was they who applied the name of *Nuevo México* to that region for the first time (Beck 1969: 49-50, Lamar & Truett 1997: 68). Thus, for traditional historiography Vázquez de Coronado represents a transitional figure between the fantasising ventures of early times and the supposedly more realistic endeavours of the 1580s and 1590s. To put it differently, he is presented as the demystifying hero who "discovered" the real character of the land that Sánchez Chamuscado later renamed.

Such a distinction between a fantasy-dominated period and a reality-oriented one is misleading. As we shall see in chapter seven the toponym *Nuevo México*, actually formulated after Vázquez de Coronado abandoned Cíbola and before Rodríguez and Sánchez Chamuscado re-visited it, is charged with mythic overtones that lasted for more than a hundred years after Oñate completed its conquest early in the seventeenth century.

This chapter is a summarised review of the series of colonising ventures that contributed somehow to the moulding and reification of imaginary *Nuevo México*. The information herein displayed has no other purpose than framing further interpretation. Therefore my text will assume the shape of a chronological narrative, starting from the early conquests that Cortés accomplished and ending with the expedition whereby Juan de Oñate took

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descubrió Diego de Ibarra en la provincia de Copala llamada Topiamé (CODOINAO: XV, 553ss) says that since Topiamé had the looks of another Mexico, Francisco de Ibarra often said that he had discovered Nueva Vizcaya and Nuevo México.

<sup>6</sup> There are few exceptions. Forbes (1960: 42-43), for example, asserts that Ibarra set out to discover New Mexico.

over the region that constituted, thereafter, the province of *Nuevo México* (1595-1598). The political, administrative and military issues I refer to have been extensively researched so I will essentially base my narrative on already extant historiography, reserving the detailed analysis of documentary evidence for later chapters.

#### **4.1.- The key to older Mexico: Early settlement and exploration of New Spain.**

Central and southern Mesoamerica were an easy prey for the Spanish conquerors due to the existence of long-established and densely settled *señoríos*, ruled over by noble lineages often supported by the exaction of tribute in kind and labour (Radding 1997: 11, Gerhard 1972: 5 & 1982: 8-10). Between Cortés' landfall at Veracruz in April 1519, and 1524, most of New Spain below the Chichimec frontier was thoroughly explored. Moreover, nearly all the states tributary to the Aztecs and some important independent ones such as Tlaxcala and Michoacán had accepted the Spaniards as their new rulers, although subsequent uprisings sometimes occurred forcing a second, or even third campaign of consolidation (Gerhard 1972: 8).

To a large extent the invaders owed the rapidity of this expeditious assault on the Indian world to the information and support that the Aztec emperor provided, as is made clear by questions 97 to 99 of the 1534 questionnaire that Cortés formulated for the defence witnesses he presented in his *residencia* trial.<sup>7</sup> Could the respondents confirm that Cortés cordially sought Moctezuma's advice regarding the best way to secure the submission of his subject states? Would they testify that Moctezuma summoned the local rulers to request their acceptance of the Spanish overlordship, and that his messengers then departed in all directions, taking five or six Spaniards along to

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<sup>7</sup> *Interrogatorio general presentado por Hernando Cortés para el examen de los testigos de su descargo.* (Martínez 1990-1992: II, 221-290).

spread the news and view the resources of the land? (Martínez 1990-1992: II, 240-241). According to the answers of some witnesses who, like Andrés de Tapia, had participated in one of such excursions, the Spanish captains personally collected the gold that local people gave as a present for the newcomers, while Moctezuma's messengers negotiated a peaceful surrender (Martínez 1990-1992: II, 351).<sup>8</sup> The particular interest that Cortés and his men showed from the beginning in visiting the gold-bearing districts—which existence they partly figured out through the "books of revenue" where Moctezuma kept record of the tributes he collected<sup>9</sup>—was almost immediately satisfied, just as their need to locate ports other than Veracruz along the Atlantic shoreline. Thus in his second letter to the king (October 30, 1520) Cortés reports that the Aztec emperor not only ordered his officers to draw a map of the eastern coast for him but also offered several escorts to show the Spaniards the gold mines and districts of the southern provinces (Martínez 1990: 251-252, Cortés 1960: 56-57).

As is well known the massacre that Pedro de Alvarado executed in the Great Temple of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (May 1520) and Moctezuma's subsequent death (June 1520) brought the Indian collaboration that Cortés initially enjoyed to a violent end. Forced into a precipitous flight from the Aztec capital, the surveys he had initiated to determine the population and resources of the land in areas today comprised within the Mexican states of Veracruz (Pánuco and Coatzacoalcos)<sup>10</sup> and Oaxaca (Tuxtepec, Malinaltepec, and the Mixteca) were interrupted. Nevertheless, by the time the Spaniards recaptured Mexico-Tenochtitlan, in August 1521, the scope of their domination was considerably

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<sup>8</sup> Tapia visited the province of Tuxpa in the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. See also the answers by Martín Vázquez (Martínez 1990-1992: II, 337) who declares to have witnessed that Cortés sent small parties accompanied by Moctezuma's messengers all over the land.

<sup>9</sup> Both Cortés (1960: 66) and Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1982 [1555]) describe this document, a pictographic codex today known as the *Matrícula de Tributos*.

<sup>10</sup> In June 1520, just after defeating Pánfilo de Narváez in Veracruz, Cortés sent Juan Velázquez de León to Pánuco and Diego de Ordaz to Coatzacoalcos, but when he knew about the revolt in Mexico-Tenochtitlan he ordered them to return (Martínez 1990: 262).

larger. Apart from preserving their first allegiances (Zempoala, Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, and Cholula) they also gained control over such important areas as Tepeaca —key to the roads leading to the Gulf of Mexico; Cuauhnahuac and other minor city-states in the valley of Morelos; and the independent *señoríos* of Tututepec and Meztitlan, north of valley of Mexico, that pled allegiance to the Spanish monarch voluntarily.

Once he controlled the heart of the ancient Aztec empire, Cortés resumed exploration in more distant areas that fell one after the other before the conquerors' sweeping campaigns.

To the South Cortés sent different simultaneous expeditions that achieved, by 1524, the effective control of the provinces of Coatzacoalcos, Tuxtepec, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Soconusco and Guatemala. Then, between that year and 1526, Cortés himself commanded a fruitless expedition to present day Honduras (Hibueras).

On the western front Cortés' captains explored the coast of the Pacific Ocean (Mar del Sur) between 1521 and 1522. Later on he would plan to engage in maritime exploration from two ports, Zacatula and Tehuantepec, that his captains located in that period (Martínez 1990: 340, 662-663). In 1521 Tzintzuntzan, capital of the Tarascan state of Michoacán, received with Antonio Caicedo its first Spanish visitor. His friendly encounter with the local ruler, the *Cazonci*, encouraged Cortés to dispatch, in the summer of 1522, a much larger expedition under the command of Cristóbal de Olid (Martínez 1990: 351-356, Warren 1979: 34). Through the *Relación de Michoacán* (Acuña 1987) and Cortés' fourth letter to the king (15 October 1524, in Cortés 1960: 175-176) we know that despite the *Cazonci's* rapid submission, plans for a Spanish settlement in Pátzcuaro died out when Olid learnt that not a gram of the gold he confiscated was locally produced.<sup>11</sup> Thus while some of his men returned to Mexico,

<sup>11</sup> Later on, gold and silver mines were discovered within the Tarascan territory but they yielded so little produce that by 1580 no gold mine was left in exploitation in the region, while silver mining activities had been mostly transferred to Zacatecas and other northerly sites (Lecoin 1988: 130, Bakewell 1971).

captain Juan Rodríguez Villafuerte, who had been instructed to proceed with his company to Zacatula, made an unauthorised detour, venturing an assault on the autonomous province of Colima early in 1523.<sup>12</sup> Later that year, Cortés commissioned Gonzalo de Sandoval to consolidate the conquest of this bountiful and densely populated region. North of Colima Juan de Avalos, Hernando de Sayavedra and Francisco Cortés conducted the first incursions into present day Jalisco and Nayarit (1523-1525), a region that only the following decade was effectively occupied, when Nuño de Guzmán ravaged the rich peasant communities that beyond the Tarascan empire thereby establishing the province of Nueva Galicia (Martínez 1990: 356-357, Gerhard 1982: 10).

While the north and north-western limits of New Spain expanded periodically throughout the sixteenth century the north-eastern frontier was fixed early on at the province of Pánuco, although some dispute over this territory arose between Hernán Cortés and Francisco de Garay —a rich island settler appointed lieutenant governor of Jamaica in 1521. North from Pánuco lied the peninsula of Florida, from the tip of which (Punta de Santa Elena) the coast ran up to the land of the Bacallaos (Cape Breton). Many thought this shoreline hid the mouth of the Strait of Anian that was presumed to connect the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. The area became the object of much imperial competition partly due to this reason, but also because, as María del Carmen Velázquez remarks (1974: 31), the Bahama Channel, that separates Punta de Santa Elena from the Caribbean islands, was unavoidable for every vessel on its way back to Europe. Reason why the Spaniards very early tried to secure its control against any possible European rival.<sup>13</sup> Isolation, fierce indigenous

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<sup>12</sup> From the reports concerning these events contained in primary sources it is not clear who was the captain responsible for this disobedience. Nevertheless after a detailed source analysis Carl O. Sauer (1948: 11-17) and J. Benedict Warren (1979: 73-75) concluded that Villafuerte was a much likelier candidate than Olid.

<sup>13</sup> Juan Ponce de León, governor of Puerto Rico, discovered Florida in 1512 or 1513 but he believed it was an island. In the following years, Diego de Miruelo (1516) and Francisco Hernández de Córdoba (1517) tried to conquer it but were expelled by the Indians. A new



resistance and harsh natural conditions, thwarted all colonising efforts in Florida and sheltered, at the same time, the looting activities of English and French pirates. Whence the strategic importance of Pánuco, which constituted for decades to come the main barrier against French prospective colonists, even when the authorities continued trying to settle Florida or keep at least a frontier outpost there.<sup>14</sup>

Cortés' victory over the control of Pánuco marks the closure of the first stage in the creation of New Spain, a colony that conquerors assumed, from 1520 on, to comprise all continental North America whatever its extension. Since 1519, Francisco de Garay had commissioned several expeditions to Pánuco, hoping to found a colony under his own independent government but as none was successful he personally led a military campaign in 1523, backed by a 1521 royal charter that authorised him to settle the province of Amichel, near Florida. Yet when he reached Pánuco's vicinity Cortés had already established a municipal council at Santiesteban del Puerto, the authority of which a new royal charter soon endorsed forcing Garay to withdraw (Martínez 1990: 365-368; Gerhard 1982: 5, 10).

By 1524 New Spain's effective boundaries reached southward to El Salvador and Honduras, north-east to the Huasteca and west to Colima, though further conquests and administrative amendments would successively

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failed attempt at settling the region was made by Ponce de León in 1521, the same year that Francisco de Garay demonstrated it was not an island but a peninsula. In 1526 Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón, judge of the *Audiencia* of Santo Domingo made his own try and in 1539 Hernando de Soto, after reaching perhaps what today is Arkansas, joined the list of failed conquerors of Florida (Bernard & Gruzinski 1999: 337 & 341-344, Gerhard 1982: 5).

<sup>14</sup> The exclusive rights that the Pope had granted to Spain and Portugal over the colonisation of America gave rise to a long-lasting conflict between the French and the Spanish monarchies. France promoted piracy. Spain prohibited all French commercial activity in her overseas domains and forbade the entrance of French nationals to Spanish colonies. Although this rivalry reached a point of compromise with the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis that put an end to the 1552-1559 war between both countries, the document included no explicit articles on the New World. Therefore competition over settling Florida continued. After Tristán Luna y Arellano, whom the viceroy of New Spain sent to Florida (1559-1561), failed to colonise Punta de Santa Elena the French took the lead. In 1562 Jean Ribault took possession of the land and began to build a fort. In 1564 a Huguenot colony was established but Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, governor of Cuba and Florida since 1560, destroyed it the following year. Despite the French temporary withdrawal and the establishment of a Spanish garrison, the conflict persisted and was only resolved the following century (Velázquez 1974: 29-34).

change its jurisdictional physiognomy (Gerhard 1972: 10). The irregular pattern that characterised the growth of sixteenth century New Spain was not only a matter of administrative decision. The conquest and effective occupation of new territories, whether they were alternately placed under New Spain's jurisdiction or detached from it, were determined by a combination of the conqueror's ambition and the local population's condition.

At the beginning, the conquerors adjusted their explorations to the sole objective of discovering gold and silver mines, a port suitable for transpacific navigation, and the Strait of Anian. Nevertheless, as it became clear that precious metals were not of immediate appropriation and the transcontinental strait proved an elusive target, they gave more importance to the foundation of Spanish villages in well-off agricultural districts that offered the possibility to exploit what turned out to be the most precious booty: indigenous labour (Velázquez 1974: 26-27, Helms 1975: 129, Elliott 1984a: 165-166). By 1570 nearly 57000 Spaniards lived in the central highlands and the West, according to Woodrow Borah (1975: 55). Both areas were highly productive and had an extremely dense Indian population who was used to a dominance system based on the exaction of tribute and personal service (Ortega Noriega 1993: 37-38). Colima (Sauer 1948: 59) and the Tarascan Plateau (Lecoin 1988: 124-125) were also intensively settled by Spanish colonists due to their abundant resources and large population,<sup>15</sup> even though Cristóbal de Olid and most of his men had initially refused to become established in the gold-lacking core of the Tarascan domains. But the Spaniards could not expand in every direction at the same pace, as the hostile population in many areas where no political

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<sup>15</sup> According to Sauer (1948: 60) Colima's indigenous population was so large that by mid century 112 Indian towns still existed in the area of initial Spanish occupation. Lecoin (1988: 124-125, 129) notes that according to the *Relaciones Geográficas* the Tarascan peasant communities of Michoacán, that were used to pay tribute to the *Cazonci*, accepted to give it to the Spaniards instead. Furthermore, until the decade of 1560 this tribute included workers for the silver mines of Taxco and Sultepeque and, until 1575-1576, the obligation to provide personal service in the Spanish villages.

structures of subservience existed proved a much more difficult enemy to defeat.

#### 4.2.- Guzmán vs. Cortés: The conquest of Nueva Galicia.

Towards the end of 1525 the Crown adopted the first of a series of administrative measures aimed at achieving control over her newly acquired colonies in mainland North America, thereby arresting the hegemonic position that Cortés hitherto occupied in New Spain. On the one hand, she appointed Luis Ponce de León visiting judge to inquire about Cortés' administration, on the other she granted Nuño de Guzmán an independent command at Pánuco (Gerhard 1982: 10, Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 18). Although Ponce de León's unexpected death in July 1526 delayed the legal proceedings against Cortés, he had to renounce to the office of governor of New Spain, preserving only —and not for long— his assignment as Captain General and Administrator of the Indians (Martínez 1990: 460-462). Nearly two years later, on 5 April 1528, Guzmán acquired jurisdiction over the whole of New Spain as president of the first *Audiencia* of Mexico (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 23), a post that would be reserved from 1535 on to the newly created office of viceroy.

From the moment Guzmán disembarked in Pánuco in May 1527<sup>16</sup> he confronted the enmity of Mexico City's municipal council (*cabildo*), the administrative head of New Spain still controlled by Cortés' partisans, which was not willing to recognise the autonomy of Pánuco's government (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 19). Guzmán was an ambitious character though, so taking no heed of this hostility, he ruled the province at will until he left for Mexico City in December 1528 to take possession of his new post as president of the *Audiencia*. By this time Cortés had already left for Spain to confront his *residencia* trial, an absence that Guzmán took advantage of, sequestering many

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<sup>16</sup> In his 1538-1539 *memoir* Guzmán made an error saying this occurred one year earlier (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 53).

of Cortés' properties and *encomiendas*, as well as some belonging to those soldiers who had served in the conquest of Mexico (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 24).

Later on, Guzmán was accused of illegitimate enrichment, despotism, misdemeanour and cruelty against the Indians, charges that in the long run caused his dismissal, both from the presidency of New Spain (1531) and from the government of Pánuco (1533). In the meantime, however, he conducted the first wide-ranging conquests attained by the Spaniards beyond the north-western limits of the bygone Aztec empire. *Espíritu Santo de la Mayor España* was the name Guzmán chose for the territory he then subdued, but in 1531 when the Crown appointed him governor of this now independent province she also prescribed that it should rather be called Nueva Galicia.

Primary sources concerning this comprehensive enterprise are relatively abundant: Besides a couple of report-letters that Guzmán addressed to the monarchs<sup>17</sup> and a *memoir* that he prepared in 1538 or 1539 to base his defence before the judges presiding at his *residencia* trial,<sup>18</sup> some captains under his command wrote accounts relating their own actions.<sup>19</sup> A useful supplement to these reports, including several ordinances that Guzmán dictated and other documents derived from the legal suits he was submitted to, has been recently compiled by Adrián Blázquez and Thomas Calvo (1992), while ten of the 168 *Relaciones Geográficas* existing for New Spain, compiled in the second half of the sixteenth century from the memories of locally resident witnesses, provide independent information on the subject.<sup>20</sup> Finally we have friar Antonio Tello's

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<sup>17</sup> "Letter from Omitlán, July 8, 1530" (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 25-59, Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 205-225) and "letter to the empress, June 12, 1532" (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 239-262).

<sup>18</sup> *Memoria de los servicios que había hecho Nuño de Guzmán desde que fue nombrado gobernador de Panuco en 1525* (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 53-73).

<sup>19</sup> All contained in a volume edited by José Luis Razo Zaragoza (1963): Gonzalo López (1532), Juan de Sámano (1531), Pedro de Carranza (1532), Cristóbal Flores (undated) García del Pilar (1531) Francisco de Arceo (undated), Pedro de Guzmán (undated), three anonymous and undated *relaciones*.

<sup>20</sup> One of these reports corresponds to Pátzcuaro, in the Tarascan Plateau (Acuña 1987), and nine to principal towns in the province of Nueva Galicia and their subjects (Acuña 1988).

*Crónica miscelánea de la santa provincia de Xalisco* (1891 [c. 1651]), the first history on the conquest of Nueva Galicia ever written.<sup>21</sup>

According to García del Pilar (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 217), Nuño de Guzmán set out from Mexico City on 21 December 1529 leading an expedition towards the West, composed of a few Spaniards and plenty auxiliary Indians, mainly Tlaxcalans.<sup>22</sup> Donald Chipman (1967: 231) argues that he was thus trying to avoid facing the *residencia* trial concerning Pánuco. But Pedro de Castañeda Nájera (1992 [1560-1565]: 63-65) attributes this undertaking to certain reports about seven towns "paved in silver" —similar in size to Mexico City— that Guzmán received in 1529 from an "Oxitipar" Indian. Castañeda Nájera was a soldier in the army that Vázquez de Coronado later led to Cíbola. His chronicle, written more than twenty years after this expedition took place, aimed to prove that Cíbola was worth conquering because rumours about its grandeur had reached the Spaniards from early times, drawing their steps towards the North but eluding them repeatedly.

None of Nuño de Guzmán's testimonies mention an "Oxitipar" informant, though Pedro de Guzmán and the second anonymous *Relación* assert that the expeditionaries did search for the "Seven Cities," of which they knew before leaving Mexico (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 280, 321-322). On the other hand, Guzmán does affirm in his 1538-1539 *memoir* (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 68) that before leaving Pánuco he commissioned the conquest of the valleys "they call Ogitipa."<sup>23</sup> Located in the Huasteca Potosina, Oxitipa was indeed one of the

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<sup>21</sup> This is one of the most important sources concerning Guzmán's activities, although the first of its three original volumes is lost. Other colonial works on Nueva Galicia exist (e.g. Mota y Escobar 1966 [1605], Arregui 1980 [1621], Mota y Padilla 1870 [1742]) but they contain much less first hand information on this early period.

<sup>22</sup> Guzmán provides no date for his departure but he specifies that he took 150 Spanish horsemen, 150 Spanish foot soldiers and seven or eight thousand Indian friends (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 25 ). Arceo counts 150 horsemen, 200 foot soldiers and only 1500 Indian allies (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 241-2); similar but even smaller figures are provided by one of the three anonymous accounts regarding these events ("*anónima primera*," in Razo Zaragoza 1963: 288).

<sup>23</sup> Huxitipa, according to the *Relación* by Pedro de Guzmán (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 283) and the second anonymous *Relación* (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 324, 326-327). Oxitipan according to plate 55r of *Codex Mendoza* (Berdan 1997:141).

most populous and lucrative towns in Pánuco (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 245, Chipman 1967: 92, 168, 196), appearing in *Codex Mendoza* among the communities paying the richest tribute to Moctezuma (Berdan 1997: 140-141). According to Gerhard (1972: 354-358) and Chipman (1967: 200), in 1527 Guzmán actually took it away from Cortés—who had reserved it for himself in *encomienda*—on the grounds that it belonged to the governor's office rather than to any particular individual.

It is certainly quite possible that Guzmán wished to escape his *residencia* trial by engaging in a broad expedition that would outdo Cortés' achievements. His faith that towards the North he would accomplish fruitful conquests may have been partly derived from the talk of an "Oxitipar" informant, as Castañeda Nájera asserts, but it rested on other, more trustworthy sources as well. On the one hand, he could have well seen in Mexico the reports of the expedition that Francisco Cortés had led to Aguacatlán and Xalisco (1524), which described a series of rich and densely settled territories (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 29). On the other hand, he no doubt obtained valuable information about Michoacán and the land beyond from the *Cazonci*, whom he captured in Mexico City to procure, though unsuccessfully, his purported knowledge about gold and silver mines (*Relación de la ciudad de Pátzcuaro*, in Acuña 1987: 199, Cristóbal Flores' *Relación*, in Razo Zaragoza 1963: 185).

Nuño de Guzmán spent the first months of his journey gathering supplies and additional Indian recruits in Tzintzuntzan, the Tarascan capital. Before heading North in February 1530 he tormented the *Cazonci* and organised a summary trial against him after crossing the Lerma river (*Nuestra Señora de la Purificación de Santa María*). For some soldiers like Pedro de Carranza (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 157) the death sentence that the Indian monarch received was completely undeserved as the ambush he was supposedly preparing proved to be non-existing.<sup>24</sup> After the execution Guzmán

<sup>24</sup> In his letter to the king from Omitlán Guzmán only mentions briefly the trial and slaughter of the *Cazonci* (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 26) but his 1538-1539 *memoir*, which omits the torture

sent Peralmíndez Chirino and Cristóbal de Oñate ahead in different directions (Tello 1891 [c. 1651]: 107, Razo Zaragoza 1963: 31) and then led his army to Cuitzeo.<sup>25</sup>

By July 1530 Guzmán had taken over the territory today occupied by the state of Guanajuato and the southern part of Jalisco. A few Spaniards from the expeditions formerly led by Alonso de Avalos and Francisco Cortés had already settled in the vicinity of lake Chapala (Chapetela) and Tonalá—agriculturally the richest places in the whole region. Nevertheless, as Guzmán believed that gold abounded in this area and in the neighbouring districts of Contla and Nochistlán (Michitlan),<sup>26</sup> he acted as if it was still a non-subjected Indian province, ravaged it and then claimed its jurisdiction. At the time, irrigation, rather than precious metals, was the real wealth in those locations, since the silver veins extending through the Sierra Madre to Sinaloa, and from San Luis through Zacatecas to Chihuahua remained hidden for several years and were not fully exploited before the eighteenth century (Berdan 1992, Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 29). Promising signs, however, appeared elsewhere, nourishing the golden dreams of Guzmán and his soldiers. At La Quemada and El Teúl<sup>27</sup> they came across the ruins of magnificent cities (letter from Omitlán, in Razo Zaragoza 1963: 47) and later on they saw people wearing gold ornaments in Tepic and Centicpac (Centiquipaque), a couple of provinces that the army traversed before temporarily establishing its headquarters in Omitlán to prepare the attack on the lacustrine district of

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episode, argues that his death sentence made justice to the numerous Christians he had killed (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 63). The testimony that Francisco de Arceo gave to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo also keeps silence about the torture that the *Cazonci* was submitted to and asserts that in knowing his death sentence the monarch confessed that several Spaniards had been killed upon his order (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 242-245). The *relaciones* by Juan de Sámano (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 117), Cristóbal Flores (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 185- 189), and García del Pilar (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 217-220) contain more detail showing the cruel procedure surrounding the *Cazonci's* prison and death.

<sup>25</sup> The sources write this name differently: Cuisco, Cuiseo or Cuyzco.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Omitlán (in Razo Zaragoza 1963: 38-44).

<sup>27</sup> The site of El Teúl (Teblinchan in Guzmán's erroneous transliteration) was also called Tonanipan according to the second anonymous *Relación* (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 292).

Aztatlán that Gonzalo López had discovered in a scouting mission (letter from Omitlán, Arceo's *Relación*, & Gonzalo López's *Relación*, in Razo Zaragoza 1963: 52-53, 83-85 & 260).

In December 1530, after crossing the Sebastián de Evora (Mocorito) river, Guzmán subjugated the towns of Chametla and Piaxtla and then proceeded against Cihuatán and Quilá, reaching present-day Culiacán by Easter 1531. There he later established the village of San Miguel that remained the most advanced outpost of the Spanish occupation for the following sixty years.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, before the year ended Guzmán was convinced that nothing of interest existed beyond this point, as neither Lope de Samaniego, who set off North exploring the land up to the Petatlán river nor Gonzalo López, who travelled East across the sierra to the Nazas river, found anything they considered worth conquering (Gonzalo López & second anonymous *Relación*, in Razo Zaragoza 1963: 99-104 & 321; Ortega Noriega & del Río 1993: 28-30; Ortega Noriega 1993: 38-42; Bancroft 1889: 1-19). Therefore in December 1531 he sent Juan de Oñate south-east to establish the village of Guadalajara (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 33-34) while he moved South towards Espíritu Santo-Compostela. Emulating Cortés, he had formerly established this village in the region of Tepic to serve as provisional seat to a municipal council with jurisdiction over the lands he had thus far occupied.<sup>29</sup> There he received official notice of his appointment as governor of Nueva Galicia on 16 January 1532 (letter to the Empress, in Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 239-240).

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<sup>28</sup> The original foundation of San Miguel was located at the shore of the Cihuatlán river but the ninety-six Spaniards and numerous Tlaxcalan Indians that remained in the village soon decided to relocate it, moving to the confluence of the Humaya and Tamazula rivers where the city of Culiacán stands today (Ortega Noriega & del Río 1993: 28-30, Ortega Noriega 1993: 38-42). This enormous territory received the name of Sinaloa and was organised in two provinces of undefined limits: Chametla to the South and Culiacán to the North, each administered by a mayor subjected to the authority of the governor of Nueva Galicia. Spanish presence in Chametla was ephemeral as in 1535 a severe epidemic and an indigenous rebellion pushed the colonists away.

<sup>29</sup> Guzmán commissioned the foundation of this village to Francisco Verdugo in January 1531, when the army was still in the province of Chametla. The original name was Espíritu Santo but the Spanish empress ordered that it be changed for Compostela (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 33, 65, 250-251).



Now that he nominally held the government of all the lands known until then north of New Spain, from coast to coast, Guzmán pursued their effective occupation, so he left east from Compostela early in 1533 seeking to connect Pánuco and Nueva Galicia. Having followed the Lerma river to the Huasteca Potosina he founded Santiago de los Valles in the region of Oxitipa, the conquest of which he had commissioned some years before.

Guzmán was dismissed from the government of Pánuco on April 20, 1533, though he remained governor of Nueva Galicia until January 19, 1537, when he was remitted to Spain as a prisoner in compliance with an order issued in March 1536 (Blázquez & Calvo 1992: 33, 44). In less than two years (February 1530–September 1531) he had placed an enormous territory nearly half the size of New Spain itself under the Spanish Crown (map 10). But the war strategy he followed, i.e., to enter settled villages, defeat the population, take hold of their material wealth and destroy the remains so that no counter-offensive could be organised as he left (Ortega Noriega & del Río 1993: 27) would eventually prove counter-productive.<sup>30</sup> Between 1540 and 1542 the region comprising southern Zacatecas and Jalisco became the theatre of several revolts, the most famous being the Cuzcán rebellion or Mixtón war because it represented such a threat to Spanish domination that the Viceroy personally attended it and put it down (Cabrero 1986: 114–118, Bernard & Gruzinski 1999: 127–128). Even when

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<sup>30</sup> Although some witnesses like Gonzalo López (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 70, 97) and Juan de Sámano (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 126) occasionally acknowledged that as they found a town they took the food and burnt the place before leaving, Nuño de Guzmán (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 38, 47), Arceo (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 251), López (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 72), and Sámano (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 129) systematically blamed this destruction on the Indian allies. Some accounts are more critical. Pedro de Carranza, for instance, asserts that in the town of Cynan "the friends spread around and began to burn the land so in every town we went to everything was left completely burnt" (y luego los amigos se tendieron por la tierra y comenzaron a la quemar [...] y por los pueblos por do andábamos todo quedaba quemado. In Razo Zaragoza 1963: 159). Nevertheless, he also admits that in Xalisco it was Guzmán who "ordered the Indian allies to set fire and burn the houses, which they did" (mandaba que los indios pusiesen fuego y quemasen todas las casas, y ellos así lo hacían. In Razo Zaragoza 1963: 164). He repeats the same indictment later, asserting that he personally heard Guzmán instruct the Indians to burn the town of Chiametla ("porque yo se lo oí al mismo que dijo que lo quemasen [...] y así cuando se partió Nuño de Guzmán, se quedó quemado el pueblo de Chiametla." In Razo Zaragoza 1963: 171–172). The same denouncing tone is used by the first anonymous *Relación* when describing the attack on Xalisco (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 294).

this uprising —according to the third anonymous *Relación* on the conquest of Nueva Galicia (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 331)— began as an Indian refusal to pay tribute to the Spaniards living in Guadalajara and Compostela, and Guzmán, therefore, was not directly responsible for its eruption, the bitter resentment he had left behind certainly fostered a rebellious mood among native population.

After the authorities arrested Guzmán, Antonio de Mendoza —first viceroy of New Spain (1535-1550)— took on the exploration and conquest of the North, encouraged by the news that a handful of survivors of the Narváez shipwreck brought to Nueva Galicia in 1536 and using the most important of Guzmán's settlements, Compostela, Culiacán and Guadalajara as departure stations for the expeditions he organised.

#### **4.3.- The promise of Cíbola: Cabeza de Vaca, Niza and Vázquez de Coronado.**

On November 17, 1526, Pánfilo de Narváez signed a *capitulación* for the discovery, conquest, and colonisation of the lands comprised between the Río de las Palmas river and the cape of Florida. He had participated in the conquest of Cuba in 1511 and had been expecting an opportunity to try his fortune since 1520, when he returned to Spain as a prisoner after having failed to reduce Hernán Cortés to the obedience of the governor of Cuba, whose authority the conqueror of Mexico had dismissed. Narváez was now finally in command, ready to become the master of a much ambitioned territory that he imagined, like others before, to be as rich and wonderful as that Cortés had subdued.

When Narváez set sail from Spain on June 17, 1527, leading five ships that transported around six hundred men, he did not suspect how disastrously this expedition would turn out. Neither could his treasurer, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca foresee the importance that his personal memories would acquire. In April 1528 unexpected winds pushed the boats towards the coast of present day Texas, after having experienced several sea-storms in the Caribbean where they had stopped to reprovision. Of the four hundred survivors, Narváez sent

a small group by sea to locate the mouth of the las Palmas river and took the rest inland to search for rich and densely settled "señoríos". Neither wealth nor people were found, and as the soldiers despaired, hopelessly waiting on the beach for the ships to return, disease, starvation and Indian arrow attacks dramatically reduced their numbers. Finally, on September 22, 1528 the agonising expeditionaries again set sail aboard five precarious rafts which they built themselves, only to suffer by November yet another shipwreck in the island they called Mal Hado (Ill-Fate). The few survivors fell prisoner and were apportioned as slaves among different Indian groups. Although we know that at least one became assimilated to the culture of his captors —Hernando de Soto found him and received his help in 1539 (Bernard & Gruzinski 1999: 341)— the majority certainly perished, while only four managed (or wanted) to escape and go back to their fellow countrymen.

The amazing story of how Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Andrés Dorantes, Bernardino del Castillo Maldonado, and the Moor slave Estevan reunited, escaped (1533 or 1534) and travelled westwards until reaching the frontier settlements of New Spain, managing to survive as healers and merchants is told by Cabeza de Vaca in a *Relación* today known as *Naufragios*, first published in Zamora, Spain, in 1542.<sup>31</sup> A shorter account based on another manuscript that Cabeza de Vaca, Dorantes, and Castillo Maldonado supposedly wrote and sent to the *Audiencia* of Santo Domingo in 1539, is contained in chapters one to seven of Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia General y Natural de las Indias* (1959 [1535-1552]).<sup>32</sup> Most chroniclers of the sixteenth and

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<sup>31</sup> *La relación que dio Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca de lo acaescido en la Armada donde iba por Gobernador Pánfilo de Narváez desde el año de veinte y siete hasta el año de treinta y seis que bolvió a Sevilla con tres de su compañía.* The British Library preserves one of the three extant copies of this edition and one of the thirteen that still survive of the second edition (Valladolid 1555).

<sup>32</sup> The only accounts written by the participants themselves that have come to us are the *Naufragios* and a short testimony by Cabeza de Vaca that ends abruptly at the island of Mal Hado, preserved in the *Archivo General de Indias* and published in CODINAO (XIV, 269-279): *Relación del viaje de Pánfilo de Narváez al Río de las Palmas hasta la punta de la Florida, hecha por el tesorero Cabeza de Vaca, año 1537.* In a letter to the empress dated February 11, 1537, viceroy Mendoza mentions a manuscript by the three surviving Spaniards which

seventeenth centuries also include a section on this expedition, certainly based on the *Naufragios*.<sup>33</sup>

Cabeza de Vaca and his companions arrived at San Miguel de Culiacán in May 1536 escorted by one of Guzmán's soldiers who had spotted them near the Petatlán river while conducting a slave raid. After meeting governor Guzmán in Compostela they continued down to Mexico City where they met viceroy Mendoza and Hernán Cortés on July 23 (Gutiérrez 1991: 41, Ortega Noriega & del Río 1993: 30). Modern scholarship has engaged in numerous controversies concerning the truthfulness and accuracy of the stories these men recounted. The miracles they said to have performed (e.g. Pupo Walker 1987, Lafaye 1993, Lewis 1993) and the route they followed from Mal Hado to the Petatlán river<sup>34</sup> (Bandelier 1890 & 1981, Ponton & M'Farland 1898: 175-186, Bishop 1933, Coopwood 1900) are the most debated issues, although much attention has been given in recent years to the textual analysis of the *Naufragios* as a particular form of colonial discourse (Barrera 1984, Glantz 1992, Pastor Bodmer 1992, Adorno 1994).

The scepticism that has surrounded the reports of Cabeza de Vaca and his companions since the nineteenth century was not there in the sixteenth. Their story concerning seven populous cities they did not see but heard about seemed to confirm the rumours that had put Nuño de Guzmán on the road in 1529 and therefore gave rise to a frenzied exploring activity (Bandelier 1981: 65-66). Friar Jerónimo de Mendieta says in his *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana* (1997 [1596]: II, 59-61) that in January 1538 friar Antonio de Ciudad Rodrigo,

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may have either been the one that Oviedo summarised or another independent document. Neither has ever been found (Barrera: 1984: 23-24, Nicolau D'Oliver 1963: 86, Wagner 1967: 36).

<sup>33</sup> Francisco López de Gómara (1986 [1552] book ix chapter ix) and Antonio de Herrera (1945 [1615]: decade iv, book ii, chapter iv & book iv, chapter iv; decade vi, book i, chapters iii-vii) are the most extensive.

<sup>34</sup> In the nineteenth century it was believed that the odyssey began east of the Mississippi river and that the vagabonds traversed Arkansas and New Mexico. Today it is generally agreed that the last shipwreck occurred in Tampa Bay and that the four survivors walked through Texas, part of Chihuahua, Sonora and Sinaloa.

provincial of the Franciscan order sent three friars by sea to discover the pacific coast to the North and some others over land across Nueva Galicia. According to his account, one of these religious explorers heard news along the way of a remote land where cotton dressed people lived in houses several stories high. Reason why friar Marcos de Niza, who had just arrived from Peru and Guatemala to succeed Ciudad Rodrigo, set out to trace the multi-quoted urban district. The same episode is related with less detail in a *Relación* that a Jesuit friar, Gerónimo de Zárate Salmerón wrote around 1629 (1965: 120-121) and is repeated in a 1792 chronicle by friar Juan Domingo Arricuita (quoted in Mora 1992: 16), who names only two travelling friars —Juan de la Ascensión and Pedro Nadal— and confers the responsibility of the commission to viceroy Mendoza rather than to Ciudad Rodrigo.

No first-hand reference concerning the journeys commissioned by Ciudad Rodrigo has come to us; nor does the much earlier testimonial chronicle by Castañeda Nájera (1992 [1560-1565]) on Vázquez de Coronado's journey to Cíbola, and its precedents, mention any such expedition. The first well documented undertaking aimed at reaching the "Seven Cities" we know about is that of Marcos de Niza, who took the commission from the Viceroy. His report and the instructions he received before departing<sup>35</sup> are preserved in the *Archivo General de Indias*, together with several letters and other minor related documents.

Francisco Vázquez de Coronado was appointed to substitute Guzmán as governor of Nueva Galicia late in 1538. His most immediate commitment was the minute organisation of Niza's excursion (Aiton 1939). Like the Viceroy, he was deeply interested in discovering the wondrous universe the North apparently concealed. Thus after dispatching the friar from Culiacán on March 7, 1539,<sup>36</sup> he led an ambitious though unsuccessful expedition to another

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<sup>35</sup> They have been published in many collections of documents. I quote from Carmen de Mora (1992).

<sup>36</sup> Niza's 1539 report (in Mora 1992:148).

reputedly wealthy province north-east of Culiacán: Topira (Lecompte 1989: 285, Castañeda Nájera 1992 [1560-1565]: 67-68). Back in Compostela in September he received Niza's reports about four neighbouring kingdoms that had never been visited by Christians before. As we saw above Niza was indeed the first European ever to reach the Pueblo area and his report is the first document to contain the word *Cíbola* —phonetic transcription of the name that the Zuñi Indians gave to themselves: *Shi-wi-nah* (Mora 1992: 76-77n).

Only a few places that Niza visited are named in his *Relación*, although he took along some natives from Petatlán, together with Estevan and various Indians who had followed Cabeza de Vaca back to New Spain (Niza 1539, in Mora 1992: 148). The highlights of his journey, that followed roughly a coastal route through Sinaloa, Sonora and Arizona, are the following:

First Niza stopped at Petatlán where he left friar Onorato, his only Spanish companion. Then, after meeting some Indians from the "island" where Cortés had recently been (i.e., California),<sup>37</sup> nothing remarkable happened until he reached a four-days-long *despoblado*, (uninhabited area) after which he came across people who had neither seen nor heard about any European ever. These people indicated that heading inland five days further the mountains gave way to an open-land country with huge settlements, but the friar preferred to stick to his coastal route and visit this place on the way-back journey. From the "reasonably large village of Vacapa" that he came across next the friar sent messengers to the seashore while Estevan rushed ahead to reconnoitre the country, promising to mark his path with crosses of varying sizes to indicate the magnitude of his discoveries. A few days later Estevan's envoys returned bringing crosses the size of a man and, for the first time, news alluding to "the land they call *Cíbola*." From this moment on natives would not cease to provide glowing reports about *Cíbola*, Marata, Acus and Totonteac, described

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<sup>37</sup> Cortés had been in California in 1536.

in every place as wealthy provinces teeming with cities of multistoried, stone houses inhabited by people who dressed cotton and wore turquoise jewellery.

Accompanied by an ever growing escort of Indians, Niza crossed densely populated lands and a couple of *despoblados*, making a brief detour at some point to take a look at the coast. One day's distance from Cíbola, however, he met some of Estevan's Indian companions hastily running away, as the ex-slave and most of his vanguard party had been killed by order of the local ruler. Despite the dangers this situation implied, the friar pushed forward until he beheld Cíbola in June 1539, after which he took possession of the region and turned back immediately, only stopping to cast a quick glance at the cluster of settlements he had been referred to just before he first reached Vacapa (Niza, in Mora 1992: 145-160, Horgan 1963: 152-159, Cutter 1992: 11-15).

Marcos de Niza's report was favourable enough to reaffirm the Viceroy's conviction to colonise the newly discovered land, a task he entrusted to Francisco Vázquez de Coronado on January 6, 1540, simultaneously appointing Hernando de Alarcón to travel by sea as a marine rearguard. Hernán Cortés, Nuño de Guzmán, Hernando de Soto, and Pedro de Alvarado also claimed the right to take on this conquest, adducing the contracts or appointments they had previously signed or received, either to explore the Southern Sea or to colonise and govern a particular territory North of New Spain (Horgan 1963: 151, 162, 164; Río 1990: 23; Martínez 1990: 732-733). The legal process concerning these claims<sup>38</sup> ended with the issuing of a royal charter on 10 July 1540, which proclaimed that neither Niza's excursion nor Vázquez de Coronado's ongoing expedition invaded the jurisdiction formerly granted to any of the discording captains (Martínez 1990-1992: IV, 216-219). Still, viceroy Mendoza reached a compromise with Alvarado, too influential among the conquerors of New Spain to be simply dismissed. The contract they signed in November 29 (in

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<sup>38</sup> "*Proceso-pleito entre el Marqués del Valle, Nuño de Guzmán, Diego de Guzmán, Pedro de Alvarado, Hernando de Soto y Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón sobre los descubrimientos en Nueva Galicia y la Mar del Sur*" (AGI, Patroato, 21, No. 2, R. 4).

Mora 1992: 160-170) conferring on Alvarado one fifth of all the benefits resulting from the conquests achieved by Vázquez de Coronado up to that point, and a half of the benefits resulting from those that he might still achieve thereafter, never came into effect since Alvarado died in 1541 fighting against Cazcán rebels during the Mixtón war.

Like Niza's excursion, Coronado's expedition is fairly well documented. Three general accounts by participant soldiers covering the whole expedition survive. Two, the narrative by Juan Jaramillo and the anonymous "*relacion del suceso*," are almost contemporary with the events, but the chronicle that Castañeda Nájera wrote some twenty years later is the most extensive. Additionally we have several letters and short anonymous reports referring to particular events or periods of the enterprise.<sup>39</sup>

Vázquez de Coronado left Compostela late in February 1540<sup>40</sup> leading an army composed by some three hundred soldiers of European origin and nearly one thousand Indian allies from Central Mexico (Gutiérrez 1991: 42, Cutter 1992: 16, Lecompte 1989: 286). At Culiacán Vázquez de Coronado parted with the bulk of the expedition, moving ahead on April 22 with a small mounted vanguard—including friar Marcos—that reached Hawikuh (Zuñi-Cíbola) by the seventh of July. Meanwhile Hernando de Alarcón navigated north to the mouth of the Colorado river, and having lost the track of his over-land companions, he followed the river inland for perhaps one hundred miles until he finally decided to return, leaving behind a note should they ever reach the same place. When the infantry reached Hawikuh by November that year, Vázquez de Coronado had already sent Pedro Tovar to reconnoitre the Tusayán (Hopi) pueblos of eastern Arizona and García López de Cárdenas to explore the Tizón river (Grand Canyon). He had also commissioned Hernando de Alvarado to travel east to the Río Grande and beyond into the prairies,

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<sup>39</sup> The most important are published in Mora (1992), and Hammond & Rey (1940).

<sup>40</sup> Legally constituted and notarised on February 27 (Horgan 1963: 167)



following an Indian from Cicuyé (Pecos) that offered his services as guide. Alvarado visited Acuco (Acoma), Taos (the northernmost Zuñi Pueblo), and Tiguex (today Bernalillo in the central valley of the Río Grande), which he recommended should be used as winter quarters. During this excursion an Indian he nicknamed "The Turk" volunteered to take the Spaniards to Quivira, a riverside kingdom towards the Northeast, gold-rich and extremely refined (Cutter 1992: 16-17, Lecompte 1989: 288-290).

Towards the end of November 1540, as soon as the infantry caught up, the complete army moved to Tiguex for the winter. However, the Spaniards' abuse and excessive demand of resources provoked a widespread revolt that lasted until March 1541. Once in control of the situation Vázquez de Coronado burnt one hundred "rebels" alive as exemplary punishment (Horgan 1963: 167-173 Cutter 1992: 17-22, Lecompte 1989: 291, Hammond & Rey 1940: 24, 225). Then he sent two captains to explore Quirix and took personal lead of an expedition to Quivira. The party wandered more than two months (April-July) across the plains from eastern New Mexico to Oklahoma, and perhaps Kansas, guided by "The Turk" —who said the Quivirans navigated a river "two leagues wide" in large canoes and had plenty of gold which they called "acochis." As they found no metal wealth at the place "The Turk" finally identified as Quivira —a modest peasant settlement beside a moderate-size river— they garrotted the Indian after obtaining from him the confession that he had purposefully led the Spaniards astray (Forbes 1960: 14-19). Janet Lecompte (1989: 298-300) argues that his execution was the dreadful result of a misunderstanding, as rather than telling lies he may have been talking about the only river that could be described as "two leagues wide:" the lower Mississippi. After all, the Knight of Elvas, chronicler of the de Soto expedition to Florida that reached a neighbouring area around the same period, described Qwapaw Indians crossing the Mississippi stream in large canoes with canopies too. On the other

hand, she contends, the word that Wichita Indians living in that region had for metal was precisely *acochis* (ha:kwicis).

Vázquez de Coronado returned to his Tiguex base in October 1541 and in April 1542 he was just as ready to abandon the would-be province of *Nuevo México* as most of the prospective settlers he ruled. By June that year the expedition returned to Culiacán, leaving behind a Portuguese soldier, Andrés do Campo and two or three missionaries, Friar Juan de Padilla and two others whose names are not clear.<sup>41</sup> All of them were martyred by the Indians except the soldier, who escaped and lived as a shaman before returning to New Spain five years later. Also a number of Mexican and Tarascan Indians remained among the Pueblo. Vázquez de Coronado continued to govern Nueva Galicia until September 1544 but his *residencia* charged him with incompetence and dereliction of duty. The following year he was also accused of a misdemeanour during the expedition but since he was found not guilty, he continued to serve as a minor public official until he died ten years later in Mexico City (Horgan 1963: 174-182, Bancroft 1889: 64-68, Beck 1969: 46-48, Forbes 1960: 22, Petersen 1980: 58, Lecompte 1989: 302-304, Cutter 1992: 23-27).

For over a century scholars have debated the routes that Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Niza and Vázquez de Coronado followed (e.g. Bancroft 1889, Bolton 1949, Di Peso 1974, Sauer 1932, 1935 & 1940, Winship 1896, Riley 1971) since some of the kingdoms appearing in their accounts, such as Corazones, Señora and Totonteac, do not appear in the reports by seventeenth century missionaries who traversed the area. This lack of correspondence has led modern anthropologists and historians to assume that early explorers lied about the size and complexity of aboriginal cultures. Such mistrust of pre-anthropology or pre-scientific texts, as Reff (1991: 636-637) contends may not be justified, as the noted discrepancy rather reflects depopulation. Most early

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<sup>41</sup> According to Bancroft (1889: 67) there were only two, Padilla and a certain friar Luis but according to Cutter (1992: 26) there were three: Padilla, Juan de Ubeda (Belda), and Juan de la Cruz.

accounts concerning the search for *Nuevo México*, juxtaposed with the archaeological record, indicate the existence of complex socio-political organisations and more population than that observable in later times. Sixteenth century Spaniards, Charles Gibson asserts (1964: 32), were quite conscious of settlement size distinctions for both legal and ideological reasons. Therefore it is significant that friar Marcos referred to *villas* or *pueblos* as opposed to *ranchos* or *aldeas*. Moreover, the fact that he reported only three uninhabited areas (*despoblados*) during his entire journey, suggests that in 1539 north-western Sonora and southern Arizona retained a sizeable population possibly related to the so-called Hohokam culture which, attending to Niza's descriptions, may have collapsed not in the first half of the fifteenth century as is generally believed, but much later (Reff 1991: 645-646).

The polemic concerning the credibility of Marcos de Niza's report centres on whether he really reached the heart of the North American Southwest. An interrogation already posed in his own days as he abandoned Vázquez de Coronado's expedition in August 1540, returning to Mexico with a courier party to escape the rage that filled the expeditionaries at the sight of Cíbola. Hernán Cortés ("account of the Viceroy's affronts..." in Martínez 1990-1992: IV, 210-212<sup>42</sup>) and Vázquez de Coronado (letter to viceroy Mendoza, August 3, 1540, in Hammond & Rey 1940: 170) raised bitter accusations against the friar, whose report they considered a fabrication (Horgan 1963: 171). In modern times Bancroft (1889), Bandelier (1981), Horgan (1963), Undreiner (1947), and Reff (1991) have sustained the veracity of Niza's *Relación* against such authors as Wagner (1934), who considered the friar a victim of the overexcited imagination of his time; Sauer (1932), who thought the report was fabricated in order to block Cortés and other suitors to the North, or Hallenbeck (1987) who

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<sup>42</sup> *Memorial de Hernán Cortés a Carlos V acerca de los agravios que le hizo el virrey de la Nueva España, impidiéndole la continuación de los descubrimientos en la Mar del Sur*, June 25, 1540.

adduced as proof of Niza's mendacity his incapacity to provide Vázquez de Coronado with clear distance indications.<sup>43</sup>

Whether Niza actually beheld Cíbola is not all that important for the argument of this thesis. In any case I endorse Reff's opinion (1991: 639-642) that most doubts surrounding Niza's *Relación* reflect a misreading derived from incorrect presuppositions about aboriginal culture and sixteenth century Spaniards' capacity to observe, to which I shall add an anachronistic perspective. D. J. Weber (1987: 20-21), for example, regards Friar Marcos' claim that Cíbola was the best of the discoveries as "an extravagant recommendation from a man who knew first hand the wealth of Mexico and Peru." But the friar, as Bandelier remarks (1981: 100), never saw Mexico-Tenochtitlan before it was destroyed so when he spoke of Mexico he certainly referred to the colonial city, which in 1539 had a much smaller population. Likewise, the assumption that Vázquez de Coronado and Niza followed the same trails as Cabeza de Vaca is rather incorrect, since as Reff contends (1991: 640-642) the friar did not primarily follow Estevan's lead but relayed essentially on Indian guides and informants. Therefore he probably travelled a somewhat coastal route, walking from Vacapa along the same road that frequent travellers to Cíbola also used (Reff 1991: 638). Finally, the dazzling image of the seven cities drafted in Niza's *Relación* is very much a transcription of his Indian informants' perception, as he is very much restrained when describing what he saw himself. This confidence in the word of the Other is what matters to us, since the construction of *Nuevo México* resulted largely from the Spanish engagement with native views.

#### **4.4.- Searching for *Nuevo México*: Francisco de Ibarra and Nueva Vizcaya.**

After Vázquez de Coronado returned from Cíbola the northern frontier of New Spain lived through a prolonged period of war that would only end

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<sup>43</sup> Weber (1987: 24-29) and Reff (1991: 636-645) provide an overview of the controversies this issue raised until the 1980s.

around 1590. This was also a time of constant expansion as it was then that most mine discoveries took place. The precarious peace ensuing the Mixtón War or Cazcán rebellion (1540-1542), personally suffocated by viceroy Mendoza with the collaboration of numerous Indians from Central Mexico would not last for long, as the opening of cart roads and slave raiding activities<sup>44</sup> that accompanied the discovery of silver mines in Xalpepec and Espíritu Santo (1543), Guanajuato (1544), and Zacatecas (1546) among other sites, provoked the fierce response of such Indian groups as the Zacatecos, Guachichiles, Guamares, Pames, and Tepehuanes (Gerhard 1982: 6-7 & 1972: 7, Jiménez Moreno 1958: 49, Gutiérrez 1991: 39-42 & 45, Horgan 1963: 152).

Like the Mixtón uprising, the Chichimeca War —as historians call the intermittent but constant struggle fought over forty years against these resisting tribes— forced the Spaniards to propitiate a wide northward migration of Mexicans, Tlaxcalans and other natives from the South, who would establish peasant colonies aimed at inducing rebel Chichimecas into farming and obedience (Gerhard 1982: 7-8, Forbes 1960: 29-34, Radding 1997: 30-31). This was at once a peace achieving measure and a means to secure labourers for the mines. Natives from Michoacán lived in Zacatecas since 1550, and by the beginning of the seventeenth century most mine workers in the city were Indians who spoke Náhuatl and Tarascan, many of whom had fought on the Spanish side in the Chichimec frontier before settling as day-labourers (Lecoin 1988: 131).<sup>45</sup> The cultural dislocation and readjustment that such a policy generated in the hybrid communities thus constituted, as well as the expectations that the new circumstance created among the conquered groups eligible as decoys for the northern frontier contributed to shape the dream of *Nuevo México*.

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<sup>44</sup> The slave raiding system went as far as the south of Texas, reaching its peak from 1575 to 1585 (Forbes 1960: 34).

<sup>45</sup> This is clearly stated in the *Relación de Nuestra Señora de los Zacatecas*, written in 1608 (BNM, 3064, *Descripción de Indias I*: 85).

According to the records of the local municipal council (Ribera Bernárdez 1945: 9), Juan de Tolosa discovered the first silver mines in Zacatecas on September 8, 1546. Three years later a massive flow of Spanish and Indian immigrants had turned the place into the second largest city of the viceroyalty in terms of population; thus although it only received the title of "Ciudad" in 1585 (*Relación de Nuestra Señora de los Zacatecas* 1608: 84v; Ribera Bernárdez 1945: 12; Jiménez Moreno 1958: 56), it immediately became a principal base for the organisation of northward exploration and conquest. In 1554 Francisco de Ibarra set out from here to search for new silver veins, financed by his uncle Diego de Ibarra, one of Zacatecas' first settlers who had quickly amassed a fortune in mining and cattle raising, like others that would later figure prominently in the conquest of *Nuevo México*.<sup>46</sup> In the following eight years Ibarra discovered the mines of Avino, San Martín, Sombrerete (Llerena since 1569), Fresnillo, and Chalchihuites thereby starting an incipient colonisation in the region, momentarily interrupted by a Zacateco rebellion: the League of 1561.<sup>47</sup>

Documents concerning the events occurred locally after the defeat of the rebels, such as Francisco de Ibarra's reports and letters, are vague and confusing when it comes to chronology. In consequence it is difficult to determine the date and sequence of certain episodes. Nevertheless, chronological precision is much less important for us than the fact that, between 1561 and 1565, Francisco de Ibarra sought extensively for the ancient Mexicans' place of origin, in those days called Copala according to Baltasar de Obregón.<sup>48</sup> As result of this endeavour, Ibarra conquered a wide territory that

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<sup>46</sup> Cristóbal de Oñate, Juan de Saldivar and Vicente de Saldivar (Ribera Bernárdez 1945: 9, *Relación de Nuestra Señora de los Zacatecas* 1608: 84v).

<sup>47</sup> "Account of the feats that Ibarra performed in the service of His Majesty, 1574" (*Memoria de los servicios que ha hecho el gobernador Francisco de Ibarra a Su Magestad [...] en las provincias de Copala, Nueva Vizcaya y Chiametla*. AGI, Patronato, 21, No. 4, R 2: 1-2v). See also Barlow & Simson (1943: xvi).

<sup>48</sup> Obregón was born in Mexico City in 1544 to a son of Rodrigo de Baeza, one of the first settlers of New Spain. He joined Ibarra's army in Chiametla in 1566 and later on he wrote at length about this expedition in a chronicle that described the search for *Nuevo México* —from

he named Nueva Vizcaya, at first comprising the area he had barely settled since 1554 plus all the yet unconquered lands beyond Nueva Galicia.<sup>49</sup>

In a letter that Ibarra addressed from Avino to the Viceroy on 6 June 1562 (AGI, México, 19, No. 27) he said to have set out from San Martín with friar Cintos<sup>50</sup> and another monk to confirm the rumours about Copala that circulated around the region, which he could not verify personally due to the pouring rains. He also informed that the friars remained near a certain valley he then discovered in order to assemble "the people," and he requested official support—a hundred soldiers provided by the Viceroy—to complete his inspection. Unfortunately the document does not record the date when this journey began nor the name of the valley. Judging from the 1574 "Account on the feats that Ibarra performed..." (AGI, patronato 21, No. 4, R 2: 2-4), however, it seems that this was the same excursion as that when, accompanied by a group of Franciscan friars he discovered the valley of San Juan and founded the village of Nombre de Dios (June 1562), aimed at attracting the recently defeated Chichimecas to Christian life. An indigenous account concerning the services that a group of Mexican and Tarascan Indians who served as decoys in the settling of this village, published by Barlow and Simsor, suggests the same conclusion. It asserts (Barlow & Simsor 1943: 14-24) that Francisco de Vara (Ibarra) commanded the settling process, although he parted before it was accomplished, leaving behind three of the four friars who had also been involved—Gerónimo de Mendoza, Pedro de Espinareda, Diego de la Cadena

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Hernán Cortés (1521) to Antonio de Espejo (1582). He finished the chronicle in 1583 or 1584 and sent the manuscript to the *Consejo de Indias*, but it was only published in 1924 (Bravo 1997: 22-27, Camelo 1981: 29).

<sup>49</sup> In 1579 the governor of Nuevo León, Luis de Carvajal, laid claim to the Chichimec country north of Pánuco and various mining centres such as Mazapil and Coahuila. After a period of dispute, several fertile valleys and strategic passes in the Sierra Madre Oriental were detached from Nueva Vizcaya to become part of the New Kingdom of León (Gerhard 1982: 7).

<sup>50</sup> Jacinto de San Francisco, a former soldier who had renounced the *encomiendas* he attained in the conquest of Mexico to become a monk, was better known as friar Cintos (or Cindos) after receiving the Franciscan robe.

and Jacinto de San Francisco— to supervise the full establishment of the village.<sup>51</sup>

On July 24, 1562, viceroy Luis de Velasco appointed Ibarra governor of the province of Copala / Nueva Vizcaya comprising all the lands he may conquer beyond the mines of San Martín ("Report on the government of Nueva Vizcaya 1574," AGI, Patronato, 20, No. 5, R. 16). The main goal of this assignment, as the respective ordinance stipulated (AGI, México, 19, No. 49), was to invest the captain with the authority to lead an expedition into the large settlements inhabited by people who wore clothing that he was told about while exploring the valleys he had discovered beyond Avino. According to a letter by viceroy Velasco (May 26, 1563) those settlements lied precisely in the province of Copala that had many silver mines as well (AGI, Patronato 21, No. 4, R. 3). In compliance with this commission, Ibarra conducted a lengthy discovery expedition leaving from San Martín, where he assembled a new group of volunteers including interpreters from the region who spoke Náhuatl and Chichimeca languages, as well as soldiers who had been to Cíbola with Vázquez de Coronado.

In the valley of Guadiana, explored ten year before by Ginés Vázquez del Mercado, Ibarra founded the would-be capital of his province, Durango (1563). Whether this occurred before or after he engaged in organising his new journey is not clear, as his reports are vague and mutually contradictory. In any case, we know from various letters by viceroy Velasco, Francisco and Diego de Ibarra,<sup>52</sup> that towards the beginning of March 1563 the governor left the valley

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<sup>51</sup> The *Descripción de la villa de Nombre de Dios* (BNM, 3064, *Descripción de Indias I*: 115-124) elaborated in 1608 by the local authorities provides an incorrect date for this foundation: 1563. The document, however, also mentions Pedro de Espinareda among the founders and asserts that most of the town's population at the time was still of Mexican and Tarascan origin, though many natives from Tonalá had also settled there.

<sup>52</sup>(May 1563, AGI, Patronato 21, No. 4, R. 3). This includes the *Relación de lo que descubrió Diego de Ibarra en la provincia de Copala, llamada Topiamé...* 1563.



of San Juan with his entire army in the search for Copala,<sup>53</sup> which he did not find. Instead he discovered the mines of Indehé, Santa Bárbara, and Coneto, and after dispatching most of his men back to San Juan he took a small vanguard of thirty five soldiers to follow a native woman into the western mountains, as she promised to show him another large and populous town. The village of Topia that he sighted near the end of April had in his opinion "the looks of another Mexico" ("an undated soldier's report," AGI, Patronato, 21, No. 4, R. 3) so he brought his army from San Juan and took over the place.

After the successful attack on Topia, Ibarra crossed the mountains and descended to the coastal plain of present day Sinaloa, arriving at San Miguel de Culiacán sometime in the beginning of 1564. The village was by then almost abandoned as death and desertion had caused a severe population drop since Nuño de Guzmán left in 1531.<sup>54</sup> Diego de Ibarra's 1563 *Relación*, Francisco de Ibarra's 1574 report, the chronicle by Baltasar de Obregón (1924 [c. 1584]) and the *Relación* by Antonio Ruiz (1974 [c. 1595-1600]) on the conquest of Sonora and Sinaloa narrate this part of his doings. Despite the discrepancies that all four accounts display when it comes to the sequence and dates of the events, it is clear that the governor headed North from Culiacán across the Mayo and Yaqui valleys, venturing into an almost unexplored territory until reaching the ruins of the ancient city of Casas Grandes (Paquimé).<sup>55</sup> Either on leaving or on his way back Ibarra founded the village of San Juan Bautista de Cinaloa (June 1564), from where he would later re-conquer the neighbouring province of Chametla (1565) that had been abandoned thirty years before (Ortega Noriega

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<sup>53</sup> The account of the Mexican and Tarascan Indians who colonised Nombre de Dios also mentions the episode (Barlow & Simson 1943: 24-26), which Ibarra's 1574 Account reports as an excursion to Topia (AGI, patronato, 21, No. 4, R. 2: 6-7v).

<sup>54</sup> It has been observed that by 1550 only twenty five of the ninety six original Spanish colonists were still living there (Ortega Noriega 1993: 40, 42).

<sup>55</sup> Francisco de Ibarra and his men were perhaps the first Spaniards to see these magnificent ruins. The first written description we have of the site is contained in the chronicle by Baltasar de Obregón quoted above (Guevara 1995: 342).

1993: 43-44, Ortega Noriega & del Río 1993: 32-33, Jiménez Moreno 1958: 36-8, 61-62, 99 & Radding 1997: 32).

Although Francisco de Ibarra held the government of Nueva Vizcaya until he died, none of the places he conquered matched his idea of what the *Nuevo Mexico* should have actually looked like, not even the province of Topia that at some point he had considered the most likely candidate. Other captains and missionaries took on his quest later on, as the slave-raiding and Indian-converting incursions brought renewed reports concerning cities and people dressed in cotton north-west from Santa Barbara (modern Parral), the northernmost Spanish enclave until 1581.

#### 4.5.- Cíbola becomes *Nuevo México*: The 1580's non-Authorised expeditions.

The Comprehensive Ordinances for New Discoveries and Population Settlement issued on 13 July 1573 (BNM, 3017, *Bulas y Cédulas para el Gobierno de Indias, siglo XVI*: 281-301)<sup>56</sup> mark a fundamental change in relation to the preceding period of territorial expansion. After their promulgation, conquest was to be substituted for pacification, which meant that grand military expeditions such as Cortés' and Vázquez de Coronado's were forbidden in favour of small scale, peaceful settling enterprises directed by missionaries, who should avoid the exercise of force except for reasons of self-defence (Simmons 1991: 4, Horgan 1963: 185-188). It was within this legal frame and through the missioizing zeal of a few friars that old Cíbola was revived to Spanish eyes, under the name of *Nuevo México*. Other charters similar in character had been issued previously, like the one of December 30, 1549 (BNM, 3045, *Ordenanzas y Cédulas de Indias, S. XVI*: 99-100) whereby the monarchs prohibited any new enterprise of conquest in the Indies. Such a general ban

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<sup>56</sup> A manuscript copy of the same document (*Ordenanzas de Felipe II para los Descubrimientos y Poblaciones Nuevas*) is contained in a different compilation of laws and ordinances also preserved in the National Library of Spain (BNM, 3035, *Ordenanzas de la Hacienda Real en Indias*: 282-316). The copier of this compilation made a mistake and transcribed the issuing date of the document as 1563 instead of 1573, the correct year.

was, of course, nothing more than wishful thinking, as the colonists in the New World were not prepared to cancel their ambitions of wealth and power. In this sense the 1573 ordinance was much more realistic.

Between 1580 and 1590 four small expeditions, two organised by missionaries and two by lay adventurers, entered the region that would later become *Nuevo México*, but none established a permanent grip.

In 1581, encouraged by the Spanish residents of the northernmost mining centres in Nueva Vizcaya, the Franciscan friar Agustín Rodríguez recruited two fellow monks, Juan de Santa María and Francisco López, to evangelise the lands formerly visited by Francisco Vázquez de Coronado. Parting from Santa Barbara towards the beginning of June on a journey that lasted nearly a year, an escort of nine soldiers headed by Francisco Sánchez de Chamuscado<sup>57</sup> and nineteen Indian guides, interpreters and carriers accompanied the adventurous friars (Bancroft 1889: 76-77, Horgan 1963: 214, Cutter 1992: 32).

For a couple of months the expeditionaries journeyed north along the rivers Conchos and Grande (today Bravo, which they called Guadalquivir)<sup>58</sup> and were probably the first group of Spaniards to visit Acoma and Zuñi since 1542. According to Baltasar de Obregón (1924 [c. 1584]: 243, 246-247) and a couple of reports by participant soldiers (Escalante & Barrando, Hernando Gallego), after crossing the Conchos river they heard about both the miracles performed by Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and the brutality that Vázquez de Coronado and his men exercised. Taking advantage of these memories they promised that no harm would ensue from their visit and distributed crosses, instructing the natives to show them to any Spaniard they may come across in the future to avoid mistreatment. Gaining the Indians' confidence, however, was not as easy as Rodríguez imagined. In December 1581 (or January 1582)

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<sup>57</sup> The other soldiers were: Hernando Barrado, Pedro de Bustamante, Hernando Gallego, Pero Sánchez Chávez, Felipe de Escalante, Pedro de Herrera, Pero Sánchez de Fuensalida, and Juan Sánchez de Fuensalida.

<sup>58</sup> Other names for this river: Concepción, Magdalena, Turbio, Bravo (Cutter 1992 : 32).

friar Francisco López (or Juan de Santa María) was killed at a place called Puaray, in the Pecos river area. Most members of the expedition then returned to New Spain, and upon arriving at Chihuahua (April 1582) they informed that the surviving friars, who had preferred to stay behind, might be in danger. As a consequence, the Franciscan order prepared a small rescue mission (Bancroft 1889: 75-81, Beck 1969: 49-50, Lamar & Truett 1997: 68, Forbes 1960: 49-55, Obregón 1924 [c. 1584]: 10 & 15, Cutter 1992: 31-33, Zárate Salmerón 1965 [c. 1629]: 125-128).

Organised from the city of Durango by friar Bernardino Beltrán, this modest enterprise headed by a certain Antonio de Espejo lacked royal approval and, of course, official funding. Nevertheless, the governor of Nueva Vizcaya granted a late authorisation, once the expedition was already on its way, as he endorsed the permission initially given by the major of Cuatro Ciénegas, Juan de Ontiveros (Forbes 1960: 55-56, Ocaranza 1934: 7). Four soldiers and two friars, one called Pedro de Heredia, were all the men that Espejo took along. They left from San Bartolomé (today Allende) in the winter of 1582 and having confirmed, after visiting the Great Plains, Acoma, and Zuñi, that the friars they had come to rescue had been killed they parted West in search of a golden lake they never found (Beck 1969: 50-51, Cutter 1992: 32-34, Zárate Salmerón 1965 [c. 1629]: 129). Back in Santa Barbara, New Spain, in September 1583, Espejo wrote a long report stating that he had discovered fifteen provinces full of people, which altogether he named Nueva Andalucía, although others called the place "*el Nuevo México*" (Ocaranza 1934: 7). One of his companions, Diego Pérez de Luxán also wrote a report on the expedition.

The Agustín Rodríguez incident is fundamental. Not only because the term *Nuevo México* was then first applied to the land formerly called Cíbola, which the friar re-named as province of *San Felipe del Nuevo Mexico*, but also because it can be considered the immediate antecedent of Oñate's definitive conquest expedition.

In November 1582, before Espejo initiated his non-authorised excursion, Rodrigo del Río de Losa, lieutenant Captain General of Nueva Galicia requested the king for a reinforcement of at least 300 soldiers to punish the murder of friar Agustín Rodríguez' companion. The king's answer came as a royal chart, dated September 1583, that ordered the facts be investigated by a private individual who would be commissioned to gather, on his own expense, a large and powerful army to subdue the province. During the following years many petitioners submitted their offers to the viceroyal and metropolitan authorities.

Although most of these petitions were rejected —Cristóbal Martín, Francisco Díaz de Vargas, Antonio de Espejo, Baltasar de Obregón, and Gaspar Castaño de Sosa<sup>59</sup>— two contracts, which never came into effect, were signed before the authorities finally entrusted Juan de Oñate with the enterprise (Gutiérrez 1991: 46, Bancroft 1889: 79-81 & 94-97, Ocaranza 1934: 7-9, Beck 1969: 51-52). The first, approved by viceroy Villamanrique on March 11, 1589, was granted to Juan Bautista de Lomas y Colmenares, a rich resident of the mines of Las Nieves, in Nueva Galicia. By virtue of this document the petitioner committed himself to assemble an army absorbing the full expense, receiving in exchange the government and general captaincy of *Nuevo México* for six generations, with a salary of 8000 ducats, the title of Count or Marquis for himself and his offspring, and the right to fortify harbours in the Northern and Southern Seas. But as neither the King nor the *Consejo de Indias* ever confirmed this agreement Villamanrique's successor, Luis de Velasco, signed a new contract in 1592 with Francisco de Urdiñola, who was nevertheless arrested before departing on charges of poisoning his wife (Bancroft 1889: 92-100).

Even though no official expedition into *Nuevo México* took place until Oñate's, a couple of illegal attempts at penetrating the region occurred in the years immediately preceding his departure. In July 1590 Cristóbal Marín and

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<sup>59</sup> Their offers are preserved in the *Archivo General de Indias*.

Gaspar Castaño de Sosa, lieutenant governor of Nuevo León, led 170 persons from Nueva Almaden (today Monclova) —including women and children— to colonise the now famous province. Captain Juan Morlete and fifty soldiers were immediately sent after the would-be colonists, who had to withdraw in March 1591, in compliance with the detention order presented against Castaño de Sosa (Bancroft 1889: 100-107, Forbes 1960: 67-73, Cutter 1992: 34-5). A couple of years later<sup>60</sup> Francisco Leyva Bonilla and Juan de Humaña,<sup>61</sup> whom the governor of Nueva Vizcaya had sent to fight against rebellious Indians in the frontier, made their own illegal incursion. Despite the obscurity surrounding the events concerning this "*entrada*" —there is only one brief *Relación* by an Indian survivor called Jusepe or José who joined Juan de Oñate in 1598<sup>62</sup>— we know that a certain Pedro Cazorla was unsuccessfully sent after the insubordinates and that once they entered "unknown" territory Humaña killed Leyva Bonilla, which provoked the desertion of the few Mexican Indians who had joined in the adventure (Bancroft 1889: 108-109 Cutter 1992: 35-6).

In his *Relaciones* on the history of *Nuevo México* Gerónimo de Zárate Salmerón (1965 [c. 1629]: 155-156) wrote that Juan de Oñate found remains of horses and iron objects in Quivira, which he considered to be sound evidence that Humaña was killed there. He also mentioned the adventure's three survivors: the Indian Jusepe, a mulatto woman and a Spaniard, Alonso Sánchez, who established himself in the region and by 1599 was enjoying the natives' respect. Commenting on this text more than one century later, father Juan Armando Niel (1965 [1710]: 259-263 & 273) deplored Zárate Salmerón's imprecision regarding the 1580-1595 "*entradas*," considering that the Jesuit could have spoken with the Indian Jusepe personally, as he had served as a guide with Oñate and was certainly alive in Zárate's days.

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<sup>60</sup> 1593 according to Cutter (1992: 35), 1594-1596 according to Bancroft (1889: 108).

<sup>61</sup> Antonio Gutiérrez de Humaña according to Cutter (1992: 36).

<sup>62</sup> Cutter (1992: 36) mentions this report but I have not found it.

#### 4.6.- Juan de Oñate and the foundation of *Nuevo México*.

Juan de Oñate's assignment to lead the conquest of *Nuevo México* was a difficult and a much interrupted process. Son of Cristóbal de Oñate, ex-governor of Nueva Galicia, Don Juan was married to a daughter of Juan de Tolosa,<sup>63</sup> grand daughter of Hernán Cortés and great grand daughter of Moctezuma (Horgan 1963: 215-216). He resided in Zacatecas, dedicated to mining and cattle-rising, and was among the richest men in New Spain. It was no doubt on account of his enormous fortune and his kinship to such illustrious families that, as Simmons (1991: 3) observes, viceroy Velasco encouraged him to apply for the post. His appointment and departure, however, were much delayed due to the Viceroy's succession and the late consideration of an offer made by another petitioner.

Based each on a few of several ordinances that authorised or banned Oñate's advance, most historians who have narrated this process since Bancroft (1889: 116-123) provide discordant accounts. Nevertheless the chronology can be fairly well established on the basis of Gaspar de Villagrà's *Historia de la Nueva México* (1610)<sup>64</sup> and three contemporary documents: the minutes which record the act of taking possession of the territory, celebrated April 30, 1598 (*Traslado de la posesión*); the *Memorial de Nuevo México* that either Oñate himself or one of his officials compiled in 1602 to keep the authorities informed of local developments and a general evaluation of Nuevo Mexico's situation, most

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<sup>63</sup> As I noted above, Tolosa had discovered the mines of Zacatecas where he established as first settler, contributing along the years to "pacify" and colonise the region.

<sup>64</sup> Villagrà joined Oñate's party at the village of Llerena in June 1596. He occupied important commissions almost from the beginning. Like other captains he contributed a small company of men that he recruited himself, paying seven thousand pesos of his own resources to buy horses, weapons and clothes for the soldiers. It seems that he served temporarily as governor of the town sometime after the Acoma rebellion, since Oñate addressed him a letter using this title on January 30, 1599 (Villagrà 1900 [1610]: II, 28). He also served as major of Guanaceví and Captain of the region of Tepeguanes in 1602-1603 (Villagrà 1900 [1610]: II, 1-4).

probably written in 1600 by viceroy Zúñiga y Acevedo, Count of Monterrey (*Discurso*).<sup>65</sup>

According to the *Traslado de la posesión* (Villagr  1989 [1610]: 218) the king signed a charter appointing O ate Governor and Captain General of *Nuevo M xico* in June 21, 1595. Viceroy Velasco transmitted the order to O ate in August the 24th (Villagr  1989 [1610]: 126) and then summoned him to court to sign the corresponding *capitulaciones* the 21st of September (*Memorial de Nuevo M xico*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 188). Meanwhile a new viceroy, Gaspar de Z niga y Acevedo, had been appointed and arrived at Veracruz on September 18. Before the succession ceremony took place in November the functionaries discussed the issue by correspondence (Rubio Ma   1983: I, 134-135). As a result, Z niga y Acevedo authorised Velasco to allow O ate to begin preparations for the journey, taking to Santa Barbara the people he had recruited in Zacatecas (October 21, 1595 according to the *Memorial*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 189). Nevertheless, the new Viceroy had to read the contract and confirm its approval, and this only occurred until 15 December 1595.

Although O ate's original petition is lost, Josiah Gregg (1990 [1844]) had the opportunity to see it in 1844. According to his summary, O ate offered to recruit 200 men at his own expense to serve in the dual role of soldier and colonist, as well as to purchase the necessary food and clothes and take enough weapons, mining and blacksmithing tools, medicines, seeds, plows, Indian trade goods, and other items to meet the colonists' requirements. In exchange he asked for the title of *Adelantado*, Governor and General Captain, thirty leagues of land with its vassals, a yearly salary of 8000 ducats and a mining

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<sup>65</sup> The first of these documents, *Traslado de la posesi n que en nombre de Su Magestad tom  Don Juan de Olate de los reynos y provincias de la Nueva M xico; y de las obediencias y vasallaje que los indios de algunos pueblos de los dichos reynos y provincias le dieron en el dicho nombre*, is reproduced by Villagr  (1989 [1610]: 217-224) and is also contained in CODOINAO (XVI: 88-142). The other two, contained in the same collection, are: *Memorial sobre el descubrimiento de Nuevo M xico y sus acontecimientos, a os desde 1595 a 1602* (CODOINAO, XVI: 188-208), and *Discurso y proposici n que se hace a vuestra magestad de lo tocante a los descubrimientos del Nuevo M xico por sus cap tulos de puntos diferentes* (CODOINAO, XVI: 228-276).



tribute exemption. Apart from reducing Oñate's salary to 6000 ducats a year, when viceroy Zúñiga y Acevedo approved the contract on the 15th of December, he also moderated the judicial faculties and tribute privileges originally granted, and he ordered everything to be ready in Santa Bárbara by January 1596 rather than at the end of March, deadline that Oñate had first proposed<sup>66</sup> (Horgan 1963: 216, Simmons 1991: 5, Cutter 1992: 39-40, Bancroft 1889: 116-123).

The reduction of the time granted to conclude Oñate's recruitment campaign and preliminary preparations reveals the urgency that the colonial authorities felt for securing a territory that, as the ever more frequent non-authorised "*entradas*" of the previous decade and the numerous rejected petitions demonstrated, would not cease to awaken the colonising ambitions of private adventurers.

People living in the frontier would not give up their desire to appropriate this highly attractive region, so it was peremptory to incorporate them into an officially controlled project. Otherwise the risk was they might organise their own autonomous enterprises, which could easily contest the authority of the Crown and her vicerojal representatives. In addition, the shattering of the Great Armada that Philip II had sent against Queen Elizabeth in 1588 had left the northern frontier dangerously exposed (Simmons 1991: 9), renovating the fears that, between 1560 and 1573, had led Cuba's governor, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, to insist on the exploration of northern New Spain; namely, that the English and French penetration in the heart of the continent threatened New Spain's mining districts in the north and even Spanish trade with China and the Moluccas (Velázquez 1974: 34-37). Thus if the defence policy had initially been centred on the sea and the fortification of Florida, the strategy now shifted

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<sup>66</sup> Mendieta mentions in his *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana* (1997 [1596]: 402) that Juan de Oñate's expedition is under preparation. Other secondary but early sources are: Torquemada (1975 [1615]: I, 670ss.) Zárate Salmerón (1965 [c. 1629]: 23-24), Alegre (1956-1960: I, 310-311), Niel (1965 [1710]: 89-94), Alcedo (1786: III, 189), Ribera Bernárdez (1945: 31-34).

towards achieving an effective inland colonisation over the unknown area extending between Florida and California. A region which held, according to Baltasar de Obregón (1924 [c. 1584]: 202-204), the enormous and scarcely visited provinces of Cíbola, Paquimé, Quivira and *Nuevo México*.

Despite all this and even after Oñate accepted his assignment under the modified *capitulaciones* in Mexico City on December 16, 1595, starting on his way to Santa Barbara in January 1596, new delays were forced upon him (Horgan 1963: 218-219). Since February 1596 Zúñiga y Acevedo had reported to the king the state of *Nuevo México's* affairs (*Memorial de Nuevo México*, in CODOINAO: XVI), hoping no doubt that his decisions would be simply acknowledged and his letters filed away. But the monarch and his councils were clearly not aware of the importance of a quick decision, and since the *Consejo de Indias* had made its own election, granting the enterprise to a Spanish suitor, Pedro Ponce de León, the king issued a royal charter (May 8, 1596 according to the *Memorial de Nuevo México*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 192) ordering Oñate to stop until new instructions, so as the *Consejo* could ponder both proposals.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, by 1598 Oñate had only managed to reach the already established frontier settlements of the viceroyalty.

On 6 June 1596 the Viceroy commissioned Lope de Ulloa to visit Oñate in Zacatecas in order to determine how far advanced he was in gathering the people and supplies stipulated in his *capitulaciones*. Of course this was an important consideration when it came to deciding whether he or Ponce de León were to be finally granted the expedition's leadership. But although Ulloa notified him in September of the king's order to stop his preparations (*Memorial de Nuevo México*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 193) he was never told the reason behind this order (Horgan 1963: 219). A series of complications regarding this *visita*, that we need not to examine in detail, detained Oñate's advance for almost

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<sup>67</sup> The *Archivo General de Indias* preserves an interesting document that systematically compared the *capitulaciones* signed by Oñate and Ponce de León to see which one was the most advantageous (AGI, Patronato, 22, R.12 [6]).

another year until the Spanish suitor was turned down, a period during which he nevertheless reached the valley of San Bartolomé, near Santa Bárbara. There his army was submitted to a second *visita*, conducted by a certain Juan de Frías Salazar and before the presence of the Viceroy, between December 1597 and January 1598 (*Discurso*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 229-232, Villagr  1989 [1610]: 164-175).

It was January 26, 1598 when O ate's soldiers and would-be colonists—which included 130 families with their cattle (Horgan 1963: 221)—ventured into the wilderness of "tierra inc gnita" (non-subjected territory). viceroy Z niga y Acevedo had already left for Mexico City, having approved the expedition in accordance to the results of the last inspection. The route that O ate followed was new, as he took from the Conchos river a more direct, northward path than previous explorers (Cutter 1992: 40). By the 20th of April the company reached the R o Grande river and ten days later, at the site where the city of El Paso stands today, O ate celebrated the ceremony of possession that placed the province of *Nuevo M xico* under the sovereignty of the Spanish Crown (Horgan 1963: 224, *Traslado de la posesi n*, in Villagr  1989 [1610]: 208-224). Indians in the region took their precautions: Shortly after the ceremony took place a group of Athabascans, known since then as Manso Indians, came to the camp making the signal of the cross and saying "*manxo, manxo, micos, micos*" for *mansos* (peaceful) and *amigos* (friends) (*Discurso*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 250-251). Rather than indicating, as Forbes (1960: 78-79) contends, that local groups were familiar with Spanish language and culture, the anecdote shows that they had not forgotten the disgrace that ensued from Spanish presence and so they had learnt what they thought to be the appropriate procedure to avert it.

At the site of El Paso, O ate divided his company. On May the 1st, 1598 he took a small vanguard group and moved North along the Rio Grande. Towards the end of the month they left behind a large *despoblado* and came

across a different village every day, some abandoned (*Discurso*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 247-252). This was the cluster of settlements that Niza had heard about before reaching Vacapa and which he stopped to see on his way back to Mexico; that is, the eastern Pueblos of the Río Grande valley where Vázquez de Coronado had also been (Horgan 1963: 228-229). Finally on June the 30th the vanguard camped in a town they named Santo Domingo, in the Zuñi area, where Oñate summoned the chiefs of thirty one Pueblos to have them swear obedience. There he also incorporated as guides two Mexican Indians that Castaño de Sosa had left behind in 1590 (*Discurso*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 253-256, Horgan 1963: 229).

As soon as the bulk of the company, which had stayed behind with the carts and cattle, reached Santo Domingo (July 27), the expedition moved East towards the Río Grande valley, and the 11th of August they established the capital of the province at the town of Caypa, which they renamed San Juan de los Caballeros (*Discurso*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 259-262, Cutter 1992: 42, Gutiérrez 1991: 50, Beck 1969: 54). But the great kingdom of *Nuevo México* vanished behind adobe houses and deserted lands, as neither precious metals nor a city like Tenochtitlan were actually found.

On the 20th of August 1598, forty five soldiers were caught planning desertion. The lesson of loyalty that Oñate prepared, which consisted of a death sentence followed by a general absolution next day (Horgan 1963: 231, *Discurso*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 263) required to be supervised by wider exploration. Therefore, as autumn began Oñate sent Vicente de Saldívar to explore the prairies to the East and find Quivira while he led a small party westwards in search of the Mar del Sur. The events that ensued are dramatic. Vicente de Saldívar returned to San Juan on the 8th of November, having found nothing he considered worth pursuing. His brother Juan, in charge of the capital, took then a party of thirty one soldiers to look for Oñate and tell him the sad news. At the town of Acoma, the only one that had not yet pled

allegiance to the Crown, Juan de Saldívar requested supplies from the chief Zutacapan thereby causing a local uprising with terrible consequences (*Discurso*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 264, 268, Horgan 1963: 232-236).

According to Gutiérrez (1991: 52) —and I agree— we must seek for the explanation of the violent eruption of the Acoma rebellion in the different views that Indians and Spaniards held regarding good exchange. For what the Indians thought they gave as gifts —a small amount of water and wood, a few tortillas and some maize— with the attendant obligations of reciprocation, the Spaniards thought was surrendered as tribute and were consequently expecting to receive more. Thus on the 4th of December Saldívar took eighteen soldiers to the top of Acoma mesa to help him collect the corn flour that he had requested three days before. There, Indian warriors attacked them as non-wanted intruders after an all-too-confident Spaniard stole a pair of turkeys and raped a woman. To punish the death of ten soldiers, two servants and captain Juan de Saldívar, killed in the skirmish that ensued, Oñate sent a punitive expedition on January 12, 1599, composed by seventy soldiers under the command of Vicente de Saldívar. Acoma surrendered twelve days later, having lost 800 lives, counting men, women and children, as well as 580 people who were made prisoners. Not happy with this result, Oñate organised a military trial against the town as a whole and the sentence was merciless. Every man over twenty five years old was condemned to serve twenty five years of personal labour and be mutilated losing one foot while every woman over twelve years old and every man between twelve and twenty five was sentenced to serve twenty years of personal labour (*Discurso*, in CODOINAO: XVI, 268-272, Gutiérrez 1991: 53, Horgan 1963: 236-242, Beck 1969: 55-57, Cutter 1992: 44-45).

Once the rebellion was thus put down and punished, the province's capital city was moved across the Río Grande river, from San Juan to the Indian village of Ohke that was renamed San Gabriel (Horgan 1963: 243, Cutter

1992: 42). Then Oñate wrote a report-letter to the Viceroy dated March 2, 1599 (in CODOINAO: XVI, 302-315), but his request of reinforcement was only attended the following year, when a royal charter issued on May 31st ordered the Viceroy to furnish the *Nuevo México* enterprise with all the support it might need. The party of seventy three soldiers that Zúñiga y Acevedo sent in compliance with this instruction, which arrived at San Gabriel in December 1600 (Bancroft 1889: 132-147, Beck 1969: 57-58), was too small to represent much help. At the beginning of 1601 Oñate sent an official embassy with an optimistic report to the Viceroy; nevertheless, one of his messengers, captain Gasco de Velasco, wrote a letter contradicting his lofty description of the land. Moreover, he accused Oñate and the colonists of cruelty and mistreatment of docile and generous Indians, whose women were permanently abused and who suffered from the constant stealing of their food supplies as well. Completely ignoring this intrigue Oñate took 100 men in search of Quivira, travelling across the prairies between the months of June and November of 1601 (Horgan 1963: 244-245, 247).

In response to the secret report written by captain Velasco, the Viceroy ordered Don Francisco de Valverde y Mercado to interrogate three men who had forsaken *Nuevo México* and sent Velasco's report and a summary of Oñate's letters to the King. Although Valverde's interrogatories were not conclusive, in San Gabriel things worsened to such a degree that lieutenant Peñalosa was forced to allow the malcontents to return to New Spain. Thus the town was virtually deserted when the governor returned from his journey to Quivira. In view of the circumstances, Oñate decided to send Vicente de Saldivar to Madrid in 1602 to request royal support in the form of men, money and supplies, but the complaints set forth by the deserter-settlers, that the province contained no precious metals, that the climate was harsh and the natives ferocious, and the accusations of Oñate's of power hungry behaviour and misdemeanour had already reached the court. *Nuevo México* had now become a problem for the

Viceroy, the *Audiencia* and the king, who pondered, in secrecy, the charges against its governor for two years, considering how to depose him without the risk of having the entire colony disintegrate (Horgan 1963: 247-251, Cutter 1992 : 45-46).

Although the Crown decided to send no support, until a final resolution was made, the king meanwhile authorised Oñate to explore the coast of Labrador. The expedition was carried out between October 1604 and April 1605. The party included thirty soldiers, two Franciscan friars and some Hopi Indians, who reached the Colorado river —then baptised as Río de Buena Esperanza— and followed it down to its mouth into the Mar de Cortés (Beck 1969: 60, Cutter 1992: 47, Ocaranza 1934: 27-29).<sup>68</sup> This was the last enterprise that Oñate was allowed to undertake, as the following year the king instructed the Viceroy to forbid new explorations in the area and to discretely summon Oñate to Mexico. The fate of the province was pondered until December 1608, when a report by friars Lázaro Jiménez and Isidro Ordóñez asserting that 700 Puebloans had been converted, convinced the Crown to keep a foot hold in the colony but to forbid further exploration into outlying areas. Only a governor directly appointed by the king and fifty married soldiers for defence and peace keeping purposes would remain. Consequently Oñate was dismissed and subjected to a trial, being substituted by a certain Pedro de Peralta (Gutiérrez 1991: 54-55, Bancroft 1889: 148-157, Beck 1969: 58-60, Horgan 1963: 251-252).

For more than half a century passed 1609 the colony survived precariously without receiving resources or new colonists until 1676, when the Viceroy sent fifty soldiers, 100 horses and several workers, including fifty seven convicts, in response to the desperate request that a Franciscan friar made on account of the rebellious mood that repeated epidemics and hunger had promoted among the Indians. Despite this timely response, the reinforcements were not enough and a widespread revolt exploded in August 1680, drawing

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<sup>68</sup> Ocaranza includes a summary of the report that Escobar gave to Oñate after discovering the mouth of the Colorado River.

the participation of most of the local indigenous groups, who according to Forbes (1960: 74) had become horse users, at least in southern New Mexico and Texas, since the 1590s. After the fierce attack that rebel Indians waged on the village of Santa Fe (August 12) —capital of the province since 1610— governor Otermín decided to flee with the survivors, arriving towards the beginning of October to the region of El Paso, in Nueva Vizcaya (Horgan 1963: 261-269, Ocaranza 1937: 39-52, Cutter 1992: 81-96, González de la Vara 1992: 11-18). Shortly after he attempted to re-conquer the province but was unable to consolidate a position, only managing to burn several villages and take some prisoners. The remains of the colony stayed in El Paso for the following twelve years, and although several attempts at recovering the territory were made under successive governors (1681, 1688, 1689) it was only in 1696, after four years of continuous war, that governor Diego de Vargas Zapata broke down Indian resistance and re-established Spanish domination in the area (Horgan 1963: 272-273, Cutter 1992: 97-110, González de la Vara 1992: 32-35).

Oñate's deposition marks the end of the period I cover in this thesis, for it was during his explorations that the imaginary kingdom of *Nuevo México* was first reified and then disavowed. Nevertheless, the great rebellion of 1680 deserves a few comments because it represents, among other things, a local development of the idea of Aztlán-Chicomoztoc-Nuevo Mexico. The revolt, led by a Tewa Indian called Popé who had been prisoner of a *presidio* garrison (González de la Vara 1992: 24-25), was a typical millenarian movement of the kind described by Peter Worsley (1968) for Melanesia and the Pacific. That is, a movement of resistance to colonial rule articulated around the prophetic declarations of a charismatic leader proclaiming the end of one age and the dawn of another, characterised by the reversal of current conditions of inequality generated by the colonial order and frequently involving the inversion of current affairs.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Millenarian movements of this kind differ from those of the European Middle Ages that Norman Cohn (1970 [1957]) studied in their direct link to colonialism. As a response to the external imposition of a colonial rule they seek to re-establish the order prevailing before the external intervention took place and they frequently represent that return as an inversion of the current social order. Thus it is not the kingdom of God described in the Apocalypses that they pursue, but rather a utopian order of abundance and freedom which is generally expected



The behaviour and ritualised practice of the Pueblo rebels, like the rhetoric that Popé used to recruit them, was indeed formally very similar to those characteristic of Melanesian Cargo Cults. It is clear from an eye-witness' letter quoted by Ocaranza (1934: 43) describing how in certain occasion, at the town of Santa Anna, Popé prepared a large table with the food and things used by the Spaniards and then, taking the seat of honour he ordered chalices to be brought for a toast. Through his preaching Popé convinced the rebels that he was the lieutenant of Moctezuma and as such he periodically received the visit of three spirits who came from the underworld through the lake of Copalla—then locally considered to be the place of origin of both Pueblo and Nahua Indians—to give instructions and provide their superhuman support (Zárate Salmerón 1965 [c.1629]: 190-194). Like the charismatic leaders studied by Worsley, Popé announced to his followers the overthrow of the existing society and the reinstatement of the traditional order, but this time the Indians, united as one people, would live in a doubly bountiful kingdom. Thus Popé was elected chief of a confederation of Indian peoples once the Spaniards decided to flee after a series of exceedingly violent attacks that could be described, in Taussig's terms, as mimicry of the violence that the colonists themselves had displayed one hundred years before (Taussig 1993: 64-65). Traditional dances suppressed by the missionaries were re-instated, catholic marriages were invalidated and the use of Christian names prohibited, and, most importantly, it was agreed that only local crops like maize, cotton, beans, and squash were to be grown in the future (González de la Vara 1992: 26-29).

The history of this rebellion and the brief period of local utopian independence that ensued could make themselves a separate thesis. I only bring it up to remark the fact that hybrid Hispanic/Nahua notions about Nuevo Mexico as the "recovered" original abode of the ancient Mexicans were so powerful that they even articulated native resistance among Oasis American peoples.

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to be brought by the ancestors who will make themselves present in a material, objectified form. David Martin has studied the rapid spread of protestantism in late twentieth century Latin America from this perspective (Martin 1990).

## **Part Two**

***"Nuevo México"* as an Imaginary World**

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE MEDIAEVAL HYPOTHESIS**

This and the following chapters explore a number of mythical and legendary themes that served the Spanish conquerors to conceptualise the strange realities they faced in the New World. I will focus on the revision of two topical constellations linked to the construction of *Nuevo México*, which I understand as an ill-defined entity with long discursive existence among Indians and Spaniards —be they soldiers, bureaucrats, or settlers— that for a long period did not correspond to any particular geographical place. Chapter five deals with a series of European legendary motifs that many scholars regard as the main "goal providers" for those expeditions that wandered across northern New Spain, and builds a preliminary demonstration for the argument that they did not constitute a significant element in the collective imagination. Chapter six examines the corpus of myths of ancestral origin held by Náhuatl speaking Indians from the highland plateau of Central Mexico that, as I will prove in chapter seven, served as the conceptual axis around which the colonial penetration in the North was organised.

#### **5.1.- Indian and Spanish focused sources.**

Documentary sources available for the study of pre-conquest North America and colonial New Spain comprise a wide variety of printed items, as well as alphabetic and pictorial manuscripts elaborated for all sorts of reasons by Indian, Spanish, or Mestizo authors. For the purpose of my analysis and without pretending to achieve a comprehensive classification, I have divided those materials dealing with historical developments and cultural description in two major categories, according to whether the main issues they address are Indian or Spanish topics. This classification is in part due to the customary use that scholars make of such material. However, it also responds to the practical

need to allow the reader to quickly distinguish, as I write, whether the document referred meant to portray the native discourse I identified in it, or whether this discourse was secondary to the writer's intentions.

Under the category of Spanish-focused sources I include accounts written by Spanish soldiers and settlers who took part in the conquest and exploration of the land, and were obliged (or wanted) to report on the events and their own performance. Some of these texts were intended for publication, like Baltasar de Obregón's *Historia de los descubrimientos antiguos y modrnos de la Nueva España* (1924 [c. 1584]), and the epic poem by Gaspar de Villagrà *Historia de la Nueva México* (1989 [1610]), but many were addressed to particular authorities rather than the public at large. Such is the case of the testimonies rendered before the *Audiencias* on occasion of the customary *Residencia* trials, or any other litigation over the conflicts derived from expeditionary action. The same goes for routine *Hojas de Méritos y Servicios*, that itemised whatever bureaucrats and soldiers considered to have done "in the service of Your Majesty"; and for the innumerable petitions that conquerors and first settlers made to the viceroys and metropolitan authorities. Also within this category fall various reports of missionaries or secular ecclesiastics to their superiors; as well as lists of individuals enrolled and resources invested in concrete journeys, together with the instructions issued for the captains. Essentially, the group comprises documents by Spaniards —and occasionally by Indians or Mestizos— speaking about Spanish actions, failures and achievements; or documents that reflect and represent Spanish interests, in the sense that it is their agency the one emphasised or it is their rights and privileges that are under discussion.

The other category comprises Indian-focused sources produced in the late pre-conquest era and during the colonial times. That is, pictorial records of indigenous forms of knowledge; historical accounts and encyclopaedic works, composed either by Indians or Spaniards with the purpose of understanding,

or conveying, native past, beliefs, and practices; personal memoirs and official reports partially or significantly devoted to ethnographic description; Indian accounts of their own participation in the enterprise of conquest; and a wide variety of bureaucratic and legal documents springing from the administration of Indian issues and the settlement of disputes between Spaniards and Indians or amongst Indians themselves.

Certainly, a good quantity of the material available cannot be classified within any of these categories; either because it concentrates on subjects I do not consider in this thesis, or because it could belong to both, as the chronicles that official historians appointed by the *Consejo de Indias* wrote to register past and current developments in the colonies. My point, however, is not to fit every extant document in this taxonomy but to remark that the two categories of sources it defines are seldom combined as evidence in modern literature, either devoted to draft colonial institutions and policies of conquest, on the one hand, or that on native Mesoamerican civilisations, on the other.

## **5.2.- Indigenous migration / Spanish "de-migration"**

Since the nineteenth century the study of Native Mesoamerican civilisation has primarily relied upon Indian-focused sources written in colonial times, as well as on archaeological evidence and the few pre-conquest pictorial documents that survived the destructive action of Christian invaders and the passage of time.

It is just natural that scholars who attempt to reconstruct indigenous culture in the area at the moment of the Spaniards' arrival, and the process of its development, should turn their attention to those materials portraying indigenous culture and society before (or contemporaneous with) the European intrusion. And so they have done, drawing a great deal of information from painted books elaborated by indigenous authors, both on their own initiative like the *Codex Boturini* or *Tira de la Peregrinación* (the oldest

record we have of Aztec ancestral origin myths), or upon the request of a Spanish patron, like the *Codex Mendoza* (record of the tributary provinces of the so called Aztec empire). Also important for this reconstruction are the treatises on native peoples written or compiled by missionaries such as Diego de Durán (1967 [c. 1579-1581]) or Bernardino de Sahagún (1989 [c. 1558-1577]), and the village or ethnic-based histories and annals that Indian and Mestizo authors composed in the interest of personal or communal betterment, like the writings of Alvarado Tezozómoc (1980 [1598] & 1992 [c. 1600-1610]) or Chimalpahin (1998), and several anonymous short narratives.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous traditions dealing with places of ancestral origin and migration are among the most conspicuous themes these sources address, and they also figure, though in a different manner, in the Spanish-focused sources that modern scholars writing on native societies before the conquest seldom use.

Various ethnic groups in Mesoamerica claimed that their ancestors were foreign to the lands they occupied themselves, having left their primeval abode following the mandate of a patron god to begin a long "pilgrimage" that would eventually lead them (as a people) to a glorious future in a faraway country. Collective rights over particular lands in a highly contested territory were thus legitimised with the grant by a god in the distant past. It is not coincidental that peoples in the central highlands, the Maya area, the Mixteca, and the West, articulated their foundational narratives around this theme (Navarrete 1999: 247); for they lived within the most densely populated region of Mesoamerica during the period to which such traditions belong. Indeed, the need to justify territorial occupation and political dominance in part explains why migration narratives were cast in the same mould over a large territory and across ethno-linguistic boundaries.

Rather than contributing to the enormous amount of scholarly literature dealing with the symbolic meaning, or the cultural and political significance that

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<sup>1</sup> Most of these Indian historians wrote at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. See chapter six below.

such narratives held for their indigenous creators in the pre-conquest era, I am interested in analysing the importance they had for the colonial enterprise, an issue that has been rarely addressed.

Several authors have indicated that a European mediaeval imagery served as one of the most important incentives in the carving out of the northern provinces of New Spain (e.g. Gandía 1929: 63, Leonard 1944, Gil 1989a, Pastor Bodmer 1992: 106-107). But even when it is true that European sources concerning the New World frequently mention the Amazons, the Fountain of Eternal Youth and the lost island of Antilla, such mediaeval figures came up in isolation every time they were referred to in continental North America and implied no organic relation between the particular undertakings where they appeared. Thus, although often invoked in a number of contexts I will analyse further down, they never achieved the quality of meaningful links between actual experience and dreamed expectation that could have made separate endeavours appear as one continued enterprise to the actors involved. In contrast, the Azteca / Mexica migration story articulated in one single process, that culminated in the foundation of *Nuevo México*, a series of expeditions carried out in separate geographical areas that shared nothing but a northerly position in relation to the Valley of Mexico, heartland of both the ancient Aztec empire and colonial New Spain.<sup>2</sup> It provided, with the location of its starting and ending points, and the main stops and events along the route, the programmatic basis that the universe of fabulous referents brought from Europe failed to supply.

Indeed, several accounts on the conquest of New Spain, written by Spanish authors throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, highlight the place where the ancient Mexicans came from as one of the principal aims of those expeditions towards northerly routes organised from Mexico city.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that in many colonial documents the term Mexican is applied to all the Náhuatl speakers from the central highlands, including the Aztecs, actually the only ones who called themselves Mexica.

Furthermore, some authors even identify certain features of the landscape they saw in the North as traces of the events occurred during the Azteca / Mexica migration. To take two of many possible examples: In his *Historia de los descubrimientos antiguos y modernos de la Nueva España*, Baltasar de Obregón (1924 [c. 1584]: 10) wrote that Hernando Cortés and Antonio de Mendoza intended to "discover the origin, coming, root and main of the ancient Culgua Mexica, seriously suspecting that numerous Indians, towns and riches awaited there to be subjected to our holy Catholic faith."<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, Gaspar de Villagrà maintained in his book on the conquest of *Nuevo México* (1989 [1610]: 82-85) that the army found clear vestiges indicating that a particular spot along the way was the point where the native god Huitzilopochtli once appeared before the wandering Aztecs.

Statements of this kind are not only present in this type of reflective texts, composed several years after the narrated events with the intention to provide general overviews in which memories of personal experience are supplemented with information from other sources. We also find them in all sorts of petitions, legal claims or attestations submitted to the viceroys or metropolitan authorities in connection with ongoing or projected journeys. My review of a fraction of such materials suggests that the legitimacy of the colonial penetration in the North was anchored, to a large extent, in the image of the Nahuas' primeval abode, and hence it was represented —and sometimes lived— as a backward reconstruction in time and space of the route followed by the forefathers of the Aztecs and other Náhuatl speaking peoples, the procedure being an "un-walking" of the ancestral way, a "de-migration".

The demonstration of this hypothesis requires a careful analysis of the textual evidence produced in connection with those expeditions that brought under colonial rule the territory located beyond the northern limits of the

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<sup>3</sup> In the Spanish text we read: "descubrir el origen, venida, raíz y tronco de los antiguos culguas mexicanos, teniendo sospecha seria de gran número de indios, poblaciones e riquezas, para sugetarlos al gremio de nuestra santa fe católica."



ancient Aztec empire, which I do in chapter seven. Drawing out the scattered passages referring to pre-conquest migrations from such material is essential to elucidate how far Spanish strategies and expectations were moulded after this particular motif. Also important is to determine which among different versions of Nahua migration history could have actually served as the "basis-tradition" for the conquerors; that is, the particular body of narratives to which the Spaniards concerned had access and the channels through which they became acquainted with them, a subject I explore in chapter six.

Additional methodological implications that I briefly turn to examine resulted from this investigation on the performative capacities shown by indigenous discourse in the colonial context.

Nahua pre-conquest traditions of ancestral origin seem to have acquired renewed relevance for natives themselves as the penetration into the north advanced. At least half the Indian-focused sources containing migration accounts were elaborated between 1540 and 1600. It is precisely this period when the subjugation of Nueva Galicia, Nueva Vizcaya, Sonora, and *Nuevo México* was achieved, thanks to the massive participation of Indians from Central Mexico. However, scholars who attempt to understand the nature and significance of such traditions seldom look at Spanish-focused sources associated with the exploration and conquest of those provinces; thereby missing the fact that their use, in connection with the Indian-focused sources they traditionally employ, can contribute to understand the cultural meanings that Indian communities attached to their wilful collaboration in the colonial enterprise, as well as the cultural effects that such a collaboration produced among Indians and Spaniards alike.

Consider the following fact: Nearly all the indigenous histories written in European script that dealt extensively with the Azteca / Mexica migration were contemporaneous with the expedition that accomplished the definitive establishment of the province of *Nuevo México* and the first years of its

existence; that is, from 1597 to 1631. Their authors came from the central highlands, a region that contributed numerous "auxiliary troops" for the undertaking. Hence, migration accounts not only continued to fulfil the same function they had in pre-Hispanic times; that is, to define and defend the legitimacy of the polities to which they belonged (Navarrete 2000: 69). If they were brought about to support politico-territorial claims, their vindication capacity was now also projected to the future as well as played out on the past.

This argument needs to be refined, of course. Meanwhile it clearly illustrates the fact that the body of literature commonly used for the assessment of Nahua ancestral migrations must be studied in close relation with the involvement of indigenous communities in the northward colonising enterprise. Particular attention should be given to the rights and claims that particular Indian communities could derive from the new, ever-changing, politico-geographic map, according to the position each of them came to occupy in relation to other competing Indian communities *viz a viz* the Spanish overlordship. The systematic comparison between Indian and Spanish focused sources therefore reveals a situation of cultural exchange and adaptation far more deep and complex than we tend to assume.

Summarising: This and the following chapters provide evidence to substantiate several interconnected arguments. First, that native American discourse, more than European mediaeval imagery, rendered the colonial advance in the North coherent because several motifs, central to indigenous accounts of ancestral migration, became not only the common idiom but also the arena for the negotiation of rights and privileges to which different parties involved aspired. Second, that playing the game in the terms provided by such discourse, the Spaniards granted it with authoritative status and could therefore appropriate indigenous ideas to mould their own expectations. Third, that indigenous interests and understandings not only worked their way through a modified Spanish consciousness but also had social consistency through Indian

agency in itself, which means that the colonial encounter had a dialogical character at the level of both discourse and practice. Fourth, that cultural interaction between Indians and Spaniards took the form of an uneven mixture of imposition, resistance, collaboration, borrowing, revivalism, and misunderstanding that, in the long run, worked in favour of European domination.

The rest of this chapter deals with the principal themes of mediaeval imagery I identified in Spanish-focused which refer to the conquest and colonisation of northern New Spain, together with a brief review of academic assessments on the topic, leaving for chapter six the Azteca / Mexica ancestral migration as depicted in Indian-focused sources.

### **5.3.- Marvels and monsters coming from Europe.**

Traditions of ancestral origin held by Indians from Central Mexico often have been ignored by scholars devoted to the sixteenth century exploration and conquest of northern New Spain. This neglect is due in part to the widespread assumption that Spanish conquerors designated and thus assimilated the new American reality with mediaeval terms, many times acting on the basis of imaginary geographies that coloured their vision with European monsters and marvels (Weckmann 1951: 132; Ladero Quesada 1994: 132). The following quotation from Lewis Hanke exemplifies this line of interpretation, heavily resting on the argument that fantastic beings and places, such as the Amazons or the Island of Antilia, that populate early accounts on the Caribbean islands, are also associated with later explorations in New Spain, Florida, and the South American jungles:

The wealth of ideas and legends developed with such luxuriance during the Middle Ages was transferred at once to America; this mediaeval influence was especially marked during the early years [... when conquerors] sought for the Fountain of Youth or tried to locate—in the general region of Nebraska and Dakota—the Seven Enchanted Cities which were believed to have been established by seven Portuguese bishops who had fled there when the Arabs invaded the Iberian Peninsula. (Hanke 1959: 3)

Other historians devoted to tracing the influence of European thought and institutions across the Atlantic sea have elaborated upon similar considerations (Bourne 1904, Sánchez Albornoz 1983 [1934]; Weckmann 1951 & 1984), coming to the conclusion that one of the most powerful stimuli behind the enterprise of conquest was the desire "to find confirmation for the existence of the marvellous" as it had been imagined in the Middle Ages, together with a crusading drive deeply seated in the Spanish society of that period, and a crude ambition for precious metals. The argument is particularly prominent in a number of studies concerned, specifically, with the role of popular culture—literary and otherwise—in moulding the personal attitude of early Spanish conquerors, as well as the way in which they perceived and portrayed America. Some of these works are global overviews or general discussions; therefore, they draw evidence from the whole continent (Gandía 1929, Leonard 1992 [1949], Rodríguez Prampolini 1948, Hernández Sánchez Barba 1960, Pastor Bodmer 1992). Others are rather monographic accounts, focused on particular areas or concrete journeys generally regarded as outstanding examples of this phenomenon (Olschki 1941, Hammond 1956, Leonard 1944, Gil 1989b).

More important to my study, however, is the fact that this alleged capacity of European culture to encode and condition conquering practice has turned common place in nearly every academic approach to the history of colonial America, no matter the particular aspect under study.<sup>4</sup> Even when rarely discussed at length, it is often posed to explain the colonists' conquering drive and, to a certain extent, the institutional support they received. Thus the search for European fantasies is frequently mentioned in passing, mainly through brief allusions to the most spectacular instances in which the compelling force of popular chimeras is supposedly well established. I will not discuss every possible expression of this academic consensus, neither do I

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<sup>4</sup> This theoretical position stands in heavy contrast to parallel studies of colonialism elsewhere which assume that such non-dialectical agendas are impossible to sustain (e.g. Comaroff & Comaroff 1991 & 1997, Rafael 1993, Said 1993)

intend to build a comprehensive sample for each and every region in the continent. I will refer only to the key role attributed to mediaeval imaginations in the carving out of the northern provinces of New Spain, sometimes looking at the wider context by way of comparison.

Two thematic sources are singled out by modern scholarship as constitutive of the mental baggage of sixteenth century conquistadors.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, a series of legends and fantastic stories resulting from the struggle against the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula. On the other, a mixture of references taken from the fictional romances of chivalry, and the rehabilitation of themes from the classical world. Fernando Ainsa has recently suggested (1992: 45-47 & 80-83) that Europeans saw the discovery of America as the fulfilment of the prophecy contained in Seneca's tragedy, *Medea*, which predicted that one day the earth's limits would be transposed, this being the reason why so many fantastic places and beings described in classical and mediaeval literature were expected to exist side by side in the New World.

The Fountain of Eternal Youth that led Juan Ponce de León and Hernando de Soto to explore Florida between 1512 and 1539,<sup>6</sup> for instance, can be traced back to an episode of a Greek story told by Homer that tells how Medea used the water from a certain spring to rejuvenate Eson, father of the Argonaut Jason. The theme was popularised in the fifteenth century through the writings of Sir John Mandeville, who claimed to have discovered the *Fons Juventutis* near a remote city he called Polombe (Gandía 1929: 49-56; Weckmann 1951: 133; Olschki 1941; Ramos 1988: 399-400; Pastor Bodmer 1992: 106).

Similarly, Amazon related references found in colonial chronicles and documents associated with various journeys throughout the continent, from

<sup>5</sup> The notion of mental baggage was coined by Lucien Fevre to designate the body of concepts and responses to the world that corresponds to each particular civilisation, which is not universally valid for all times and societies and does not necessarily change according to linear progress (Chartier 1995: 18-19).

<sup>6</sup> The events are told by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1959 [1535-1557]: book xv, ch. xi), Antonio de Herrera (1945 [1615]), Garcilaso de la Vega (1982 [1605]), and Francisco López de Gómara 1941 [1552]: ch. civ).

Columbus in the Caribbean (1492-1494) through Hernán Cortés and Nuño de Guzmán in New Spain (1521-1540) to Pedro de Valdivia in Chile (1539) and Francisco de Orellana in the heart of South America (1541)<sup>7</sup>, also belong to a long standing set of European traditions. Since antiquity, Greeks reported that a tribe of warlike women called Amazons existed in Asia Minor. They persisted throughout the Middle Ages, always on the margins of the world known to the Europeans, in the writings of travellers like Mandeville, Marco Polo and Pedro Tafur. At the beginning of the sixteenth century they were incorporated into a couple of popular chivalry tales, *Las Sergas de Esplendián* and *Lisuarte de Grecia*, that provided the story after which the peninsula of California was named (Davidson 1910; Putnam & Priestley 1917: 293; Leonard 1944: 562-564 & 1992 [1949]; Portillo y Diez de Sollano 1947: 121-128; Rodríguez Prampolini 1948; Weckmann 1951: 132; Gil 1989a: 70-82; Pastor Bodmer 1992: 153-168).

Finally, the island of Antilla that gave its name to the Caribbean archipelago appears in several fourteenth and early fifteenth century European maps. It seems to have derived from Plato's tales on the Atlantis but it was later fused with a legend according to which, around the year 734, when the Moors entered Spain, seven Portuguese bishops fled with their people and sailed to an island where each founded a city (Gandía 1929: 9-17 & 59-61; Clissold 1961, Mora 1992: 34-36).

Applied to the study of the area herein concerned, the "mediaevalist hypothesis" has resulted in a general disregard for the fact that Spanish conquerors saw in Náhuatl myths of ancestral origin the promise to accomplish their own particular ambitions. The problem is not simply leaving a primary source of pursuable illusions virtually unexplored. Excessive emphasis on mediaeval imaginations has obscured the importance of indigenous politico-

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<sup>7</sup> Most of these people wrote their own accounts of the events they steered, whether in the form of letters or as formal reports. Chroniclers and historians such as Herrera and Fernández de Oviedo also wrote extensively on them. The only first-hand account on the expedition led by Orellana, however, was written by friar Gaspar de Carvajal (Gil 1989b: 151-153).

territorial interests —embedded in those Nahua traditions— for the development of the colonial enterprise at a regional level. It is true that the Amazons and the Fountain of Eternal Youth were sought, respectively, during the early exploration of California and Florida. It is also possible that, as Gandía (1929: 63) and Pastor Bodmer (1992: 106-107) maintain, Spanish explorers who went after the seven cities of Cíbola that Marcos de Niza described, had the cities supposedly founded by the famous Portuguese bishops in mind. Nevertheless, beyond Mexico to the North as I noted above, these motifs did not provide a programmatic basis for the conquering enterprise because, however repeated, they were often restricted each to a single line of exploration, working at best as individualised obsessions even when they may have occasionally triggered expeditionary action.

The same probably holds true at the continental level, at least for certain themes regularly played upon during the first stage of the conquest, like the Antilla or the Amazons that lost their cohering power quickly. Either they faded away or became localised under the influence of native traditions; or they remained as ready made images at the back of individual consciousness, only being brought back to life sporadically in a wide variety of disjointed contexts.

The quest for El Dorado, a gold-rich civilisation sought between 1529 and 1617 in the Colombian Amazonia and Guyana —first in the regions of Guatavita and Cundinamarca, and then along the Amazon and Orinoco rivers— exemplifies the displacement of European fantasies by local indigenous traditions. It seems indeed that the Spanish belief in the existence of a golden lake where a local chieftain, El Dorado, covered his body every day with a golden film which he removed at night, derived from a 1527 second hand report on the ceremony preceding the investiture of each new *cacique* among Chibcha Indians from the north-west of present-day Colombia. During the ceremony —which had disappeared before the end of the fifteenth century with the virtual extermination of its practitioners at the hands of Muysca

Indians from Bogota— the cargo of a huge balsa raft laden with gold and emeralds was jettisoned in the centre of lake Guatavitá to propitiate the spirits, while the gold-dusted *cacique* bathed himself in its waters. Thus although it has been noted that the legend of El Dorado may also be originally related to such topics as the golden Quersoneso and the gold from Sudan (Bernard & Gruzinski 1996: 499), it was the native story of the Gilded Man what Europeans became obsessed with.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the eventual consignment of European notions of Amazon-like women to the South American jungles, could well be related to the presence of comparable stories among the Kalina and the Xikrin Indians from Surinam and central Brazil, whose traditions, according to various authors, also spoke about aggressive whole-female tribes (Jara 1986; Sued-Badillo 1986).

Having said this, I take the gradual disappearance of the Amazons from New Spain by way of example. Then I turn to the theme of the Seven bishops as it has been unanimously (and mistakenly) considered the fundamental but concealed motivation behind the early exploration of present-day New Mexico.

#### 5.4.- New Spain and the Amazons

In 1510 Garcirodríguez de Montalvo published in Seville *Las Sergas de Esplendián* (deeds of Esplendián), a continuation of a popular Portuguese romance that he had translated and published under the title of *Amadís de Gaula* (Amadis from Gaul) two years before (Putnam & Priestley 1917: 294-295). The novel was a typically mediaeval story, telling the adventures of the son of the great Amadís, both prototypical knights who devoted their lives to the fight for Christendom and the defence of all sorts of honourable causes. Chapters 157 to 178 take place in an island called California, populated by a tribe of Amazons ruled by Queen Calafia and celebrated for its abundance of gold and

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<sup>8</sup> Modern literature on El Dorado is abundant. For this brief account I only used the now classical monograph by Demetrio Ramos (1988 [1973]), and the studies by Hand (1976: 50-51), Gil (1989b), and Ainsa (1992: 121-125).



jewels. The episodes narrate how the Queen, who had joined efforts with the king of Persia and the rest of the pagan princes to capture Constantinople, was defeated in personal combat by the superior skill of Amadís and the beauty of Esplendián, who had travelled to California in response to her own defiance (Leonard 1944: 564-565). The popularity that both novels achieved was so enormous<sup>9</sup> that a number of subsequent romances carried the cycle through successive descendants of Amadís; only one of which, *Lisuarte de Grecia* (1514), spoke about Queen Calafia again.

The existence of Amazons in the New World had been reported by Columbus nearly twenty years before Montalvo wrote his novel, both in his *Epistola Insulis Nuper Inventis*, and in a letter addressed to the monarchs on February-March 1493.<sup>10</sup> Columbus mentions the island of Mateunin (or Martinio), supposedly populated only by women who had male, rather than female occupations.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it was not through Columbus himself that the theme became so inextricably associated with mainland America, but through the hyperbolic manner in which Montalvo used the Admiral's exotic reports to frame his book in the contemporary context, thus capitalising—as Irving Leonard (1944: 565) convincingly suggests— "on a recently renewed interest in an ancient legend":

Know ye that on the right hand of the Indies there is an Island called California, very close to the earthly paradise, and inhabited by black women without a single man among them, for they live almost in the manner of Amazons [...] Their weapons are all of gold as well as the trappings of the wild beasts which they ride after taming, for there is no other metal on the whole island. (quoted by Leonard 1944: 565)

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<sup>9</sup> New editions of *Esplendián* were made in Toledo (1521), Salamanca (1525), Burgos (1526), and Seville (1526). Leonard (1944: 566-567) observes that the period coincides with the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés and the first expeditions he sent to locate gold and silver mines, sometimes giving further instructions about the verification of rumours concerning Amazons.

<sup>10</sup> Partially reproduced by Lunenfeld (1991: 39, 136).

<sup>11</sup> As several authors have pointed out, his conviction to have arrived in Asia probably predisposed Columbus to interpret things he saw and heard in this manner. His will to find confirmation for the standard geographical knowledge of the period, embodied in tales of previous travellers like Marco Polo and in various treatises on cosmography that he was familiar with, particularly Pierre D'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, was discussed in detail by S. E. Morison (1942) and E. O'Gorman (1984 [1958]). More recent assessments on the perceptions and interpretations that Columbus and others gave to the American reality include Todorov (1984), Hulme (1986 & 1994), Greenblat (1991), and Rabasa (1993).

If Columbus' reports on Amazon-like natives were thus picked up in Europe by Montalvo, and, some years later, by the first historian of the New World, Peter Martyr (Mártir de Anglería 1964-1965: I, 408 & II, 631), they disappeared from his own accounts after reaching the gulf of Paria, in Venezuela, during his third voyage (Mason 1986: 57). Perhaps this was due to the unexpected appearance of unequivocal signs suggesting the proximity of an enormous mass of land —that which today we know as South America; an event that challenged Columbus' Asiatic interpretation and made him consider the possibility that he was actually near to the Terrestrial Paradise.

This is not the place to describe the process by which Columbus' Asiatic theory was finally discarded. Note simply that once the identity of the lands he discovered was established as an entirely New World, and from the moment a permanent hold on the Caribbean islands was achieved at the turn of the century, Amazons reappeared along the subsequent exploration of the mainland mass to the North, East and South. But contrary to the argument that Irving Leonard developed and other authors have repeated ever since (e.g. Weckmann 1951: 132, Pastor Bodmer 1992), their importance as guidelines in the area that would later become New Spain was rather secondary, while their actual existence was more controversial than these authors make it appear.

The paradigmatic value that chivalrous literature acquired for Spanish adventurers travelling to the New World is clearly attested in New Spain by two well known incidents. First, the multi-quoted declaration of Bernal Díaz del Castillo stating that upon their arrival conquerors thought that the Valley of Mexico was "like the enchantments they tell of in the book of Amadís" (Díaz del Castillo 1982 [c. 1555]: 151).<sup>12</sup> Second, the fact that the peninsula of California derived its name from the story of Queen Calafia (Weckmann 1951: 132) in a peculiar way.

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<sup>12</sup> Díaz del Castillo wrote his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* around 1555 but it was not published until 1632.

More than blind belief for the marvels of Amadís, Díaz del Castillo's statement indicates that the cycle provided conquerors with conceptual tools for the assimilation of novelty; and, more importantly, that in bestowing their descriptions with an exotic yet familiar imprint, it became an efficient means to transmit the sense of strangeness they experienced to other people who did not cross the Ocean. As Greenblat explains:

In the face of the undreamed, and consequently in a crisis of representation, Bernal Díaz turns to the language of mediaeval romance, with its dream images, its magical castles and temples, its rhetoric of amazement [...] The absolutely other cannot be conveyed at all, cannot perhaps be even perceived, but the romance can at least gesture towards this other, marked with the signs of fantasy, unreality, enchantment (Greenblat 1991: 132-133)

The problem here is indeed one of "representation". What the cycle of Amadís provided was neither programmatic goals nor objects of belief but metaphors. The same can be applied to the chivalrous reference in the naming of California, although in this case Montalvo's novel seems to have had a more instrumental value.

In his *Fourth letter to the king* (October 15, 1524) Hernán Cortés reported that in the province of Cihuatlán one of his captains received news from local *caciques* concerning a nearby island, rich in pearls and inhabited only by women, whose practices he described in the same terms as classical sources described those of Amazons:

And as part of his report concerning those provinces he brought news of a very good port they found in that coast [...] and he also brought me a report from the lords of the province of Ceguatan, who are firmly convinced that there is an island populated only by women, with no single man, and that from time to time these women receive men from the mainland to have intercourse, and those who result pregnant if they have girls they keep them but if they have boys they send them away [...] They tell me as well that [the island] is rich in pearls and gold: I will work, when I get the opportunity, towards finding out the truth and I will make a lengthy report about it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Y entre la relación que de aquellas provincias hizo, trujo nueva de muy buen puerto que en aquella costa se había hallado [...] y asimismo me trujo relacion de los señores de la provincia de Ceguatan, que se afirman mucho haber allí una isla poblada toda de mujeres sin varon ninguno, y que cierto tiempo van de la tierra firme hombres, con los cuales han acceso, y las que quedan preñadas, si paren mujeres las guardan, y si hombres los echan de su compañía [...] Dícenme asimismo que es muy rica de perlas y oro: yo trabajaré, en teniendo aparejo, de saber la verdad y hacer dello larga relación a V.M." (Cortés 1960: 184)

As I pointed out in chapter four, Cortés prepared the maritime exploration of the western coast nearly as soon as his men reached the Pacific Ocean, during the conquest of Michoacán and Colima<sup>14</sup> by Cristóbal de Olid and Gonzalo de Sandoval (1522-1523) from which this report derived (Davidson 1910: 28, Sauer 1948). His principal intentions were to locate the mouth of the Strait of Anian (or the Strait of the Bacallaos), a maritime passageway allegedly leading to the Atlantic Ocean (Gil 1989a: 315-318), and to find suitable ports and routes for transpacific navigation. We may assume that he also aimed to verify the story concerning the "women-only-island" of native reports, which resonated with Montalvo's fabled island of California.

The circumstances attending the discovery and naming of the peninsula we today know under this name have been the object of numerous studies. Ever since Edward Eversett Hale proposed in 1862 that the source of the toponym was Montalvo's novel *Las Sergas de Esplendián* the thesis has been reformulated with different emphases. Most authors (Davidson 1910, Leonard 1944 & 1949, Rodríguez Prampolini 1948, Río 1990) maintain that conquerors who dreamt of Esplendián's and Amadís' adventures were misled to believe that the island of Santa Cruz, as Cortés and his men called the peninsula from May 1536 on, was in fact the fantastic realm of queen Calafia. Nevertheless, a few others like Putnam & Priestley (1917: 293-313, 351-354) and Portillo y Diez de Sollano (1947: 111, 119) argue that, despite the substantial evidence indicating that conquerors were indeed familiar with the novel and applied the legendary name to the peninsula, there is no convincing basis for the thesis that they believed it to be such a place.<sup>15</sup> Let us then quickly review the facts.

In June 1523 Cortés obtained a royal permit to carry out his navigation programme along the Pacific coast. In 1525 he was even instructed to send

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<sup>14</sup> In pre-conquest times Colima was split into different political units. One of them occupied the broad valley of Cihuatlán and apparently had an urban character and excelled in the quality of its weaving, cotton being one of the most important crops (Sauer 1948).

<sup>15</sup> Both Portillo y Diez de Sollano (1947:130) and Putnam & Priestley (1917: 353-354) considered it much likelier that the name derived from a misheard native word in one of the several languages spoken locally that may have sounded similar to the one the novelist used.

some ships to the Moluccas, but the Crown soon opposed to his maritime activities as the expedition he entrusted to the command of Alvaro de Saavedra failed to reach the islands. Four years later, however, after negotiating personally with the monarchs, Cortés signed a *capitulación* (October 1529) to discover the islands of the Mar del Sur. Between 1532 and 1539 he organised five expeditions, the second of which, led by Diego de Becerra and Hernando de Grijalva in 1533, confirmed of the existence of a large, pearl-rich island—which later turned out to be a peninsula—near the coast of Cihuatlán. In 1535, excited by this discovery, Cortés led a third expedition himself, but the "island" resulted bare and almost deserted. Consequently his projects to explore the peninsular shoreline dwindled out with the fifth expedition he organised, this time led by Francisco de Ulloa between 1539 and 1540 (Portillo y Diez de Sollano 1947: 141-152, Río 1990).

Although it is impossible to determine the precise date when people began to call this land mass California, the report by Francisco Preciado on Ulloa's voyage already used the name as customary (Río 1990: 17-19). According to Portillo y Diez de Sollano (1947: 114-119), however, this evidence is unreliable because the original document is lost and the only version that we know today is the Italian translation published by Ramusio in the decade of 1550.<sup>16</sup> Thus the first unequivocally documented use of the name for the peninsula corresponds to Juan Paez' 1542 *Relación* regarding Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo's maritime voyage. Other than Preciado's report, the only testimonial account we have on Ulloa's expedition was written by Pedro de Palencia, who consistently uses the name Santa Cruz instead of California. Therefore Portillo believes that Preciado's Italian translator substituted the document's original designation of Santa Cruz for California, in order to make clear a reference to a place that had already changed its name by the time he was making the translation.

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<sup>16</sup> *Delle Navigazione e Viaggi*, Venice: 1550-1556.

The fact is that neither Cortés nor anyone in his service ever used the name California, and apparently they did not use the term Amazons either. This suggests that even when the Spaniards eventually adopted the story of Esplendián as a means to identify the female-populated, pearl-rich island of indigenous reports, they did not plan their westward maritime adventures to search for queen Calafia and her Amazons. On the contrary, they took over the toponym only after they discarded the native reference as a legend. Like Díaz del Castillo did with the book of Amadís, they used the reference in a metaphorical sense because the island it was meant to identify stood on the right hand side of New Spain, just as fabled California stood "on the right hand of the Indies."

Women living without men appear in documents concerning the exploration and conquest of Nueva España at a very early date. The report that Juan Díaz wrote on Juan de Grijalva's expedition (1517) along the shoreline from Yucatán to the North contains the first of such references.<sup>17</sup> The trip it describes was the second ever along that coast, the first having been led by Francisco Hernández de Córdoba one year earlier. Díaz' report was published between 1520 and 1522 in Italian, Latin and German. Although an extensive summary of the text is contained in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia General y Natural de las Indias* (1959 [c. 1535-1552:]),<sup>18</sup> the original manuscript is lost and all the Spanish versions we have today are translations from the 1520 and 1522 Italian editions. Amazons only appear once at the beginning of Díaz' report, when the army "found a tower on a tip of the land that is said to be inhabited by women who live without men". The Italian version says immediately that "we believe they shall be from the stock of the Amazons,"<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Itinerario de la armada del Rey católico a la isla de Yucatán, en la India, en el año 1518, en la que fue por comandante y capitán general Juan de Grijalva* (in Vázquez 1988: 37-57).

<sup>18</sup> The first part was published in Seville in 1535 and book XX of the second part in 1552. The complete manuscript was only published in 1851.

<sup>19</sup> "Y anduvimos por la costa, donde encontramos una muy hermosa torre en una punta, que se dice estar habitada por mujeres que viven sin hombres, créese que serán de la estirpe de las Amazonas" (Juan Díaz *Itinerario de la armada...* In Vázquez 1988: 42).

but this seems to be an addition by the translator because Oviedo, who follows the original closely, does not include a similar comment (Vázquez 1988: 42n).

Three documents related to Hernán Cortés' performance must also be broached. First, the instructions that he received from governor Diego Velázquez before leaving Cuba (October 23, 1518),<sup>20</sup> which are mostly dedicated to military and administrative issues aimed at establishing the rules to be followed by all during the journey but also contain items outlining the expedition's main goals. The most important among these are the following: A) to search for Juan de Grijalva and Cristóbal de Olid who had sailed to explore Yucatán earlier that year and had not yet returned; B) to inquire about —and rescue if possible— six Spaniards from a lost ship that, according to the Indian Melchor captured in 1517 by Hernández de Córdoba, had been made prisoners by local *caciques* several years back; C) to gather general information and obtain gold samples via barter exchange (Martínez 1990-1992: I, 47-48 & 53-54). The brief and only reference to Amazons in the entire document is in fact part of a passage of no more than ten lines altogether. It requests the verification of various fantastic rumours spread by Melchor and another Yucateco Indian that Cortés was taking along in his army:

[In every island you visit] you will try to find of an informant who will give you news about other islands and other places, as well as the nature and customs of their inhabitants; and also why does people say that there are people with large and wide ears, and others with dog-like faces, and you will also inquire where and in what direction are the Amazons, who dwell nearby according to the Indians that you are taking along."<sup>21</sup>

Another occasion when Amazons are associated with Hernán Cortés derives from indigenous reports, quoted above, concerning a women-only-tribe that Gonzalo de Sandoval (or someone in his service) gathered in the province of Cihuatlán. As we saw before, Cortés included a brief account of the incident in

<sup>20</sup> *Instrucciones de Diego Velázquez a Hernán Cortés*, Isla Fernandina, October 23, 1518 (Martínez 1990-1992: I, 47-56).

<sup>21</sup> "trataréis de haber lengua de quien os podais informar de otras islas e tierras y de la manera y nulidad de la gente della; y porque diz que ay gente de orejas grandes y anchas, y otras que tienen las caras como perros, y ansimismo dónde y a qué parte están las amazonas, que dicen estos indios que con vos llevas, que están cerca de allí." (Martínez 1990-1992: I, 56).

his *Fourth Letter to the King*, promising that he would try to find out as much as he could about those women. Therefore, when he sent Francisco Cortés to further explore that region his instructions required him to ascertain the truth of such rumour.<sup>22</sup> Among the documents produced in connection with this particular undertaking, there is a coat of arms that the Queen granted to a certain Jerónimo López (June 26, 1530) for feats performed "while searching for the Amazons in the said journey."<sup>23</sup>

Cihuatlán and the stories about women-only-tribes that native inhabitants disclosed to their European invaders continued to attract the attention of Spanish soldiers during the conquest of Nueva Galicia by Nuño de Guzmán, a circumstance that scholars commonly use as evidence to prove the piloting functions fulfilled by Amazon beliefs in New Spain.

It is certainly true that in a report he sent to the king from Omitlán, dated on 8 July 1530, Guzmán asserted that after reaching the province of Astatlán he would "go in search of the Amazons, whom they say are ten days away," living either in the sea or an arm of the sea, and whom they also say "to be rich and feared by the mainland inhabitants as if goddesses".<sup>24</sup> It is also true that various men in his army confirm that they also pursued this goal after having received similar reports once in Astatlán.

The *First Anonymous Relación on the conquest of Nueva Galicia*, written by a participating soldier says, for instance, that in Astatlán the army received plenty news about the Amazons, called Ciguatán in the native language,<sup>25</sup> as well as other news concerning many neighbouring provinces rich in gold. According

<sup>22</sup> The instructions that Francisco Cortés received for this expedition are reproduced in CODINO: XXVI, 153)

<sup>23</sup> "... en demanda de las amazonas en la dicha entrada" (Sauer 1948: 20, Leonard 1944: 578). The document is reproduced in Paso y Troncoso (1905: II,).

<sup>24</sup> "Iré a la provincia de Astatlán, que dicen que es cosa muy grande [...] y de allí, mediante su gracia, iré en busca de las amazonas que me dicen están diez jornadas; unos dicen que havitan dentro de la mar, y otros que están en una parte de un brazo de mar y que son ricas y temidas de los havitantes de la tierra, por dioses [...] Traen arcos y flechas y rodela, comunicanse cierto tiempo del año con los vecinos, y lo que nace, si es baron, dicen que lo matan" (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 58, also quoted by Leonard 1944: 578, and Weckmann 1951: 132).

<sup>25</sup> Cihuatlán is a Náhuatl word meaning indeed "place of women" (Federico Navarrete, verbal communication). We do not know however what exactly did the reference to a place of women signified.



to this account many the women from Ciguatán, who were very different from any other they saw before, were taken as prisoners "and later it was known through the interpreters that [they] said to have come [to that land] by sea, having kept such an order in ancient times that they had no husbands [...] but, from time to time, men from the vicinity entered with them and those who bore sons buried them alive while they kept and brought up their daughters, though in recent times they stopped killing the boys" (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 300, 303-304).<sup>26</sup> Also Gonzalo López declares that from Tepic he was sent "to search for the women" (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 93-94), and Juan de Sámano confirms that the entire army went from Astatlán to the province of the Amazons, which he describes as a town "where plenty of women and very few men were found" (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 145).<sup>27</sup>

Whether Amazons could actually be found in Cihuatlán was always a controversial issue. Pedro Carranza, for example, noted that although some soldiers believed that Cihuatlán (Capuatan) was a women-only town because many more women than men were found, this could not really be confirmed because the Spaniards did not have an interpreter.<sup>28</sup> Cristóbal Flores made a similar remark but he denied categorically that those women were Amazons, asserting instead that they were ordinary women. If the army found so few men among them it was because, at the time, they were preparing themselves to confront the Spaniards in war.<sup>29</sup> Finally, Fernández de Oviedo, who heard the story from a certain Francisco Arceo, observed that this was the same town

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<sup>26</sup> "Despues por las lenguas se supo que estas mujeres decían haber venido por la mar, y antiguamente guardar entre sí tal orden que no tenían maridos [...] mas antes de cierto tiempo en cierto tiempo venían los comarcanos a entrar con ellas, y las que preñadas quedaban y parían hijos los enterraban vivos, y las hijas criaban, y que de poco tiempo a esta parte no mataban los niños..."

<sup>27</sup> "habían hallado en él mucha copia de mujeres y muy pocos hombres." There is another similar reference in the *Second Anonymous Relación* (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 321-322).

<sup>28</sup> "y allí en Capuatan, se halló cuando fue el maestre de campo, mas mujeres que hombres, por donde se tuvo que era pueblo de mujeres, como se decía, y no se averiguó porque no llevaba lengua que los entendiese" (Pedro Carranza's *Relación*, in Razo Zaragoza 1963: 173).

<sup>29</sup> "En este pueblo y en otros que se corrieron al derredor no se halló sino mujeres, y muy poco o casi ningund varon, y por esto se presumió más ser las mujeres de que se traía noticia; y la cabsa porque no se hallaron varones entre ellas, era porque se andaban acabdillando los varones para nos dar guerra en cierto cabo" (Cristóbal Flores' *Relación*, in Razo Zaragoza 1963: 202).

of women that a captain in the service of Hernando Cortés —either Sandoval or Francisco Cortés— had found long before, which also bore the name Ciguatán. Then, following the testimony by Gonzalo López, Oviedo declared that the place was a well established town with good buildings and streets, where a great number of women, dressed in white, long shirts said to live on their own and to bring men only a few months every year. Nevertheless, he concluded, "I later found Guzmán in Spain and he said it is not true that they are Amazons or that they live without men" (Razo Zaragoza 1963: 265-267).

From this brief review we may conclude that even when Amazon-like women and the supposedly rich island they inhabited were indeed sought and suspected to exist during the conquest of New Spain, the interest was short lived and volatile. Furthermore, despite the peninsula of California being named after Montalvo's re-working of the classical theme, and notwithstanding the coat of arms granted on the basis of their supposed search, references to their existence not only faded away completely after Nuño de Guzmán, they were in fact never posed as the main goal pursued by any given expedition. On the other hand, it is important to insist that, like in South America, it was a local indigenous belief —that of the Cihuatlán women— rather than the European stories which made conquerors so interested in the theme of an "all female tribe."

#### **5.5.- The island of Antilla and its seven bishops.**

Throughout the twentieth century many historians have considered that just as the Amazons configured the early exploration of California, the mediaeval legend of the seven wondrous cities founded by Christian fugitives across the Ocean after escaping from the Moor invasion of the Iberian peninsula, configured Vázquez de Coronado's and subsequent journeys into the area that later became *Nuevo México*. Standard academic views propose that the Spaniards who explored and conquered the northern part of America were

moved to engage in the enterprise because, among other things, they expected to find these cities. The argument is as follows:

Long before Columbus arrived in America, several Europeans had tried to reach the unknown island named Antilla that figured in the cartography of the period; it was sometimes identified as the place where the fugitive bishops settled down. When the Caribbean islands —initially expected to include Antilla— proved to house no Christian peoples, Spanish conquerors were ready to seek for the Seven Cities elsewhere. And after Cabeza de Vaca and Marcos de Niza spoke about wealthy cities to the north of New Spain they were even prepared, after all, to accept they might be located on mainland, not necessarily on an island (e.g. Gandía 1929, Sauer 1932, Hodge 1937, Jiménez Moreno 1958: 49, Clissold 1961, Beck 1969, Petersen 1980, Pastor Bodmer 1992: 105, Mora 1992: 34, Bernard & Gruzinski 1999: 346).

Scholars often quote the official chronicler of the Indies, Antonio de Herrera (1945 [1615]: I, 204) to support this theory of delusion:

Ancient navigation charts depicted some islands amidst the seas, specially an island called Antilla, which they located nearly two hundred leagues west of the Canary islands and the Azores. This island the Portuguese thought to be the island of the Seven Cities, so famous and craved after that many greedy people has been led into delusion, spending [in the attempt to find it] a lot of money without any profit. Thus dreaming, the Portuguese say that this island of the Seven Cities was populated by fellow countrymen, in the time when Spain was lost, under the reign of King Don Rodrigo; when fleeing from that [Muslim] persecution, seven Portuguese bishops embarked with plenty of people and arrived in the said island of Antilla, where each founded a town. Then, in order to prevent people from turning back they set the boats afire. [The Portuguese also say] that in times of Infante Don Enrique de Portugal, a ship that had sailed from Portugal was caught in a storm and did not stop until reaching that island. People living there took the sailors to the church to find out whether they were Christians and performed the Roman ceremonies; and when they learnt they did, they pleaded them to stay [...] but the sailors were afraid to have their vessels burnt and be retained, so they left for Portugal very happy [...] and never returned to that kingdom once they had left.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> "En las cartas de marear antiguas, se pintaban algunas islas en aquellos mares, especialmente la isla que decian de Antilla, y la ponian poco mas de doscientas leguas al poniente de las islas de Canaria, y de las azores, la cual estimaban los portugueses, que era la isla de las Siete Ciudades, cuya fama y apetito ha hecho a muchos, por codicia, desvariar, y gastar muchos dineros, sin provecho. Y segun se sueña, dicen los portugueses que esta isla de las siete ciudades fue poblada de ellos, al tiempo que se perdió España, reinando el rei Don Rodrigo; porque huyendo de aquella persecución, se embarcaron siete obispos, y mucha gente, y aportaron en aquella isla, adonde cada uno hizo su pueblo; y porque la gente no pasase a tornar, pusieron fuego a los navíos; y que en tiempo del Infante don Enrique de Portugal, con

Judging from various documents it seems unquestionable that during the earliest phase of exploration in America several people, on both sides of the Atlantic, thought of this legend, popularised in Castile by a chivalrous novel titled *Crónica del Rey Don Rodrigo y la destrucción de España* (Phelan 1970 [1956]: 70). Friar Bartolomé de las Casas asserts, for instance, that according to Columbus a Portuguese vessel arrived in 1460 at the island of Antilla and was received by Christian people (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, chap. XIII<sup>31</sup>). The Admiral's son, Ferdinand Columbus, also mentions the story in his father's biography (*Historia del Almirante Cristóbal Colón*, quoted by Gandía 1929: 17); while Francisco López de Gómara claims in his *Hispania Victrix* (Saragosa 1553) that Columbus had tried to locate the Antilla (Gandía 1929: 17). In fact it is his *Historia de las Indias* (1552) that gives the clearest indication that, in the years immediately succeeding the first contacts with would-be New Spain, some people did believe they were near the Island of the Seven Bishops. He declares, despite his own scepticism, that certain soldiers considered the brass crosses Hernández de Cordoba had found in Yucatan as evidence to the fact that many Spaniards had been there "during the destruction of Spain by the Moors in the time of king Don Rodrigo" (quoted in Wagner 1942: 42). Furthermore, when governor Velázquez sent Hernán Cortés to follow the shoreline of Yucatan, he may have been expecting to confirm the legend, as the twelfth item of his instructions requested the captain to find out the meaning that indigenous people gave to the symbol of the cross:

In the said island of Santa Cruz on top of certain tombs and burials many crosses have been found; and since it is said that natives revere them you will inquire why they have them and whether it is because they have heard from God Our Lord before."<sup>32</sup>

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tormenta, corrió un navío que había salido de Portugal, y no paró hasta dar en ella, y los de la isla llevaron a la gente del navío a la iglesia, por ver si eran christianos y hacían las ceremonias romanas; y visto que lo eran les rogaron que estuviesen allí, hasta que viniese su Señor, pero los marineros temiendo que les quemasen el navío, y los detuviesen, se volvieron a Portugal muy alegres [...] y salidos del reino nunca más volvieron."

<sup>31</sup> Written between 1527 and 1566, this chronicle was first published only until 1875-1876.

<sup>32</sup> "Porque en la dicha isla de Sanata Cruz se ha fallado en muchas partes della e encima de ciertas sepulturas y enterramientos, cruces, las cuales diz que tienen entre sí en mucha veneración, trabajaréis de inquirir [...] la significación de porqué las tienen, y si las tienen porque hayan tenido noticia de Dio Nuestro Señor" (Martínez 1990-1992: I, 51-52).

After Cortés established the Spanish domination over the former Aztec Empire, however, individuals exploring the North do not seem to have been particularly interested in the Seven Bishops. Nothing in Herrera's allusion of the money wasted because of this fantasy indicates that he was referring to explorations by Vázquez de Coronado or other conquerors in the area. It rather refers to maritime expeditions contemporaneous, or prior to, Columbus. The same holds true for a paragraph by Mendieta cited by Phelan (1970 [1956]: 69-71) to support the assertion that the Antilla was actively sought in the New World:

I could rule with little help [...] a province of fifty thousand Indians organised and arranged in such good Christianity that it seemed as if the whole province were a monastery. And it was just like the island of Antilla of the Ancients [...] which is located not far from Madeira. In our times it has been seen from afar, but it disappears upon approaching it [...] They say that on this island there are seven cities with a bishop residing in each one and an archbishop in the principal city. The strange thing is that it seems to the author of the history of the Gothic kings (*Historia del Rey Don Rodrigo...*) [...] that our Lord would be served by having this island discovered and placing it under the obedience and bosom of the Catholic Church. It would be equally appropriate to ask of our Lord that the Indians be organised and distributed in islands like those of Antilla; for they then would live virtuously and peacefully serving God, as in a terrestrial paradise.

Fifteenth century efforts to locate the island of the Seven Cities are indeed well documented. In a letter addressed to the Monarchs dated July 25, 1498, the representative of Spain in London, Pedro de Ayala, reported that up to four ships seeking to find the islands of Brasil and the Seven Cities had set sail every year between 1491 and 1498, sponsored by the inhabitants of Bristol (Gandía 1929: 14, 61). We also know that Juan II King of Portugal granted several charts and licenses to private petitioners with the same purpose. In 1474 and 1475 Fernao Téllez, for instance, received rights over any populated and cultivated land he might find while exploring the so called "Isla de las Flores", previously discovered by Diego de Tieve, including that of the Seven Cities but excluding those in the seas of Guinea (Gandía 1929: 11-12). The most famous expedition of this sort, launched by the Portuguese king was to be led by Fernan Duolmo, under a license issued in 1485. We ignore whether he actually made the

journey, but documents containing details of its preparation testify that resources were indeed invested in the enterprise (Pastor Bodmer 1992: 107; Mora 1992: 35). Finally, one year later the same monarch commissioned navigators van Olmen and Juan Alfonso del Estreito to find out whether the island of the Seven Cities was the same as that of Antilla (Mora 1992: 35).

It has been said that mediaeval beliefs in the existence of wondrous islands deep in the Ocean—which according to L. Weckmann (1976: 203) were not exclusive or novel to Columbus—derived from the story about the lost continent of Atlantis that Plato registered around the year 360 B.C. (Mora 1992: 34). In his dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* the philosopher described Atlantis as the seat of an advanced civilisation, ruled by descendants of Poseidon and a mortal woman, that having lived for generations a simple and virtuous life, became deeply corrupted by greed and power. As a punishment the continent disappeared swallowed by the sea, leaving no trace except for an impassable barrier of mud and a number of unreachable islands. Such ideas about the Ocean imperviousness tumbled down as new geographical information spawned from incipient, extra-Mediterranean navigation in the late Middle Ages. Nevertheless, map-makers recording the knowledge thus generated, still depicted reminders of the lost continent amidst the Ocean. The imaginary island that bore the name of Antilla, first represented in the map of Pizigani (1367), could have been related to the Atlantic legend. In the fifteenth century it appeared again in the *Portulano* (1424), and was later included in the maps of the following cartographers: Bedario (or Bedrazio 1434/1435), Andrea Bianco (1436), Fra Mauro (1460), Bartolomé Pareto (1475), Gracioso Benicasa (or Benacaza, 1463/1476?); Ortelius, Mercator, and Toscanelli (1484) (Gandía 1929: 9; Junquera 1989: 14; Mora 1992: 34).

Cartographic representations of Antilla and the story of the Seven Bishops escaping by sea from the Moors fused into a single legend towards the end of the fifteenth century, its credibility enhanced, as we have seen, by the

alleged existence of fairly recent testimonial accounts. The oldest existing document containing a complete, explicit association of both legends, the *Mappaemundi* of Martin Behaim, was drafted in 1492 with information "all taken very carefully from the books of Ptolemy, Pliny, Strabo and Marco Polo," from the reports of Sir John Mandeville on certain countries that "Ptolemy ignored," and from reports on the most "recent discoveries made by order of King Juan of Portugal in the year 1485."<sup>33</sup> Accompanying an island in the western extreme of the Ocean, Behaim wrote an inscription that might be the source of the passage by Herrera quoted above:

In the year 734 after our lord Jesus Christ was born, when all Spain was subjugated by the heathens that came from Africa, the said island Antilla called Septe Citade was populated by an Archbishop of Porto, in Portugal, and other six bishops, with a number of Christians, men and women, who had left running away from Spain with their livestock and goods. In 1414 the ship that approached it most closely was a Spanish vessel.<sup>34</sup>

According to Enrique de Gandía (1929: 60) we can trace this identification to the map of Benicasa, which records seven names beside the island of Antilla —Ana, Antioul, Anselli, Anseto, Ansolli, Ansoldi, and Cori— that might correspond to the cities of the Seven Bishops.

Historians have seen the search for the Seven Cities of Cíbola, first reported by Marcos de Niza and quickly adopted as a primary goal for exploration, as the transposition, on the part of the Spaniards, of the expectations they had built around the theme of the Seven Bishops. Furthermore, some even claim that a vague resemblance between this motif and the Nahua myth of origin in *Chicomoztoc* (The Seven Caves) set off a powerful fantasy that repeatedly promoted expeditionary action. The problem is that, except for the numerical coincidence, no sound evidence to support the argument is ever provided.

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<sup>33</sup> Behaim (also known as Martin Bohaemus), was a member of the board constituted by the Portuguese King Juan II to develop the art of navigation. This information is provided in the notes written on the globe itself, presently kept in Nuremberg (Gandía 1929: 18).

<sup>34</sup> "El año de 734 después del nacimiento de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, en que toda la España se sujetó a los paganos que vinieron de Africa, dicha isla Antilla llamada Septe Citade, fue habitada por un Arzobispo de Porto en Portugal, y otros seis Obispos, con un número de Christianos, hombres y mujeres, que habían pasado huyendo de España con sus ganados y bienes. En 1414 el que más se arrió fue un navío español" (Gandía 1929: 59-60).

The association between the cities of the "Seven Portuguese Bishops" and the Antilla was such a widespread cultural theme in late mediaeval Europe that it frequently found textual articulation, as the previous review clearly shows. If the theme had been as significant in northern New Spain as it was for early Atlantic navigation, or for the initial exploration of the Caribbean, textual traces in the sources would be available in a comparable way. Thus the hypothesis about the particular phenomenon of delusion supposedly transpiring in the quest for *Nuevo México* is merely the result of academic speculation and cannot be maintained in the face of the evidence.

A brief examination of academic literature on New Mexico's colonial history will show that the argument, formulated in 1929 by Enrique de Gandía, has been uncritically repeated ever since to sustain the assertion that Spanish conceptualising strategies subsumed everything American into ready made images brought from Europe.

Gandía analysed the main legendary themes registered in chronicles and other contemporary accounts concerning the New World in a well documented historical survey. He traced each motif to an ultimate European source, based on the premise that Europeans in the Middle Ages attributed particular value to the authority of Greek and Latin wise men, whose cosmographic ideas codified the Orientalist obsessions prevalent at the time America was discovered. In some instances he also noted the influence of Native American beliefs. Thus he found three original inspirations capable of inducing the legend of the Seven Cities of Cíbola: First, the legend of the seven bishops fled from Portugal; second, the Nahua myth of origin in *Chicomoztoc* (Seven Caves); and third, the appearance of the Pueblo villages seen from afar by Marcos de Niza (Gandía, 1929: 62-63, 68). He believed that since the Nahua myth of origin described wealthy lands in the vicinity of *Chicomoztoc*, a place supposedly located in the same direction where the seven cities that Niza reported also stood, the Spaniards were soon convinced that the Seven Caves of the Nahua ancestors



and the Seven Cities of the Portuguese Bishops were the same place that Niza had actually seen.

To support the first point of his argument, Gandía quotes Herrera's passage concerning the story of the Seven Bishops and mentions some of the maps depicting the Antilla or the Island of the Seven Cities, both prior to Columbus' first voyage and after.<sup>35</sup> The maritime expeditions launched by the inhabitants of Bristol and the Portuguese crown in the fifteenth century also appear as crucial evidence in his analysis. Nevertheless, this only proves the legend was relevant before the Spanish accession to the Aztec empire's heartland; that is, during the Caribbean phase of conquest but not afterwards. As for his second and third points, Gandía quotes, first, Gerónimo de Mendieta's assertion (1997 [1596]: 59-60 & 394-395) that Niza's journey was aimed at verifying rumours that Franciscan friars had gathered in 1538 concerning a populous land where people were dressed and had multi-storied houses. Then he brings up an incident from Vázquez de Coronado's subsequent expedition, told by López de Gómara. According to this author, at the village of Tiguex the expeditionaries heard tell of the country of Quivira, ruled by a king called Tatarat, bearded, white headed and rich, who prayed in the prescribed hours and worshipped a golden cross and the image of a woman.

Gómara's fragment indeed testifies to the fact that Spanish conquerors believed there were Christians living beyond Cíbola. However, none of the reports written throughout or shortly after the expedition mentions king Tatarat or the worship of a cross or woman, although they all mention the high expectations the news of the rich country of Quivira raised.<sup>36</sup> The only

<sup>35</sup> After the discovery of America, the Antilla appeared in the *mappaemundi* by Jan Ruysch (1508) and in the globe by Schoner (1523) (Gandía 1929: 9).

<sup>36</sup> I refer to the following documents: A letter from Vázquez de Coronado to the king dated at Tiguex on October 20, 1541; *Relación del suceso de la jornada que Francisco Vázquez hizo en el descubrimiento de Cíbola* (1541); *Traslado de las nuevas y noticias que dieron sobre el descubrimiento de una cibdad, que llamaron de Cíbola, situada en la tierra nueva* (1541); and *Relación postrera de Sívola* (1541). The same goes for the complete account of the journey that Pedro Castañeda Nájera, a participating soldier, wrote between 1560 and 1565 under the title of *Relación de la jornada de Cíbola*. All reproduced by Mora (1992).

document by a participant that suggests the Spaniards expected to find Christians in the area is the *Relación* by Captain Juan Jaramillo. He states that when the army reached the immediacy of "Harache and Quibira," Vázquez de Coronado wrote a letter "to the governor," whom "we thought was a Christian from the armies lost in Florida as we were led to believe by the way in which the Indian [guiding us] described his governmental order and civility."<sup>37</sup>

We cannot affirm, of course, that Gómara did not use testimonies, oral or written, containing news about Tatarrat and his praying habits, but the incident that Gandía interpreted in his particular way seems to have had a different meaning for the Spanish soldiers involved. Rather than thinking they were near the cities founded by the Portuguese Bishops, Vázquez de Coronado and his men were certain —attending to Jaramillo's comment— that the country their Indian informant described, rich in gold and silver and ruled by a refined and powerful king (Castañeda Nájera 1992 [1596]: 88; Vázquez de Coronado (1541, in Mora 1992: 173-174), had already been discovered by Spaniards who may have survived one of the disastrous attempts to conquer Florida that preceded their journey: Juan Ponce de León in 1521, Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón in 1526, and Pánfilo de Narváez in 1528. What Jaramillo's testimony indicates is that in the eyes of the Spanish soldiers the lifestyle of Tatarrat was that of a Christian. Reason why they concluded that he was a surviving conqueror who had managed to integrate into the native society and become a local ruler, instead of attempting a return to the Spanish world. After all a similar incident had already occurred in Yucatan. Gonzalo Guerrero survived a shipwreck in 1511 and was a slave among the Mayas, but in 1519 he rejected Cortés' offer to be rescued because he had married a daughter of the lord of Chactemal, from

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<sup>37</sup> "y escribió aquí una carta el general para el gobernador de Harache y Quibira, teniendo entendido que era cristiano de las armas de la Florida, perdidas, porque la manera del gobierno y policía que el indio había dicho que tenía, nos lo había hecho creer" (*Relación que dio el capitán Juan Jaramillo de la jornada que hizo a la tierra nueva, de la que fue general Francisco Vázquez de Coronado* (1541, in Mora 1992: 194).

whom he begot three children, and he held a position as military advisor to his father in law (Thomas 1993: 164).

Gandía was not the first to suggest an association between Cíbola and the Seven Bishops. Other scholars preceded him, such as Adolph F. Bandelier (1890), E. G. Bourne (1904), Frederick W. Hodge & T. Lewis (1907), and Herbert E. Bolton (1916), yet his contribution was to furnish the argument with a proper follow-up of the sources. He linked the legend with late mediaeval navigation and early American exploration and, what is more important, asserted that the Seven Bishops were primarily sought in New Mexico because the Indian myth of Chicomoztoc worked as a confirmation, to which Marcos de Niza's description of Cíbola was later added.<sup>38</sup>

Many works devoted to the Spanish exploration of the Greater Southwest written in subsequent years continued to maintain that soldiers found in the legend of the Seven Bishops one of their main inspirations (Bolton 1949, Horgan 1963: 151-160, Wagner 1934, Weckmann 1951: 133, Hammond 1956: 5-7). Moreover, shortly after Gandía published his book, Robert Ricard developed the thesis further in two articles aimed at demonstrating that, in fact, the mediaeval legend found its way into the conqueror's imagery through the black slave that Niza took along as guide (Ricard 1929 & 1936). He argued that being himself a Moor from the Arab city of Azamor, occupied by the Portuguese between 1513 and 1542, Estevanico was acquainted with the legend, though he was not the only possible vehicle since Portuguese influences in New Spain are well documented.

More recently several authors (Chávez 1968: 11-12; Udall 1987: 64; Weber 1987 & 1992: 24) have elaborated on the idea that north-westward colonial penetration was carried out by gold thirsty Spaniards, who seized upon the old myth of the Seven Cities. On its part, Fernando Ainsa has recently (1992: 161-166) established a link between the Seven Cities of Cíbola and the City of the

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<sup>38</sup> A hint of this hypothesis had been posed by Bandelier (1890: 6ss) but not strongly argued.

Cesars (Ciudad de los Césares), derived from the legend of Prester John who supposedly founded a Christian enclave beyond the barrier of Islam. Some even consider, following Gandía, that a mixture of the legend of the Seven Bishops, information by Cabeza de Vaca and Marcos de Niza about the Seven Cities of Cíbola, and the Aztec myth of origin in Seven Caves, was the basis for the belief in the Great North riches that eventually came to conform the idea of *Nuevo México* (Clissold 1961: 75-76; Junquera 1989: 14; Cutter 1992: 14-15; Mora 1992: 34-36; Pastor Bodmer 1992: 106-109).

If one takes the trouble to compare the list of sources these authors use to sustain their argument one realises that they are ultimately basing themselves on Gandía, directly or indirectly, or the earlier scholars who laid the foundations for the history of the North American Southwest (Bandelier, Bolton, Hodge). The evidence upon which all this interpretation edifice rests is therefore reduced to that I briefly analysed above, with some additions such as Niza's report and a few other sixteenth century documents that do not explicitly mention the Portuguese legend, let alone its association with Chicomoztoc.

In conclusion, the uncritical repetition of the "mediaevalist hypothesis" analysed in this chapter has obscured the importance that native discourses held for the colonial enterprise. For even those authors who consider the possibility that Spanish explorers relied on indigenous myths in conceptualising the unknown territory limit themselves to suggesting that the myth of Chicomoztoc served as a confirmation for the European fables through which the Spaniards had *already* formulated their image of the land.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **WE ALL CAME WALKING FROM THE NORTH: TRADITIONS OF ANCESTRAL ORIGIN AMONG NAHUAS**

This chapter draws a general picture of the traditions of ancestral origin that Central Mexican Nahuas held in the late pre-conquest era, focusing particularly on the migration of the Azteca/Mexica<sup>1</sup> from Aztlan, their original homeland, to Tenochtitlan.

This topic has been thoroughly studied by historians, archaeologists and anthropologists who have long debated the status that indigenous migration stories—as they are contained in Indian-focused sources—should be accorded, for two principal reasons. On the one hand all Nahua groups living in Central Mexico in the contact period—and other groups elsewhere in Mesoamerica—claimed a foreign ancestry. On the other, the narratives they produced to trace their ancestors' journeys to their places of definitive settlement were suggestively similar and included a number of clearly mythical episodes. Moreover, the somewhat twisted correspondences between these narratives recall the type of structural transformations that Lévi-Strauss emphasised in his interpretation of myth (1981 [1971]: 626-646, 1976a [1973]: 21-24, 1976b [1973]). Take the city of Tollan (also spelt Tulán or Tula) by way of example: mentioned in almost every tale, Tollan is indistinguishable from the point of departure in Maya sources whereas in Nahua documents it appears as a clearly distinct stopover, albeit in divergent positions.

Whether and to what extent migration narratives convey empirical information about the past, or whether we should take them as primarily

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<sup>1</sup>These two names designate the same people in most modern literature and popular culture. The usage is however incorrect. The people who founded Mexico-Tenochtitlan and lived in it until the Spanish conquest, i.e., the group leading the so-called Aztec empire was called Mexica. Azteca was only the name of the Mexica ancestors in their original homeland and during the first stage of their migration. I will keep the indigenous convention using the term Azteca only when I refer to the Mexica ancestors before the moment when, according to their own stories, their tutelary god instructed them to drop their original name.

symbolic, is a complex issue I do not intend to analyse in any depth. Although I will briefly refer to some lines of interpretation proposed in this respect, I aim neither to achieve an accurate reconstruction of the sequence of incidents that may have taken place during actual migrations, nor to decode the symbolic meanings attached to particular migration narratives. My purpose is merely to display the universe of themes from local knowledge that Spanish individuals borrowed to formulate their own enterprise of conquest.

Nahuas are the Mesoamerican linguistic group best represented in the extant documentary sources due to the hegemonic position they had attained by the time of the Spanish conquest and the key position they consequently occupied in the colonial regime. Not only their historical discourse nourished the conquerors' imaginations; the political, commercial, and tributary networks they consolidated before the conquest were taken over by the new masters, of whom they even became fundamental allies, contributing with valuable information and warrior troops to the subjugation of other native peoples. Furthermore, the Spaniards readily adopted their tongue as a *lingua franca* for many cross-ethnic dealings, as missionaries, confronted with extreme linguistic diversity, realised the importance of promoting a common language other than Castilian.<sup>2</sup> For, if the natives' incorporation as obedient subjects of the Spanish Crown and faithful members of the Catholic Church was to succeed, they needed to understand the word of God and the King's orders;<sup>3</sup> as well as the talk of many different peoples who had suddenly turned into countrymen who were unable to comprehend each other.

The governmental decision to privilege Náhuatl speech —a 1570 royal charter declared it the "official language for general use among the Indians" and

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<sup>2</sup> The systematic study of native languages began in the decade of 1530 in the Franciscan colleges in Tiripitío and Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco. By the end of the sixteenth century grammatical rules and lexicons existed for several languages. Among them Náhuatl received the most prolonged and fruitful attention, reflected in the treatises and dictionaries by Andrés de Olmos (*Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana*, 1547), Alonso de Molina (*Vocabulario de la lengua castellana y mexicana*, 1555), and Antonio del Rincón (*Arte de la lengua mexicana*, 1595) (Hernández de León Portilla 1997: 189-190).

<sup>3</sup> Later on in the Philippines a similar consideration drew the Spaniards to study and promote the use of the most widespread native language: Tagalog (see Rafael 1993).

further decrees favouring its learning and teaching followed until 1592 (Urquijo Durazo 1997: 165-166, Guzmán Betancourt 1997: 33-35)— certainly derived from its already being a widespread language. Over 90% of the population of Central Mexico at the contact period spoke Náhuatl either as mother tongue or as a second language, according to calculations based primarily on sixteenth century *Relaciones Geográficas* (Harvey 1972: 313-314). On the other hand several groups in regions beyond the control of the Aztec empire, like Jalisco and Nayarit, were partially bilingual before the area became heavily nahuatized towards the end of the century. Thus the colonial policy of linguistic acculturation, as Harvey remarked, only intensified a process that was already well under way before the European invasion, sometimes resulting in the replacement of the vernacular with Náhuatl rather than with Castilian, particularly in remote places, away from the circuit of regular Spanish activity.

This continued trend of Náhuatl speech expansion, and the corresponding settlement of native peoples from the central highlands in northern localities during the early colonial period, pose interesting questions regarding other cultural and political continuities, evident in particularly persistent forms of indigenous discourse.

A key argument in this chapter is that Nahua migration traditions renovated their ideological pertinence as the Spanish colonisation of the North progressed. In the pre-conquest era the Nahua population of Central Mexico was organised in relatively small, lineage based socio-political units that Spanish sources address under the interchangeable labels of "peoples" (*gentes/pueblos*), "nations" (*naciones*), "tribes" (*tribus*), or "lineages" (*linajes*). These units —*calpolli* (pl. *calpoltin*) or *altepetl* (no plural form) in Náhuatl documents— had separate identities, predicated each upon a specific historical memory that linked the group in question to a particular tutelary god and displayed a particular migration story. That indigenous authors continued to write profusely on this topic, even at the beginning of the seventeenth century —when the Spanish

advance reached its northernmost limit— indicates that far from disappearing, old rivalries, loyalties and alliances persisted in the colonial regime, as indigenous communities resorted to their parochial, exclusive identities to negotiate an advantageous position in the new power structure.

Attending to the fact that Nahua participation in the quest for Nuevo Mexico ran apparently along the lines of pre-conquest political articulations and considering that, in any case, the migration narratives that conquerors knew expressed the interests of different communities within a well established arena of pre-conquest regional politics, I will address a couple of general issues after revising the sources and before turning to examine the Azteca/Mexica migration proper. First, the insertion of Nahua traditions of ancestral origin in the wider Mesoamerican context; and secondly, the definition of collective identity and group affiliation among the central highland Nahuas at the time of the Spanish intrusion.

### 6.1.- The sources.

Indigenous accounts of ancestral history have come to us in three distinct types of documents: 1) pictorial manuscripts —usually called *mapas*, *lienzos*, or *códices* depending on their formal characteristics— painted by specialised indigenous scribes before the conquest, or their descendants in colonial times; 2) chronicles, histories and general surveys written in Náhuatl or Spanish with alphabetic script, sometimes combined in bilingual texts; 3) hybrid documents that reunite alphabetic and pictorial elements in different fashions.

Most of these materials, particularly those referring to Nahua past, were physically produced in the colonial period (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries);<sup>4</sup> however, many derive directly from indigenous traditions and

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<sup>4</sup> Only fifteen of the approximately 500 pictorial manuscripts known at the present time are of indisputable pre-conquest elaboration. All fifteen come from areas outside of the Aztec heartland; that is, the Maya area, the Mixteca, southern Puebla, western Oaxaca, and the Gulf Coast (Quiñones Keber 1995: 107).



reflect local knowledge current before the Europeans' arrival.<sup>5</sup> Some are colonial copies or glosses of pre-Hispanic prototypes that were later lost or destroyed; others seem to be accurate transcriptions of the recitations that accompanied native traditional "public readings" of pictorial records.<sup>6</sup> Yet as Federico Navarrete contends (1997: 155-156), excluding the few pre-conquest codices that survive today and perhaps a couple of early colonial pieces that preserve indigenous stylistic conventions mostly untouched, they all resulted from the combination of Western and Indian traditions. Frequently produced under the official request of governmental authorities, their composition involved the collaboration of native informants, Spanish missionaries, European, Mestizo and Indian wise men or administrators.

Bearing in mind the risks entailed in using a documentary corpus in which so many different interests and loads of cultural baggage converge, I will extract from it the principal episodes of the Azteca/Mexica migration to establish what might have been the "basis-tradition" that North-going Spanish conquerors built upon. Even when the multiple versions of the story we know today share the same episodic core, they only resemble one another in a general level. Therefore my own reconstruction will bring together episodes that may appear in some versions while being omitted in others.

Most of the sources I draw upon are specifically devoted to narrating Mexica past. Nevertheless, I also employ historical records related to non-Mexica Nahua groups, as once the expansionist drive of Central Mexico-based

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<sup>5</sup> The practice of recording history in Mesoamerica goes back to the fourth or fifth century BC. The most ancient historical records known to us come from Oaxaca and the Maya area. They are glyphic texts —integrated into public buildings in the form of sculpture and mural painting, or as decoration in ceramic artefacts— that commemorate particularly important religious ceremonies and military conquests and also record the names, births, marriages, enthronements and deaths of members of the local ruling elites. The type of link existing between this memorial practice and later historiographical developments, where paint, paper and animal hide became the privileged media, is not clear. Nevertheless, both the Mayans and the Mixtecs developed complex writing systems between the third and tenth centuries of our era, and by the Post-Classic period more or less reduced devices serving as maps and scrolls were generally used throughout Mesoamerica to keep record of historical happenstance, tribute payments, religious ceremonies, calendar calculations, and other issues (Martínez Marín 1996: 397-408, Brotherston 1995: 10-20, Boccara 1997: 63-64, Thouvenot 1997: 73-74).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of how these documents were "read" see Navarrete (1999: 238-241, 2000 & 2000a).

conquistadors bridged the limit of the ancient Aztec domination to the North, the Spanish category "*Mexicanos*" often embraced all Náhuatl speaking peoples living in the valley of Mexico, who claimed a common origin in Chicomoztoc. Furthermore, due to this very claim, non-Mexica, Nahua traditions contain important references, sometimes even long passages on Mexica history. Such is the case of the work by Domingo Chimalpahin, as well as certain global accounts, like the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán*, considered by Martínez Marín (1976: 127) as the first indigenous history of the valley of Mexico as a whole. Finally I will make brief reference to three documents from the Puebla-Tlaxcala valley as they too describe the primordial place of origin: Chicomoztoc.

My selection is based, essentially, in four scholarly works: Carlos Martínez Marín's (1976) survey of Mexica migration historiography, Doris Heyden's (1989) analysis of Mexico-Tenochtitlan foundation myth and symbol, Elizabeth Hill Boone's analysis (1994) of Aztec historical manuscripts, and Gordon Brotherston's (1995) study of Mexican indigenous codices preserved in British collections. I also cross checked my sample with the indexes by Alcina Franch (1955), Carrera Stampa (1965), Glass & Robertson (1975), and Gibson & Glass (1975).<sup>7</sup>

Spanish soldiers and settlers who journeyed across the North in the second half of the sixteenth century probably ignored most of the sources I rely upon, either because they were produced in the central highlands after or during that period, or because they had a very restricted circulation; not to mention that many conquerors were illiterate or had poorly developed reading habits. Yet if it is very likely indeed that migration stories became familiar to most soldiers by word of mouth, we have no means, other than such material, to follow the traces left by an oral tradition to which no direct access is now

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<sup>7</sup> In his recently approved doctoral thesis, Navarrete (2000) analyses the migration narratives of the native inhabitants of the valley of Mexico in detail. Some of the sources he studied are lacking in my sample because I am essentially interested in identifying the most widespread indigenous views on Mexica past current in the contact period, while he aimed at comparing all the presently known migration histories of the different groups who lived in the valley of Mexico before the Spanish conquest.

possible. Furthermore, the oral versions of Nahua migrations that North-going conquerors knew must have been substantially similar to those we can read today in the codices, chronicles and treatises they ignored, as indicated by the frequent but inexact correspondence existing between relevant passages contained in both Indian and Spanish-focused sources.

Keeping these general points in mind let us now review the sources that constitute my sample, starting with those in indigenous iconic writing.

Modern studies on Mesoamerican pictorial documents often make a Western-based twofold distinction between "profane paintings" devoted to mundane issues, and "religious or sacred paintings" dealing with the cosmic order, calendars, rituals, and deities. Nevertheless, Gordon Brotherston demonstrated recently (1997: 84-109) that most codices traditionally categorised as ritual or sacred also recorded specific information about geography, politics and history; whereas the internal coherence of the annalistic accounts and territorial depictions normally seen as "profane" frequently rests on the ritualised image of the cosmic order.<sup>8</sup> Therefore the "logic of reading" that governs the structure of these documents is a much better analytic instrument than any classification based on the sacred/profane distinction, which is completely alien to indigenous culture. In this sense most of the codices or sections of codices I employ<sup>9</sup> are of the kind that Brotherston terms *xiuhtlapohualli*; that is, annals organised as year-by-year accounts of events.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Indigenous peoples classified their pictorial records in different kinds. In the Nahua area the principal genera seem to have been the *tonalámatl* (record of the 260 day ritual cycle), the *xíhuítl* or *ilhuiámatl* (distribution of the feasts through the 365 day calendar), the *teoamoxtlí* (book of the gods), the *tlacamecayoámatl* (lineage-record book), the *tlalámatl* (land-record book), and the *xiuhámatl* (year-count book or annals) (Martínez Marín 1996: 410-412). The most influential scholarly classifications elaborated in the first half of the twentieth century began from this taxonomy and created overall categories based primarily on thematic content and geographic provenance (Alcina Franch 1955). Later indexes by Carrera Stampa (1965) and Glass & Robertson (1975), more interested in providing a complete catalogue with individual item descriptions, placed more emphasis on dates of elaboration, degrees of European stylistic influence and other formal characteristics.

<sup>9</sup> Although colonial codices kept many indigenous record-keeping conventions late sixteenth century examples represent a combination of diverse pre-conquest book genera. Of these documents I usually consider only the annalistic section.

<sup>10</sup> Hill Boone (1994: 55-68) divides these documents in two groups. One composed by items that follow what she calls a *res gestae* narrative modality —primarily from the Mixteca region—focused on important events and their participants; another composed by prototypical year-count annals, organised around a continuous flow of individually represented years as the principal axis on to which only significant events are correspondingly signalled. Both

Ten pictorial manuscripts dealing extensively with Azteca/Mexica history exist today but only eight contain full accounts of the migration period. The best known is the *Codex Boturini* or *Tira de la Peregrinación*, a screenfold of native paper that recounts the migration of the Mexica from Aztlan to the period of their subjugation to Cocox, ruler of Colhuacan.<sup>11</sup> Formerly considered of pre-conquest elaboration it is now regarded as early colonial.<sup>12</sup> The document follows the classical pattern of a continuous stream of individually represented years, with a line of footprints indicating movement in space as well as reading direction. However, according to Donald Robertson (1994 [1958]: 83-84) the fact that historical events are portrayed at specified locations, between lengthy blocks of year-sign groupings (fig. 1), reveals the post-conquest editing of a precolumbian prototype closer in format to later screenfolds such as the *Codex Mexicanus* and the *Tira de Tepechpan* that preserve the linear format of the year-sign axis (fig. 2).

The extensive historical section of *Codex Mexicanus* (plates 18-87 as numbered in the facsimile edition by Mengin, 1952) portrays the complete Azteca/Mexica migration and continues to record over seventy years of Spanish colonial history, covering a wide range of non-historical indigenous and Christian subjects as well. Dating the entire piece is difficult as it was painted by several artists at widely scattered moments. Nevertheless, a single scribe seems to have drawn the annals up to the year 1574, while other two hands are noticeable in the fragment covering the remaining years to 1593 (Robertson 1994 [1958] : 122-123). In contrast, the *Tira de Tepechpan* —painted around 1596 according to Carrera Stampa (1965: 212)— is exclusively devoted

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groups, however, are linear accounts displayed along the axis provided by the succession of years within the secular cycle of fifty two years. Therefore they contrast with space oriented representations of history and with the cosmogonic books or *teoamoxtli* that, as Brotherston rightly argues, dictate an entirely different "reading" order.

<sup>11</sup> For general descriptions of this manuscript and its editions see Robertson (1994: 63, 82-84), Glass & Robertson (1975: 101), and Carrera Stampa (1965: 174-176).

<sup>12</sup> Orozco y Berra, José Fernando Ramírez and Paul Radin deemed it pre-conquest but the stylistic analysis by Jiménez Moreno established it as colonial (Robertson 1994 [1958]: 82). Still, it is the earliest example we have of a "year-count" book.

to the narration of historical happenstance.<sup>13</sup> An interesting example of how Mexica-Tenochca history was regionally an important point of reference, the document—covering the period 1298-1590—shows synchronically the town of Tepechpan's history, represented above the row of year-signs, and the corresponding fraction of Mexica history, portrayed below the row (fig. 2).

*Codex Aubin*, like *Codex Mexicanus*, is diverse in content and authorship. Painted between 1576 and 1608 (Glass & Robertson 1975: 88-89, Carrera Stampa 1965: 213-219), it includes a lengthy section of annals covering the migration period and the post-foundation history of Tenochtitlan until 1591, with two additions, 1595-1596 and 1597-1608.<sup>14</sup> *Codex Aubin*, however, is far more influenced by European models. It is painted on European paper bound like a book and combines pictorial records with Náhuatl alphabetic texts. Nevertheless it preserves the year-sign axis, blocking together individual years to create, like the *Codex Boturini*, large units of uneventful time (fig. 3). Very similar in format and content is a late seventeenth century manuscript known as *Histoire Mexicaine depuis 1221 jusqu'en 1594* (1998). Starting from Aztlan and finishing in 1573, it is a copy of an older prototype lost today.<sup>15</sup> Except for the year-signs and a few episodes painted in the traditional manner, most of its information comes in the form of Náhuatl texts. Heavily acculturated in style, *Codex Azcatitlan* is also painted on European paper and bound like a book but has no alphabetic text except for a few glosses.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, despite its European shape and pictorial style it has a completely indigenous structure as it consists of an uninterrupted "year-count" which follows the Mexica from Aztlan to Tenochtitlan and then continues until the first decade of Spanish domination.

<sup>13</sup> Published in a facsimile edition by Xavier Noguez (1978).

<sup>14</sup> The original manuscript (also known as *Códice de 1576*) is lost but three sixteenth century copies exist, one in the British Library manuscripts section.

<sup>15</sup> Also known as *Fonds Mexicain 40* after its location in the National Library of France (Medina González 1998: 26).

<sup>16</sup> Preserved in the National Library of France, this manuscript was first published by Robert Barlow in 1949 and has been recently reproduced in a facsimile edition (*Codex Azcatitlan* 1995), introduced and annotated by Michael Graulich, which contains the comments that Barlow wrote for his own edition.

Carrera Stampa (1965: 183) dated it at around 1530 but later studies affirm that it rather dates from the last third of the sixteenth century (Graulich 1995: 16).

The two remaining pictorial manuscripts in my sample that contain annals concerning the Azteca/Mexica migration are the *Codex Telleriano Remensis*, painted in Mexico between 1549 and 1563,<sup>17</sup> and the *Codex Vaticano Ríos*, presumably painted in Italy between 1566 and 1589.<sup>18</sup> They are so closely related that scholars have long considered *Codex Vaticano* to be a copy of *Codex Telleriano*. Eric S. Thompson argued in 1941 that both could have rather derived from a common original lost today, which Robert Barlow called *Codex Huitzilopochtli*. Nevertheless, Robertson (1994 [1958]: 108-109) discarded this theory in 1959 due to the fact that their content is too varied to reflect a single earlier prototype.<sup>19</sup> The consensus today is that the *Codex Telleriano Remensis* is a synthesis of several prototypes all done before 1549, whereas the *Codex Vaticano Ríos* is a copy of the *Telleriano* by friar Pedro de los Ríos. Preceding the annals, which emphasise the history of Mexico-Tenochtitlan over the migration period, both documents include sections on ritual calendars and public religious ceremonies.

Two Mexica pictographs that do not follow the "year-count" pattern remain to be mentioned. One is *Codex Mendoza*, painted between 1541 and 1550 (1549 according to Carrera Stampa 1965: 180) by order of viceroy Mendoza to be sent to the king of Spain (Robertson 1994 [1958]: 94-96).<sup>20</sup> The document, that records the conquests of the three polities whose alliance constituted the Aztec empire, also contains the annals of Mexico-Tenochtitlan to the rule of

<sup>17</sup> The years 1562-1563 traditionally given for the completion of the manuscript (Carrera Stampa 1965: 203) are only valid for the Spanish glosses, not the pictorial representation, which according to Robertson should be dated at two different moments. A first campaign of work carried out by one single scribe ended in 1549, while the last years up to 1562 were drawn by one of the hands that glossed the manuscript, thus representing a twelve years later addition (Robertson 1994 [1958]: 110-111).

<sup>18</sup> Also known as *Codex Vaticanus A* or *Vaticano Latino 3738*. These dates are provided by Robertson (1994 [1958]: 111) but Carrera Stampa (1965: 207) prefers 1563-1570. The glosses, hand written in Italian, are almost identical to those in the *Codex Telleriano*.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the so-called *Codex Huitzilopochtli* and its relation with codices *Vaticano Ríos* and *Telleriano Remensis* see Robertson (1994 [1958]: 110-111) and Glass & Robertson (1975: 136-139).

<sup>20</sup> It never reached Spain because it fell in the hands of French pirates.

Moctezuma II, an index of the tribute paid by subject peoples, and a few conventional depictions of the daily life of an individual from birth to old age. Finally, we have the *Mapa Sigüenza*, a cartographic history of the Azteca/Mexica migration painted in a single panel, most probably in the sixteenth century (Hill Boone 1994: 60 & 1991: 123-124). Although in the valley of Mexico historical manuscripts based on place rather than time signs are usually associated with a school of painting centred in the area of Tetzaco (Robertson 1994 [1958]: 63, 134), the *Mapa Sigüenza* no doubt comes from the Mexica core area (Carrera Stampa 1965: 176-177).

Of the three Non-Mexica pictorial manuscripts I employ, two are closely related: the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* (in Yoneda 1991) and the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (HTC 1989 [c. 1533]). Both recount, with great similarity, the migrant history of the peoples established in Cuauhtinchan and other towns in the valley of Puebla (Yoneda 1991: 15, Pohl 1994: 145-147). The *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* is a "year-count" with pictorial representations and extensive Náhuatl texts, that begins with the peopling of the city of Tula and ends twenty six years after the Spanish conquest.<sup>21</sup> According to Henry Nicholson (1971: 55) its drawings were probably copied from pre-Hispanic documents while the texts represent faithful transcriptions of the corresponding oral recitations. The migration of the Totomihuaque from Chicomoztoc to Cholula and Cuauhtinchan is told in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*. Painted sometime between 1533 and 1563 (Yoneda 1991: 74) it is part of a wider group of Cuauhtinchan maps, today dispersed in several collections (Leibsohn 1994: 164, Yoneda 1991: 19).<sup>22</sup> The last non-Mexica codex in my sample is the *Rollo Selden*, a native paper strip painted in the early colonial period that traces the

<sup>21</sup> I hereby use the edition by Kirchhoff, Güemes and Reyes García (1989).

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed description and follow-up of this corpus see Yoneda (1991).

migration of a Chichimeca group from Chicomoztoc to the Coixtlahuaca Valley, in western Oaxaca.<sup>23</sup>

As I said, a number of textual sources in Latin script narrate the events portrayed in these pictorial manuscripts. Some, like the *Anales de Tlatelolco* (1948 [1528-1532]), the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* (HMP c. 1547, in Garibay 1965: 23-66) and the texts contained in the *Códice Chimalpopoca* (1992 [1558-1570]), are first generation copies of pre-conquest codices; others are later derivations cast along the conventions of European narrative presentation (Hill Boone 1991: 123, Duverger 1983: 20).

I will first refer to a group of five documents which focus on Azteca/Mexica history, generally known as the "*Crónica X* group" after the name that Robert Barlow (1945) coined for the hypothetical single manuscript which he suggested was behind them all. Their content is so closely related that their origins and relationships have been debated ever since the nineteenth century, it having also been suggested that one can identify the *Crónica X* with a wide oral tradition rather than with a single lost prototype (Couch 1991: 111). The so-called *Tovar (or Phillips) manuscript* —which I did not consult— and "treatise I" of friar Diego Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de la Tierra Firme* (1579-1581) seem to derive from the same original Náhuatl text. It has been suggested that the former is a straightforward translation by the Jesuit friar Juan de Tovar whereas the piece by Durán, though largely copied from a Spanish version of the Náhuatl prototype, was expanded by the friar himself. The other three documents in the group are the *Crónica mexicana* by Hernando Alvarado Tezozómoc (1598) —an original Spanish text substantially similar to that of Durán; the manuscript known as *Códice Ramírez* (c. 1581-1590) also attributed to Juan de Tovar and regarded as essentially based on Durán; and "book VII" of Joseph de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590)

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<sup>23</sup> Brotherston (1995: 78-79) also calls it the *Tlahuixtlahuaca Roll* because it comes from the town of that name. Other interrelated lienzos also showing Chicomoztoc as a place of origin have recently been located in different communities within the Coixtlahuaca valley.



which includes large fragments apparently taken from the *Códice Ramírez* (O'Gorman 1962: xiv-xxii, Martínez Marín 1976: 122 & 126, Couch 1991: 110-112, Monjarás 1994: 49).

Also important for my survey is the work by three indigenous authors and by one Mestizo, all Christians educated in Spanish institutions (Keen 1984: 209, Rendón 1965: 12). I already mentioned the *Crónica mexicana* by Alvarado Tezozómoc, who traced his descent to the ruling lineage of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (León 1992: xx). Besides this book in Spanish, he wrote another in Náhuatl regarding the same events, the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. Together with the *Crónica X* group this text is viewed as the "official" Mexica version of Aztec history. The text itself dates from the first decade of the seventeenth century but the manuscript, preserved in the National Library of France, is a later copy (León 1992: ix- xiv). Working too at the turn of the sixteenth century, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl descended from the last ruler of Tetzco and could also trace his lineage back to Cuitláhuac, one of the last Aztec emperors. In Spanish he wrote a number of short *Relaciones históricas* (c. 1608-1625) and his lengthy *Historia de la nación chichimeca* (c. 1616),<sup>24</sup> all fundamentally dealing with the peopling of Tetzco by immigrant Acolhua-Chichimeca groups. Finally, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, who descended from the family ruling Amaquemecan in 1519 (O'Gorman 1985: 9-16, Romero 1983: 17-71), wrote a series of annals which number and extension has not yet been determined.<sup>25</sup> Of these I only consulted some of his eight *Relaciones* and his *Memorial breve acerca de la fundación de la ciudad de Culhuacan* (Chimalpahin 1998 [c. 1620-1631]).

<sup>24</sup> The chronology of these writings was established by O'Gorman (1985: 229-233).

<sup>25</sup> While the history of the manuscripts until they arrived in the National Library of France is obscure, most eighteenth and nineteenth centuries references to Chimalpahin use many different though sometimes similar titles. Therefore we ignore whether the extant documents constitute the remains of a single work that has lost many pages and also the original internal order, or whether they are independent works, in which case we ignore which are complete and which are fragments of partly lost or unfinished works (Castillo Farreras 1991: xi, xxx). For more detail see Rendón (1965) and Castillo Farreras (1991: xi-xxxvii & 1997: v - xxi).

The chronology for the elaboration of these writings is obscure as by the time Chimalpahin began the seventh *Relación*, in 1629, he had already written the eighth (1620); as for the *Memorial*, he finished it in 1631 (Castillo Farreras 1991: xxvi-xxix). We know that in 1620 the governor of Amaquemecan asked him to write the province's official history using a series of indigenous documents that, in 1549, judge Andrés de Santiago Xuchitototzin had authenticated. Nevertheless it seems that by 1606 Chimalpahin had already begun to gather and organise paintings and writings that his ancestors had owned,<sup>26</sup> which constituted the primary base of his work (Rendón 1965: 9-13 & 20-23). The eight *Relaciones* recount the migrations and wars of different groups that populated Chalco Amaquemecan during the mid twelfth century. Every group that had political presence in the province is mentioned, including the Mexica and the Culhua, who with the Acolhua dominated the central valleys from the thirteenth century on. The sections devoted to the Mexica—particularly the *Tercera relación*—tell of their migration from Aztlan to Tenochtitlan (Rendón 1965: 33-34, Castillo Farreras 1991: xxxv-xxxvii). Conversely the *Memorial*, though articulated around the peopling and dynastic succession of Culhuacan, concentrates on the Culhua and Mexica history (Castillo Farreras 1991: xl-xliv).

An atypical author amongst the group of sixteenth century indigenous historians due to his apparently modest origins,<sup>27</sup> Cristóbal del Castillo wrote, in Náhuatl, a couple of books on pre-colonial history and the Spanish conquest, substantial parts of which were lost in the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Of the surviving sections, only those pertaining to the *Historia de la venida de los*

<sup>26</sup> Some of these books his father inherited from Domingo Hernández Ayopochtzin, a noble of the local ruling lineage; others were given to him by different elders (Chimalpahin 1998 [c. 1620-1631]: II, 303-349).

<sup>27</sup> Unlike Tezozómoc or Chimalpahin, who had inherited not only the oral narratives containing the historical discourse of their communities—traditionally transmitted in a formalised and exclusive way from generation to generation—but also the pictorial documents that constituted their material basis, del Castillo, being a commoner, did not have access to the pictographic material, which he was unable to read or interpret anyway (Navarrete 1991: 67-68).

<sup>28</sup> For detailed information on the history of the manuscripts and the structure of the original books see Navarrete (1991: 13-14 & 20-31).

*mexicanos y de otros pueblos*, written between 1597 and 1600 are relevant here. We know very little about this author's life. Navarrete (1991: 18-19, 48, 99-100) contends that he was not a Mexica as his interpretation sometimes opposes the canonical traditions of this group, whose history he portrays as illegitimate and demonic in opposition to that of other groups previously established in the basin. He was most probably a Mestizo born in the Valley of Mexico in the 1520s or 1530s, and he probably received formal education in an institution run by Franciscan friars as he wrote in Latin alphabet and used the Náhuatl terms to refer to the Christian god and the pre-Hispanic deities that these missionaries had coined<sup>29</sup> (Navarrete 1991: 13-14, 33-34, 88-92).

Particularly important to this study are several brief narratives that reflect a wealth of local indigenous knowledge virtually unchanged. The earliest of all dates to 1528 and is a history of Tlatelolco from its most remote times (*Historia de Tlatelolco desde los tiempos más remotos*). It pertains to a collection of five interdependent and anonymous documents (*Anales de Tlatelolco*, 1948) written in Mexico-Tlatelolco between 1528 and 1532 (Duverger 1983: 20). Beginning with the migration from Aztlan Chicomoztoc Quinehuayan, this history follows the Mexica until the foundation of Tenochtitlan and continues with the history of Tlatelolco during the Spanish conquest.

Also from an early date are three anonymous narratives on Culhua-Mexica history published in 1891 by Joaquín García Icazbalceta. One, the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*, (HMP c. 1547, in Garibay 1965) includes, among other sections, several annals that register the Azteca/Mexica migration and the most outstanding events up to Nuño de Guzmán's expedition to Nueva Galicia. The document has been attributed to friar Andrés de Olmos, whom the president of the Audiencia commissioned, in 1533, to compile a book on the ancient Mexican culture. Neither the original manuscript

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<sup>29</sup> *Tlacatecólōtl* (demon) for the Mexica god Tetzaúhtéotl, *Iztlacateteo* (false deities) for other peoples' gods, and *Tlanetloquiliztli* (true faith) for Christianity (Navarrete 1991: 93-94).

nor any copy of this book have been found. However, scholars believe that *HMP* is a summary that Olmos wrote from memory several years after having sent all his manuscripts to Spain (Garibay 1965: 10-13), or that it is a summary of Olmos' work by someone else (Baudot 1983 [1977]: 196-219). The other two narratives are the *Origen de los Mexicanos*, and the *Relación de la genealogía y linaje de los señores que han señoreado esta tierra de la Nueva España, después que se acuerdan haber gentes en estas partes*, both very similar in content. Written between 1530 and 1532 by Franciscan friars upon the request of Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, they were intended to back up the petitions of land retribution that Juan Cano made to the Crown in favour of his wife Isabel Moctezuma, daughter of Moctezuma II (Baudot 1983 [1977]: 74-76). Therefore they trace Mexico-Tenochtitlan's ruling lineage back to its Culhua roots, following the successive migrations that crowded the central highlands since the Toltec period.<sup>30</sup>

Three other anonymous narratives compose my sample. The *Leyenda de los soles* (1558) and the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* (1570) are part of the so-called *Códice Chimalpopoca*<sup>31</sup> and refer to Culhua history (Duverger 1983: 20). The third, *Histoire du Mechique* (in Garibay 1965: 91-120) is a French translation of a now lost Spanish document.<sup>32</sup> The first person to publish it, Edouard de Jonghe, thought it was part of the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* but Garibay (1965: 14-16) questioned this attribution, arguing that the sites of Quivira and Culiacán described in the document are places that Olmos never saw. Instead he proposed that the text is largely the work of Marcos de Niza (sections I-III), whose notes another friar would have later put together with other notes on mythology by a different author, most probably Olmos (section

<sup>30</sup> Although they are admittedly based on pre-conquest pictorial documents owned by Isabel Moctezuma's family we ignore what specific pictographs the authors used, as none seems to have survived and all extant pictorial manuscripts on Mexica history are colonial.

<sup>31</sup> Translated from Náhuatl by Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca in the nineteenth century. Here I use the 1945 translation by Primo Feliciano Velázquez (*Códice Chimalpopoca* 1992).

<sup>32</sup> Contained in a manuscript written on sixteenth century paper by Andrés Thevet preserved in the National Library of France. I hereby use the standard Spanish translation by Ramón Rosales Mungía that Garibay published in the same volume as *HMP*.

IV). In any case the original text must be posterior to 1542, when Vázquez de Coronado gathered the first reports on Quivira.

The rest of my sources are well known sixteenth century treatises by the Franciscan missionaries who made extensive surveys on indigenous history, beliefs and customs, all of which I have already referred to in previous chapters. That is, Bernardino de Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* —the Spanish section of the *Códice Florentino* compiled in collaboration with Nahua informants between 1558 and 1577; Jerónimo de Mendieta's *Historia eclesiástica indiana*, finished in 1597 and widely copied by Juan de Torquemada (Rubial 1997: 46-47) in his *Veinte y un libros rituales y monarquía indiana* (1615), which I also reviewed; and the two main surviving works by Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, the *Memoriales* and the *Historia de los indios de Nueva España*,<sup>33</sup> written between 1527 and 1565.

## 6.2.- Foreign ancestry and migration: a Mesoamerican idiom for politics.

Primordial migration, as I stated above, was a common theme all over Mesoamerica in the late pre-conquest period. Groups with different cultures, and even languages, considered their sixteenth century home as a gift from a patron god to which their ancestors had arrived after a journey that lasted several generations. The Nahuas from the central highlands, the Tarascans from Michoacán, and some Maya groups in Chiapas, highland Guatemala, lowland Yucatan, and the region of Petén portrayed their forefathers roaming across the wilderness under the guidance of tutelary gods,<sup>34</sup> who gave them not only lands but also particular forms of livelihood together with a specific

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<sup>33</sup> The awkward correspondences observed in these two works, the few blatant errors that the *Historia...* makes regarding Náhuatl language and culture, and the multiple references that other sources make to a third manuscript by Motolinía have led scholars to presume that both derive from that manuscript, lost today. However, while they consider the *Memoriales* an incomplete copy of the lost piece, made by Motolinía himself and finished in 1541 (though supplemented later), they believe that the *Historia...* is a summary made in Spain by someone else around 1565. For a discussion on this issue see O'Gorman (1969).

<sup>34</sup> Brotherston remarks (1995: 62, 98) that it was essentially the groups who claimed Chichimec or Toltec ancestry who represented their past in terms of "migration from distant landmarks;" whereas the Mixtecs depicted their ancestry as emerging "from trees that stood closer to home."

expertise and the appropriate utensils (Michelet 1988: 15-19, Martínez Marín 1989: 27-30, López Austin 1989a: 57 & 79-96, 1993 & 1995b; Brotherston 1995: 45-97, López Austin & López Luján 1996: 191-192, 239-271).

This image of migrant collectivities is not entirely removed from historical fact. Other than the archaeological evidence discussed in chapter three, the fragmented distribution of the multiple languages spoken in Mesoamerica by the time of the Spanish irruption—over eighty belonging to more than fifteen families (West 1976: 277)—indicates that migrations had been fairly frequent before that moment. Thus many scholars consider that during the Post-Classic period this phenomenon was integral to the socio-political dynamics of the area (e.g. Carrasco 1971a, Nicholson 1971, West 1976, Manrique Castañeda 1977, Davies 1980, Duverger 1983, Smith 1984, Martínez Marín 1989, Florescano 1990, Noguez 1995, López Austin & López Luján 1996), even when they still debate the degree to which particular narratives accurately reflect historical fact.

Glottochronological research based on early sixteenth century documented languages (Campbell 1979, Manrique Castañeda 1989: 18-23, Wright 1996: 2-5) corroborates that successive waves of immigrants—primarily Náhuatl but probably Pame, Otomí or Mazahua speakers as well—flowed into the heartland of Mesoamerica between the eighth and fourteenth centuries conquering and displacing other groups of Otomí, Mazahua, Matlatzinca, and Ocuilteco speakers then established in the highland valleys of Central Mexico.<sup>35</sup> As a consequence multiple competing polities of reduced

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<sup>35</sup> Anthropologists assign to Otopamean languages such as Otomí, Mazahua and Matlatzinca a temporal depth of two to three thousand years in the central highlands (Escalante Hernández 1997: 121, Wright 1996: 2-3) whereas they agree that Náhuatl is a recent arrival in Mesoamerica. It is the southernmost representative of the Yutoaztecan linguistic family, a dialectal chain extending south-eastwards from California to Nicaragua that includes many languages today disappeared like Guachichil, Xixime and Acaxee. The most accepted classification (Wick R. Miller 1981) divides the Yutoaztecan family into five branches, diversified as the speakers expanded over new territories: Númíca, Tubatulabal, Tákíka, Hopi, and Southern Yutoazteca. Náhuatl belongs to the Aztecan group of the Southern Yutoazteca branch together with other languages like Pipil and Cacán. While the whole family seems to have begun its differentiation in the Great Basin of the Colorado river around 3500-4000 years BPT, the Aztecan group only began to separate around 2500 years BPT (Manrique Castañeda 1989: 14-18 & 24-26).

dimensions emerged, quickly developing regional networks of alliance and domination that had repercussions in the Mixteca, the Maya area and the West (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 176-189, Noguez 1995: 194-197 & 201-204, Reyes García & Güemes 1995: 246). It is precisely within this context of increasing conflict over territorial control and regional hegemony that ancestral migration became the common idiom of historical representation throughout Mesoamerica. This idiom, as López Austin and López Luján (1996: 262-271 & 1999) recently suggested, was part of an ideological system serving to legitimise what they call the *Zuyuano* political order, which represents a novel solution to an old problem already confronted by powerful polities such as Teotihuacan. That is, the need to achieve control over multiple micro-communities of different languages and geographic origins—each internally structured through ties of consanguinity—without seriously interfering their lineage-based organisation so that economic exaction could be the more efficient at the least expense possible.

At the level of local governance the Zuyuano system entailed regional integration, under the globalising authority of complex hegemonic organisms, of a variable number of virtually autonomous polities, each retaining its traditional rule but fulfilling, as a subordinate entity, a particular politico-economic function. The changing relations, internal cohesion, and territorial claims of these polities found ideological expression in the highly normative structure followed by most migration stories (López Austin 1993), which "amounts to the collective birth of a group, its journey to the promised land, and the founding miracle that validates its right to possess" the territory it inhabits at any one given point in time (López Austin 1995b: 3-4).

Nearly every group represented departure from its land of origin as a sort of supernatural covenant celebrated with a specific god that launched an exclusivist history, which culminated miles away with the miraculous apparition of an emblematic signal pre-defined by the commanding divinity.

The *Relación de Michoacán* (c. 1540, in Acuña 1987), for example, describes how the migrant Uacúsechas recognised in lake Pátzcuaro the site that god Curicaueri had reserved for them (Michelet 1988: 17-18; López Austin 1994b: 67). Similarly, most sources dealing with Azteca/Mexica history portray the moment when chief Cuauhtlequetzqui —and sometimes others with him— came across the signal previously revealed by god Huitzilopochtli to indicate the place where the Mexica would finally accomplish their glorious destiny.<sup>36</sup> But, if the ending point of any given migration was construed in terms so particularistic as to deserve the label of a "promised land," the point of departure was frequently conceived as the common birth-place of various groups, bearing in fact an equivalent name in the traditions of peoples that spoke unrelated languages. Thus, the Chicomoztoc of Náhuatl sources is called Vucub Ziván in Maya documents.<sup>37</sup> Literally, both expressions mean "Seven Caves" (*chicome* = 7 + *oztotl* = cave), or "Seven Gorges" (Vucub Ziván) and find glyphic correspondence in a number of well known pictograms from Central Mexico<sup>38</sup> that represent the figure of a kind of multiple womb (figs. 4-7) suggesting the recent arrival of the migrants in the world altogether (Brotherston 1995: 62, López Austin 1995b: 2 & 1989a: 79, 85).

This attribution of a common place of origin may be partially interpreted as a symbolic acknowledgement of current networks of inter-group relations, since the list of seven groups issuing from Chicomoztoc is different in each particular tradition, frequently mirroring the actual state of regional politics. Thus while the notion of a separate, godly inspired migration leading to a promised land legitimised the right of the group concerned in any given

<sup>36</sup> See section 6.5 below.

<sup>37</sup> *Popol Vuh*, *Memorial de Sololá*, and *Título de los señores de Totonicapán* use this term in combination with others like Tulán Zuivá, Vucub Pec, and Zuyuá, different forms to name the same place. That is, the city where different peoples acquired the specific protection of particular tutelary gods; the site of first human creation, where ancestors lived before migrating and where the language of each group became different to that of others (See López Austin 1989a:79-80). Due to lack of agreement on the alphabetic correspondence of the phonetics of Mayan languages, different documents often spell the same word differently. Therefore, we can find "Wukub" standing for "Vucub," and we may read "Civán," "Siwán," or "Suywa" instead of "Ziván" and "Zuyuá."

<sup>38</sup> Outstanding examples appear in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* (in Yoneda 1991), the *HTC* (1989 [c.1533]), *Codex Azcatitlan*, and *Codex Mexicanus*.



narrative to possess a specific territory and justified the internal authority and external domination of its ruling élite, the human diversity that characterised regional webs of economic interdependence, systematic war, and political subordination was ideologically neutralised with the concept of the essential unity of man under the order of creation (López Austin & López Luján 1999: 42-43). In this sense, migration histories in the valley of México —and throughout Mesoamerica— represented a way to discuss the relations existing among different groups and the respective positions they occupied within the regional political structure (Navarrete 1991: 71). In consequence they were constantly reformulated as political conflicts and realignments took place (López Austin 1994a: 38).

This is not to say that migration traditions were simple Machiavellian expedients devised by the ruling élites of hegemonic polities. Their multilayered signification admits historical, cosmological, and astronomical interpretations as well as ideological readings. My aim in stressing the political functionality they generally had in the pre-colonial arena is twofold. It helps to understanding why the colonial expansion over Arid/Oasis America spawned the collaboration of Náhuatl-speaking Indians, and it illuminates the symbolic transactions involved in the formulation of the image that Spanish conquerors projected onto that region.

### **6.3.- To be or not to be one single people: Nahua identity and "ethnicity."**

Before the Europeans arrived the Nahuas had been the numerically dominant population of Central Mexico for several centuries, their major settlements concentrating in the highland valleys of Mexico, Toluca, and Puebla-Tlaxcala, as well as in the "tierra caliente" (hot land) of present day state of Morelos. Modern academic literature often attributes them with a common ethnicity on the grounds of their linguistic and cultural uniformity, even when most authors acknowledge the absence of an "assertive consciousness of unity" (Lockhart

1992: 1) among Nahuas from different polities, whose particular identities —many remark— were also rooted in a sense of ethnic distinctness (e.g., Berdan 1989: 18, Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 282, Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 81-82, López Austin 1994: 35-38).

We can partially attribute this ambiguous treatment of ethnicity to the fact that available sources do not allow for an accurate reconstruction of autochthonous principles in the classification of human groups. First, because the information they contain is fragmentary and mutually contradicting, and secondly because they are already the product of the negotiation between the incommensurate taxonomies of colonisers and colonised, and the need to render indigenous concepts intelligible for contemporary Spanish readers. Sixteenth century documents, for example, frequently use various names —according to language, tribal chief, or place of residence— to address a same human group (e.g., Azteca = Mexica = Tenochca) but in certain cases they also subsume various culturally and linguistically unrelated peoples under the same label (Reyes García & Güemes 1995: 233, Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 267, López Austin & López Luján 1996: 187-188). Thus the term Chichimeca, that many Nahua communities applied to their own ancestry, also served to designate contemporary groups of hunter-gatherers, fishers, and primitive farmers living in the northern regions they called Teotlalpan, whom they regarded as barbaric in opposition to the Tolteca. This, it may be remembered, was an archetypal civilisation flourishing in the eleventh century to which the Nahuas also traced significant ancestral connections.

Indigenous group-identities in Mesoamerica were in fact remarkably fluid and open to frequent shifts. Individuals acknowledged ties with various social units of divergent dimensions, thus configuring patterns of social solidarity and political allegiance that bolstered factionalism and resulted in constant segmentation and re-aggregation. A situation that López Austin (1994a: 38) has clearly described in stating that personal loyalties and feelings of

attachment operated at different levels in the area, according to a hierarchy of groups and sub-groups that encompassed each other in a pyramidal structure where the major unit was the large linguistic group (e.g., Nahua, Otomí, Matlatzinca) and the minor was the family.

Beyond the polyvalence ingrained in indigenous forms of group identity, however, and leaving aside the methodological problems posed by the sources, the inconsistent use of ethnicity-related terms in relevant scholarly literature reflects the intrinsically ambiguous character of the category itself, which I think has generated more analytic problems than solutions, as the sort of social relation and/or distinction implied in the adjective "ethnic" is rather obscure. Most often scholars invoke "ethnicity" to distinguish between human groups that have different geographic origins and speak different languages, but they also use the concept to indicate a common cultural matrix or to typify social relations established through ties of consanguinity. Underlying these perspectives sits a definition of ethnicity —based on blood, language, and culture— that the criticism of anthropologists like Edmund Leach (1954) and Frederick Barth (1969) put in crisis long ago for its inadequacy to explain "the complex relationships existing between cultural expression, speech, and social and political organisation" (Barfield 1997: 152). At the same time a more current approach, standing closer to recent debates centred around the issue of self-ascription (Barth 1969: 14, Okamura 1981, Banks 1996: 11-48) and emphasising the presumption of common descent over actual consanguinity (Keyes 1976, Bentley 1987, Yelvington 1991: 168), is also occasionally employed.<sup>39</sup>

To a large extent our difficulty to pin down the couplet ethnicity/identity in the Mesoamerican context derives from the fact that for a long period that neither archaeology nor ethnohistory have allowed to define, two complementary yet conflicting orders regarding group affiliation and political

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<sup>39</sup> Note that even when this perspective is adopted the debate itself is never addressed. I ignore whether this is due to lack of awareness or because Mesoamerica specialists think it is irrelevant.

dominance coexisted, intersecting each other in ways we do not fully comprehend. One, based on kinship, privileged consanguinity as a main criteria for membership and originated lineage-based forms of authority; another, based on territoriality, gave the people who shared a place of residence a sense of community and political loyalty.

The Zuyvano model proposed by López Austin and López Luján (1999), certainly the most finished approach so far developed to this complicated issue, typifies social relations based on affinity of language and descent as "ethnic," while reserving the category "political" to distinguish forms of social solidarity and collective identity deriving from residential vicinity and territorial domination. Nevertheless I shall hereupon drop ethnicity-related terms altogether in favour of more specific terminologies in order to hopefully portray, at a more concrete level, the intricacies of Nahua group distinctions; for despite having similar customs, speaking the same language and claiming to come from the same mythical place of ancestral origin variously referred to as Chicomoztoc, Huehuetlapallan, Colhuacan or Teoculhuacan, all Nahuas did not consider themselves to be one single people.

Sixteenth century Spanish authors writing on ancient indigenous history assumed that mother tongue was an important marker of corporate identity among the inhabitants of Central Mexico. Nevertheless, they also acknowledged that individuals accorded greater importance to their ascription into the small-scale communities they erroneously called nations or lineages, articulated around different principles probably including descent. Indeed, linguistic units seldom constituted integrated political units in Mesoamerica. On the contrary, while the population of different, even factionalised polities often spoke the same language, major urban settlements were plurilingual yet politically distinct from each other and internally unified. As for descent, sources are too obscure and incomplete to allow a detailed understanding of how kinship interlocked with the wider political structure. Although it seems

that while ruling élites did trace genealogies that established links to a common ancestor, at an overall polity level the norm was rather fictive kinship. Thus even if ties of consanguinity probably structured social relations within the minor sub-units that Náhuatl sources call *calpoltin* (see section four below), their link to the apical forbears of the overall group was established through narratives of origin and migration that recorded a common historical experience and prescribed the common worship of a patron deity.

In his *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*, Joseph de Acosta wrote:

The ancient and first residents of the province we call Nueva España were very barbarous and rustic men who lived only from hunting and thus they were called Chichimecas [...] Since they neither harvest nor plan the soil they left vacant the best and most productive land, and this was then occupied by foreign nations whom because they are politically organised they call Nahuatlaca (Náhuatl speakers), meaning people that speak clearly and make themselves understood [...]. These second Nahuatlaca residents came from another, very remote land to the North, where a kingdom that has been called *Nuevo México* was recently discovered. Two provinces lay in that country, one is named *Aztlan*, meaning Place of Herons; the other *Teuculhuacan*, meaning Land of Those Having Divine Grand Fathers. In these provinces the Nahuatlaca, who are divided in seven lineages or nations have their houses and fields and gods, rites and ceremonies in good order and civility [...] and they say that from seven caves they came to populate this land of Mexico...<sup>40</sup>

The history by Friar Diego de Durán contains similar passages, though it places even more emphasis on the fact that Nahuas did not leave the Seven Caves all at once:

The news I have about their origin [...] only starts from those Seven Caves they inhabited for a long time, which they abandoned in order to come and seek this land; some first, others later, and still others much later.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Los antiguos y primeros moradores de las provincias que llamamos Nueva España, fueron hombres muy bárbaros y silvestres, que sólo se mantenían de la caza, y por eso les pusieron nombre de Chichimecas [...] Como no cogían ni sembraban, dejaron la mejor tierra y más fértil, sin poblarla, y esa ocuparon las naciones que vinieron de fuera, que por ser gente política la llaman nahuatlaca, que quiere decir gente que se explica y habla claro [...] Vinieron estos segundos pobladores nahuatlacas de otra tierra remota hacia el Norte, donde agora se ha descubierto un reino que llaman el Nuevo México. Hay en aquella tierra dos provincias: la una llaman Aztlan, que quiere decir lugar de garzas, la otra llamada Teuculhuacan, que quiere decir tierra de los que tienen abuelos divinos. En estas provincias tienen sus casas y sus sementeras y sus dioses, ritos y ceremonias, con orden y policía los nahuatlacas, los cuales se dividen en siete linajes o naciones [...] y dicen que de siete cuevas vinieron a poblar la tierra de México (Acosta 1962 [1590]: 320). The emphases are mine.

<sup>41</sup> La noticia que tengo de su origen y principio no es más [...] sino desde aquellas siete cuevas donde habitaron tan largo tiempo, las cuales desampararon para venir a buscar esta tierra, unos primero, otros después y otros muy después (Durán 1967 [1579-1581]: 18).

Those who came from the said caves were the six kinds of people: the Xochimilca, the Chalca, the Tepaneca, the Culhua, and the Tlahuica and Tlaxcalteca. Not all of them together, neither in the same year though, but first one and then the others, while the Mexica remained back there according to divine will, they say.<sup>42</sup>

The same remark appears in many other texts by Indian and Spanish authors, even the atypical version about the origin of Nahua peoples that Bernardino de Sahagún includes in the last paragraph of chapter 29, book 10 of his *Códice Florentino*, devoted to describe the "generations that have come to populate this land" (*todas las generaciones que a esta tierra han venido a poblar*). The paragraph—bearing the subtitle "About the Mexicans" (*De los mexicanos*)—records a joint migration of several groups, including the Tolteca, the Chichimeca and other non-Náhuatl speakers who, having arrived by sea to Pánuco populated the central highlands and then dispersed, travelling separately to the North until they reached Chicomoztoc. Then, after a non specified period, the Nahuas departed again, heading South to re-establish the settlements they had once abandoned in the valleys of Mexico and Puebla-Tlaxcala. Chicomoztoc, therefore, is not a place of ultimate origin in this account. Nonetheless all the Nahuas are depicted as living there together at a certain point in time before again parting, divided into different groups who travelled separately to the South. In Sahagún's version, like in those by Acosta and Durán, the Mexica are the last to arrive in the basin of Mexico; this time, however, we are told that unlike the other groups (Tepaneca, Acolhua, Chalca, Huexotzinca and Tlaxcalteca), they travelled beyond Chicomoztoc and so they were the last to return (Sahagún 1989 [1558-1577]: II, 671-676).

Setting aside the explicit association that Acosta draws between Aztlan/Teuculhuacan/Chicomoztoc and the newly discovered *Nuevo México* I will make two remarks: First, that Nahuas derived the segmentary character of

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<sup>42</sup> Los que salieron de aquellas cuevas fueron los seis géneros de gentes [...] los xochimilcas, los chalcas, los tepanecas, los culhuas y los tlahuicas y tlaxcaltecas. Aunque es de saber que no todos juntos, ni todos en un año, sino unos primero y otros después [...] quedándose allá el Mexicano, según dicen ellos, por ordenación divina. (Durán 1967 [1579-1581]: 21) The emphasis is mine.

their identity from the argument that their ancestors arrived in the basin of Mexico each at a different time and settled down in separate land tracts to establish separate, self-contained politico-territorial entities of variable size and power that modern scholars call "city-states" —or *señoríos* (e.g. Carrasco 1977: 205, Gruzinski 1989: 13-14, Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 283, Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 81-82) following the practice of some Spanish colonists. Secondly, that wider affinities were recognised at a supra-community level creating a certain sense of corporation among groups that recognised themselves as "first origin" siblings, notwithstanding their particular migration histories. The nature of this globalising identity, however, is obscure since the list of groups issuing from Chicomoztoc varies from source to source, sometimes numbering six, eight or even more "lineages" rather than the usual seven. Moreover, although mother tongue occasionally appears to define this higher level of corporate identity, as in Acosta's treatment of the seven Nahuatlaca "lineages/nations," non-Náhuatl speakers are sometimes listed as well. Thus according to Toribio de Benavente (1996 [1541]: 126-129) all the inhabitants of New Spain came from Chicomoztoc, where each of six children that the ruler begot (Xelhua, Tenuch, Ulmecatl, Xicalancatl, Mixtecatl, and Otomitl) became the leader of a human group which he guided in the search for a place to establish. Note that some of these groups, like the Mixteca or the Otomí, represent wider linguistic wholes, while the Tenochca represent a particular group within the larger linguistic family of Náhuatl speakers.<sup>43</sup>

The terminology used by Spanish observers to describe indigenous socio-political orders reveals a significant misconception of how people, land and rulership were related in Nahua society. Indeed, the Spaniards projected a distinction, seemingly absent in native understandings, between the human

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<sup>43</sup> The corresponding passage in the *Historia...* (Benavente 1969 [1565]: 5-6) mentions seven leading brothers but only specifies the places that six of them populated. Both in the *Memoriales* and the *Historia...* this version is substantially different from that included at the beginning of the text, which I cited in chapter three (pp. 107-108 above). Contradictions of this kind are common in many colonial chronicles and respond to the fact that they compile information from different local historical traditions which, as I stated before, were exclusivist in character.

groups as such ("gentes, naciones, tribus, linajes") and the polities they organised ("pueblos" and "señoríos"), while they failed to detect the contrast between migrant and settled collectivities that native corresponding categories implied, thereby conflating what Indians conceived separately. Thus in Náhuatl documents we find no expression equivalent to such terms as "gentes," "naciones," "tribus" or "linajes." collective nouns that Spanish writers applied to every human group irrespective of territoriality; rather settled communities are consistently called *altepetl* while migrant collectivities detached from any particular land are always referred to as *calpolli* or one of its derivations.<sup>44</sup>

Consider the following examples from the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, which recounts the history of how the great "*altepetl Ciudad Mexico Tenochtitlan*" originated, and how in due course it became head and master "of each and every *altepetl* located anywhere in this recently constituted New Spain" (Alvarado Tezozómoc 1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 4).<sup>45</sup> Throughout the whole chronicle the word *altepetl* is used in the same manner, sometimes in relation to Tenochtitlan, sometimes to Aztlan-Chicomoztoc or various other entities (*ibid.*: 6, 11, 21, 29, 33, 35, etc.) but always referring to what James Lockhart (1992: 14) defines as "an organisation of people holding sway over a given territory;" that is, urban centres and the polities they embodied, entities for which the Spaniards used the terms "pueblo" (town/village/people), "ciudad" (city) or "señorío" (seignior). Contrastingly, the author employs the term *calpolli* (or several derivations such as *chiconcalpoltin*)<sup>46</sup> every time he wants to address migrant corporations (Alvarado Tezozómoc 1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 13, 15, 16, 24, 34, etc.), though instead of the six, seven or eight groups appearing in other

<sup>44</sup>The words *altepetl* and *calpolli* are untranslatable. Although they have been rendered into Spanish respectively as "pueblo" (town) and "barrio" (ward) most scholars prefer to keep them in Náhuatl and I will do the same, given the uniqueness of the institutions to which they refer. Even sixteenth century Spaniards often used the Náhuatl word *calpolli* themselves, although sometimes they hispanicised it as "calpul" (pl. calpules).

<sup>45</sup> The original Náhuatl text says: "ynan yta itzonteco mochiuhtica ynmochi yx yxquich yc nohuian *altepetl* yn yncuic Nueva España." Translated into Spanish by Adrián León as: "madre, padre, cabeza que se está haciendo de todos cada uno de los *poblados* de todos lados de la reciente Nueva España."

<sup>46</sup> In Náhuatl "the seven *calpolli*" is written "*cachiconcalpoltin*," from *ca* (indicative particle) + *chicome* (seven) + *calpolli*.



sources as the original peoples from Chicomoztoc—who established different polities in the central highlands—the units that he terms the "seven calpoltin" are the constituent sub-groups (perhaps clans) of the Mexica from Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco (*Ibid.*: 13, 26, 32, 74). Note that Alvarado Tezozómoc uses no generic term to designate the Mexica as one among other similar human aggregates.

Summarising, while the territorial and institutional side of what the Indians called *altepetl* is represented in Spanish sources by such words as "pueblo," "ciudad," or "señorío," the terms "nación" or "linaje" they used to signify human groups in general actually address what we would call its ethnic aspect. But such a distinction did not exist in Nahuatl understandings. At least one additional Nahuatl document, the anonymous *Histoire mexicaine*. (1998), confirms that from the indigenous perspective the main distinction rather referred to the migrant or settled condition; for although it never employs the term *altepetl* it always refers to migrant groups as *calpolli*—either Mexica constituent sub-units or other groups also departed from Chicomoztoc—while consistently addressing established polities simply by their particular names. This non-existence of a concept conveying the sense of human groups understood as abstract conglomerations of people, which discloses the radical parochialism characteristic of indigenous identity, is also manifest in the hesitant application of the term "nación" made by the anonymous, probably Spanish author of the *Relación de la genealogía...* (c. 1530-1532):

Three sorts of people exist in this New Spain, I do not know whether to call them nations, as they call Spaniards, French, or Castilian; though it seems I should indeed call them so attending to the manner in which they began to populate [the land...] (García Icazbalceta 1891: III, 263).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> "...en esta Nueva España hay tres maneras de gentes, no sé si las digamos tres naciones, así como españoles, franceses, castellanos, y parece que sí, segund y de la manera que comenzaron a habitar."

#### 6.4.- Three intersecting arenas of corporate identity: The *calpolli*, the *altepetl* and the *tlatocáyotl*.

The basic political unit in Central Mexico when the Spaniards arrived was the *altepetl*, literally meaning "water (*atl*) and hill (*tepetl*)," or "the water(s), the hill(s)" from the metaphorical expression *in atl, in tepetl* that brings together the essential elements for a stable social life (Garibay 1962: 8, Castillo Farreras 1972: 58, Carrasco 1977: 205 & 1996: 167, Lockhart 1992: 14).<sup>48</sup> Beyond this etymological analysis no adequate translation exists for the term, as no equivalent institution is found in the western world. Nevertheless scholars frequently compare it with the Mediterranean city-state of Greek antiquity (e.g. Carrasco 1977: 205, Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 81-82, Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 283, Gruzinski 1989: 13-14, Lockhart 1990: 99-100, Hodge 1991: 12-13) because it was a socio-political entity defined by a deep sense of self-distinctness,<sup>49</sup> the control of a certain territory and the possession of an autonomous government —headed by a dynastic ruler or *tlatoani* (pl. *tlatoque*)— to which a variable number of constituent segments (*calpolli* or *tlaxilacalli*) paid tribute and owed obedience.

Most often the Spaniards called the *altepetl* "pueblo" (town/city/people), thus translated in the 1555 Náhuatl-Castilian dictionary by friar Alonso de Molina and in Sahagún's *Códice Florentino*.<sup>50</sup> This word —applicable to settlements of any size— also conveys the sense of a conglomerate of people tied together through feelings of common identity. Therefore, as James Lockhart contends (1992: 15), it described the *altepetl* better than "the standard

<sup>48</sup> Dana Leibsohn (1994: 162) and James Lockhart (1990) confidently assert that it was also the basic unit of self-definition and affiliation but other scholars rather attribute this quality to the *calpolli* (e.g. López Austin & Castillo Farreras).

<sup>49</sup> Lockhart calls it "ethnic distinctness" but I do not think the notion of ethnicity is suitable here.

<sup>50</sup> In book XI, chapter 12, paragraph 1 Sahagún says: "Y también decían que los montes [...] están llenos de agua, y por de fuera son de tierra [...] Y de aquí acostumbraron a llamar a los pueblos donde vive la gente *altépetl*, que quiere decir "monte de agua," o "monte lleno de agua." (And they also said that hills are full of water, and outside they are made of earth. Hence they used to call the towns where people lives *altepetl*, meaning "water-hill," or "hill full of water" (Sahagún 1989 [1558-1577]: II, 800).

terminology" that Spaniards used to designate their own urban entities in both Europe and the New World: "*ciudad* or city for the highest rank, *villa* or town for the second, and *aldea* or village for smaller dependencies." Nonetheless Spanish understanding of indigenous socio-political arrangements was only superficial.

Visually the *altepetl* appeared as a compact urban complex, mainly containing public buildings, surrounded by a network —sometimes denser and sometimes less dense— of residential compounds and hamlets (Carrasco 1977: 205-206, Gruzinski 1989: 13-14). Deceived by its appearance, the Spaniards came to conceive of it in terms of the institution that embodied, back at home, the minor unit of political organisation at the local level: the municipality, composed of a "cabecera," or capital, ruling a set of "sujetos," or subject hamlets (Lockhart 1990: 99-100). Unlike Spanish municipalities, however, each *altepetl* was "a sovereign or potentially sovereign entity" (Lockhart 1992: 14), though frequently inscribed within wider political configurations that had resulted either from the aggregation of various independent *altepetl*<sup>51</sup> via confederation and/or conquest, or from the internal division of an originally unitary group due to excessive growth or political schisms. On the other hand, while the "sujetos" of a Spanish municipality were hierarchically related to the "cabecera," pinnacle of a centrally organised institution, the *altepetl* was constituted by a collection of minor, self-contained communities symmetrically related to one another that functioned as corporate units in all the different spheres of social life (Lockhart 1992: 15-20).

Modern academic literature typically refers to these micro-communities as *calpullis* (hispanicised plural form of *calpolli*) and I will do the same since the term is readily recognised. Yet as we saw before, *calpolli* in Náhuatl sources most often designates the first origin sibling groups that issued from

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<sup>51</sup> Archaeological evidence and documentary sources concur that the valley of Mexico was divided among forty to fifty polities of varying size and complexity, founded between AD 1100 and 1350 that were later absorbed into regional state systems headed by the cities of Tenochtitlan, Tetzaco and Tlacopan (Hodge 1991: 113).

Chicomoztoc —or their constituent segments— during the migratory phase of their history, while other terms —most commonly *tlaxilacalli*— are preferably used to designate *altepetl* sub-units.

The *calpulli* internal articulation has been the subject of intense controversy. Its members —usually of the same linguistic group and geographic origin— were clearly linked by ties of reciprocity and solidarity, by the worship of a common tutelary god —the *calpulteotl*— and by the collective landholding of the plots they worked and inhabited, although the sources do not provide sufficient information concerning the role of kinship and vicinity as mechanisms for recruitment and boundary definition. I will not go into much detail but interpretations range between two extreme positions: One, represented by Víctor Castillo Farreras (1972) and Alfredo López Austin (1985b) considers that the *calpulli* was, above all, a group of kin related families with strong endogamic tendencies, though no prescriptive marriage rules necessarily existed. The other, essentially represented by Pedro Carrasco (1971b, 1977 & 1988) and James Lockhart (1992: 16-20) is rather sceptic about the importance of consanguinity to determine *calpulli* membership and emphasises the political, territorial and administrative aspects of the institution, particularly concerning overall state affairs such as the collection of tribute, the assemblage of warrior troops and the recruitment of *courvée* labour.

For the purpose of this thesis we need only to keep in mind that a *calpulli* was a virtually autonomous, self sufficient social unit generally coinciding with a residential ward. Each had its own internally elected sub-rulership, controlled its own lands for the general or individual use of its members, and held its own religious ceremonies in its own temples and with its own resources (Carrasco 1977: 190-191 & 207). As constituent parts of the *altepetl* each of them collectively faced such obligations as the payment of tribute and service or the participation in general cults and external wars, systematically contributing to these global affairs through general mechanisms of fixed task rotation. This

mode of organisation, James Lockhart (1992: 15) observes "can be termed cellular or modular as opposed to hierarchical," since it followed an associative rather than a strictly centralised authority pattern, replicated above the level of individual *altepetl* into a succession of increasingly complex political entities of which the so-called Aztec Empire is the extreme example.

Indeed, most polities in Central Mexico in the late pre-conquest period were conglomerations of a variable number of *altepetl*, some sovereign and some subordinated, loosely held together in politically unstable entities, internally shaken by perennial rebellion and succession disputes, and externally engaged in continuous wars and alliance negotiations (Lockhart 1992: 15-17). They fought and they conquered (or succumbed before) other like polities but territorial occupation rarely, if ever occurred, and as long as defeated parties recognised the overlordship of the victorious opponent —opportunistically paying the tribute or providing the services imposed onto them— they remained virtually autonomous.

This picture resonates with the "galactic polity" model that S. Tambiah developed to discuss ruler-realm relations in traditional Southeast Asian kingdoms of the late nineteenth century; which constituted "large fields of coexisting galaxies" influencing each other, constantly forming factional coalitions and continually shifting boundaries (Tambiah 1985: 324). Furthermore, the Nahuatl notion of rulership like "the *imperium* of the [...] universal king" through which "the galactic polity was best conceptualised in Burma and Thailand" according to Tambiah (1985: 323-324), was also graduated according to particular ranks of power. Thus the word *tlatoáyotl*, which denoted both government and realm at various levels of the politico-territorial organisation, derived from the term *tlatoani* —meaning "he who speaks/commands/governs"— that designated the dynastic ruler of the *altepetl*. Preceded by the particle *huey*, as to make *huey tlatoáyotl*, it referred to hegemonic polities comprising several individual *altepetl* who recognised a

dominant *tlatoani* as the superior political authority, though keeping their local governments for internal affairs (López Austin 1985: 324, Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 282-283).<sup>52</sup> In practical terms this meant that commoners had to pay tribute and give personal and/or military service both to their own *tlatoani* and to that of the dominant *altepetl* within the *tlatocáyotl* concerned. Also, it meant that local commercial routes and facilities within subordinate *altepetl* became integrated to the global marketing system of the whole, much to the advantage of the dominant *altepetl* élite as Ross Hassig (1985: 5-7) demonstrates for the case of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

These correspondences are not simple coincidence. Like nineteenth century South East Asia, pre-conquest Mesoamerica was overwhelmingly populated by peasants and even city dwellers in highly developed urban centres often lived from agriculture, but the production of regular and abundant surplus was never assured. Yet population density was very high, since prevalent topographic and environmental conditions were rather suitable for subsistence forms, even if they thwarted excess production and obstructed the efficient transportation and storage of consumption goods. Under these conditions the accumulation of surplus depended on the capacity to control the labour of masses of people (Castillo Farreras 1972: 90-98 & 132). This not only resulted in interline confrontation among polities of nearly every size, it also forced the adoption of a system of domination that combined full local autonomy with an overarching cosmology —periodically enacted in elaborate state rituals— and the imposition of economic obligations enforced primarily through the menace of war (Carrasco 1977: 187-189). Thus as in Tambia's examples (1985: 321-322), the power of a Central Mexican *huey tlatoani* resided in his capacity to "extract goods and services" from the commoners and

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<sup>52</sup> Eight *huey tlatocáyotl* existed in the valley of Mexico by the time of Spanish conquest, each presided by (and named after) the most powerful of its constitutive *altepetl*. Their names coincide with the groups more frequently included in lists of migrant groups from Chicomoztoc: Tenochtitlan (Mexico), Tlacopan (Tepaneca), Xochimilco (Xochimilca), Cuitláhuac (Cuitlahuaca), Culhuacan (Culhua), Chlco (Chalca), Mixquic (Mixquica), Tetzaco (Acolhua) (Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 282-284, Bernal 1977: 150, Carrasco 1977: 174, Castillo Farreras 1972: 29).

mobilise them for public activities, particularly for the construction and maintenance of irrigation systems and roads, and for the performance of state and religious rituals that cemented the ruler's authority and legitimacy.<sup>53</sup>

Not surprisingly the comparability between the political economies of traditional Asian and Native American societies rests at the base of much academic literature on the Inca and Aztec states produced after Wittfogel published *Oriental Despotism* in 1957.<sup>54</sup> Most of this reflection, however, only touched upon these similarities indirectly through the application of the Asiatic Mode of Production Marxist model, which explains the coexistence of rural, self-sufficient communities and superior hegemonic organisms exacting a surplus in the form of tributes and services while organising public works of general interest, as a transitional socio-economic formation between the dissolution of the primitive community and the origin of the state and class society (Godelier 1977, Bloch 1975: 35-40).<sup>55</sup>

#### 6.5.- From Aztlan to Tenochtitlan: The Azteca/Mexica Migration.

The Azteca/Mexica migration took place between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries of our era. According to indigenous sources it began in the year 1 *Tecpatl*, which corresponds to the Christian year 1168, or possibly 1116 (Brotherston 1995: 45).<sup>56</sup> Both Christian dates appear as equivalent to the Náhuatl year 1 *Tecpatl* in the sources. Glosses accompanying the corresponding glyph in codices *Azcatitlan* (plate III) and *Mexicanus* (plate 18), for instance, translate it as 1168 but Chimalpahin offers three different correlates: 1064 (1998 [c. 1620-1631]: I, 85, 179), 1116 (*ibid.*: 99), and 1168 (*ibid.*: 191), quoting the first

<sup>53</sup> Also Benedict Anderson (1972), Clifford Geertz (1980), and Shelly Errington (1989) show how the control of people is the key to power in South East Asia.

<sup>54</sup> See for example Wolf 1957, Chesnaux 1969, Bartra 1975, Carrasco 1988.

<sup>55</sup> Although modelling and comparison, as George A. Collier (1982: 1-8) observed, began to recede in the field of Native American studies at the close of the 1960s in favour of new perspectives seeking a deeper understanding of local forms of organisation, *Oriental Despotism* continued to be discussed in relation to Mesoamerica and the Andes at least until the mid 1980s.

<sup>56</sup> 1111 according to Berdan (1989: 26) .

as being the date of the Aztec departure.<sup>57</sup> The same sources date the founding of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in the year 2 *Calli*, which in our calendar corresponds to either 1325 or 1345 according to most scholars, though not all colonial sources coincide (Berdan & Anawalt 1997: 6).

How these people lived in their original homeland, Aztlan, why they left, where they stopped and what they did before arriving in the valley of Mexico is a complex story, for we have several varying accounts. Therefore I will only provide a schematic summary of the principal episodes contained in different versions. I will discuss some details in chapter seven together with relevant passages from Spanish-focused sources concerning the conquest of the North.

Aztlan was an urban settlement, seat of a stratified society like any *altepetl* in the valley of Mexico. Its location —a place within a lake or at least almost completely surrounded by water<sup>58</sup>— resembled that of Tenochtitlan.<sup>59</sup> Also, it

<sup>57</sup> The correlation between indigenous recorded dates and the Christian calendar is very problematic and has created much literature. Chronological disparity between sources has been attributed to the simultaneous use of different calendars in Mesoamerica —10 to 13 only in the basin of Mexico according to Caso (1967), Jiménez Moreno (1961: 146), and Kirchhoff (1954/1955)— but also to the chronological uncertainty structurally ingrained in the general time-reckoning system they all had in common. The system combined two independent but interlocking cycles: A solar calendar (*xihuitl*) ordering the seasonal activities and most important religious feasts, divided in eighteen 20-day units (months) to which five spare days (*nemontemi*) were added to make up a cycle of 365 days in all, and a divinatory almanac (*tonalpohualli*) combining 13 numerical coefficients and 20 signs to create a sequence of 260 different day-names (López Austin & López Luján 1996: 222, Marcus 1992: 95-100, Hassig 1985: 75-78, Nicholson 1971: 44-45). Inbuilt imprecisions in the system resulted from the fact that each day of the *xihuitl* was called by the name it had in the *tonalpohualli*, so in any given sequence of successive solar years the same day-name was repeated, for instance, in the first and 261 days of the first year, then in the 156 day of the second year and so on. Now, 365-day solar years were named after the day in which they began, but for arithmetic reasons only four *tonalpohualli* day-signs were susceptible to occupy this "year-bearer" position, succeeding each other in the order: 1-*Tochtli*, 2-*Acatl*, 3-*Tecpatl*, 4-*Calli*, 5-*Tochtli*, 6-*Acatl*, 7-*Tecpatl*, etc., and forming a re-entering cycle every 52 years, equivalent to 73 rounds of the 260 day cycle (Nicholson 1971: 44, Duverger 1983: 40-43, López Austin & López Luján 1996: 222, Brotherston 1995: 13, Hassig 1985: 75-78). The New Fire ceremony that marked the end/beginning of every "Year Binding" (52 year cycle) was used as time marker in most indigenous historical records. Clearly this dating system is suited only to distinguish years within a very short time-scale because the sequence of available year names is repeated identically every 52 years, and no system counting consecutively from a fixed zero point existed to label years with identical names which pertained to different revolutions of the cycle (Nicholson 1971: 45, Prem 1984: 6-7). Additional difficulties, Duverger observes (1983: 47), derive from the fact that Spaniards integrated in one record the different and mutually contradicting year-counts held by different communities who shared no initial point from which to count successive years. Thus in working out Christian date correlates for the events they historied, Spaniards took no account of the fact that a year 1-*Acatl* of the Mexica-Tenochca calendar could well correspond to a year 12-*Acatl* in other calendars (i.e. Tilantongo) as it was the case for the Christian year 1519 (Brotherston 1995: 14).

<sup>58</sup> Although most written sources portray Aztlan as an island (e.g. Alvarado Tezozómoc 1980 [1598]: 223 & 1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 15; Chimalpahin 1998 [c. 1620-1631]: I, 65, 91, 179, *Histoire Mexicaine...* 1998: 66), *Codex Mexicanus* represents the proximity of water in



had a dynastic ruler and temples and its inhabitants lived from agriculture, fishing and the gathering of lake products (Chimalpahin 1998 [c. 1620-1631]: I, 85, 93; Castillo 1991 [1597-1600]: 115-117, Alvarado Tezozómoc 1980 [1598]: 223 & 1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 15). None of the etymologies that the sources provide for its name —respectively associated with Herons (Alvarado Tezozómoc 1980 [1598]: 223, Durán 1967 [1579-1581]: II, 28), Reeds (*Codex Boturini* and *Codex Mexicanus* according to Seler 1985 [1894]: 327-328), or the white flower called Aztaxochitl (Alvarado Tezozómoc 1980 [1598]: 223)— is a strict phonetic derivation according to the rules of Náhuatl word composition, as Duverger (1983: 77-79) observes. Nevertheless, he remarks, they all denote whiteness and correspond to a marshy environment, two elements which also characterise Tenochtitlan. As for its geographic location the sources are vague and contradictory. According to Alvarado Tezozómoc (1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 15) and the *Códice Ramírez* (1980 [c. 1581-1590]: 4), for example, Aztlan stood in the recently discovered province of *Nuevo México*, but Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1985 [c. 1608-1625]: II, 28) placed it towards the West, beyond Xalisco, Durán (1967 [1579-1581]: II, 18) near Florida, and the *Histoire du Mechique* (in Garibay 1965: 96) "beyond the mountain of Tholman that Florida natives call Quivira." Much speculation surrounds this issue though the most favoured hypotheses today are those by Jiménez Moreno (1973: 169-170) who suggested Aztlan stood in the lake of Mexcaltitlán, in present day Nayarit, and Kirchhoff (1961: 64-67 & 1985: 258-259) who proposed it laid before present day San Isidro Culiacán, across the Lerma river, in south-west Guanajuato.<sup>60</sup>

Interpretations concerning Aztlan's elusive location and its similarity to Mexico-Tenochtitlan range between two extreme positions. One considers migration narratives essentially as symbolic constructs linked to cosmology

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the form of a river and Chimalpahin, in his *Memorial* (1998 [1620-1631]: I, 85), speaks about an arm of the sea.

<sup>59</sup> Compare the pictorial representation of Aztlan in the *Mapa Sigüenza* and the codices *Boturini*, *Azcatitlan* and *Aubin* (figs. 8-11) with that of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in the *Histoire Mexicaine...* and the codices *Mendoza* and *Aubin* (figs. 12-14). Also the descriptions of both places in the written sources quoted in this section.

<sup>60</sup> For a list of the principal locations that scholars have proposed see Tibón (1980: 355).

(e.g. Brinton 1882, Seler 1985 [1894]) or to the political necessities of power legitimization (e.g. Price 1980, Graulich 1974, 1984 & 1992, Florescano 1990, Duverger 1983, Davies 1984). Thus while Seler (1985 [1894]: 326) saw Aztlan as "a mythical hypostasis" of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and the full story as a symbolic chart of the cosmos referring to the cardinal directions rather than to real places, for Graulich (1974: 37-44, 1984: 26 & 1992: 92-93) the narrative is mainly a symbolic representation of the conflict between foreignness (hunter-gatherer newcomers) and autochthony (local fisher-agriculturists). Contrastingly, the other position assumes that as migration narratives contain real facts clothed in mythical images, it is possible to reconstruct, on the map, the route that the migrants may have followed. Acosta Saignes (1946: 34-40), for instance, attributed source discrepancies to the actual existence of two travel routes followed by different groups who met and merged in Tollan, whereas Jiménez Moreno (1973), Kirchhoff (1961: 59), and Martínez Marín (1971 & 1989) —who attribute the Aztlan/Tenochtitlan likeness to the Mexica preference for lacustrine environments— believe that one single migration route is much likelier.<sup>61</sup>

The Azteca began their march organised in various *calpoltin* —each constituted by several nuclear families linked by kinship according to Obregón Rodríguez (1995: 271)— all guided by four chiefs and a woman who carried the "magic bundle" containing the tribal god's relics and spirit. The reasons most frequently quoted as prompting departure are three:<sup>62</sup> dynastic or religious conflicts between two brothers (Alvarado Tezozómoc 1992 [c. 1600-610]: 15-16; *Histoire du Mechique*, in Garibay 1965: 96), the collective desire to conquer new territories (*HMP*, in Garibay 1965: 39) or to escape the tyranny of an overlord (Castillo 1991 [1597-1600]: 115-119), and the command of god Huitzilopochtli

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<sup>61</sup> For more detailed discussions of these interpretative positions see Olivé Negrete 1996 and Navarrete 1999.

<sup>62</sup> Note that the passages by Castillo and Chimalpahin herein quoted adduce more than one of these reasons, while other sources like *Historia de Tlatelolco* (1948 [1528]) and *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* (1992 [1570]) adduce none.

—directly, in the form of a bird or through his priest<sup>63</sup> (*Codex Boturini*, *Codex Mexicanus*, *Mapa Sigüenza*, Chimalpahin 1998 [c. 1620-1631]: I, 85-59 & 179-181, Torquemada 1975 [1615]: I, 112).

Of the multiple places they visited on the way, settling down for periods of variable duration, only a few are relevant here. Two, Colhuacan (also called Teocolhuacan) and Chicomoztoc (also called Quinehuayan) are often indistinguishable from each other and occasionally even from Aztlan. Colhuacan/Teocolhuacan, regularly the first stop *en route*, appears as the place of origin of an additional set of human groups, usually eight, who temporarily joined the ranks of the migrant Azteca whereas Chicomoztoc is distinguished, in textual sources, as a sacred site where migrant groups (Aztecs and others) perform propitiatory rituals before they can actually take leave. Both locations sometimes appear as different names for the same place of collective origin, though most frequently they are represented as contiguous, successively visited spots.

Textual and pictorial sources alike remark the subordinate position that the eight *calpoltin* from Teocolhuacan/Chicomoztoc took during their temporary alliance with the Aztecs, having begged to be admitted as travel companions and thus recognising the superiority of Huitzilopochtli as the principal deity of their "chosen leaders" (Calneck 1978: 251). Although the list varies in different accounts, it is identical—or almost identical—in nearly half the sources in my sample, usually including the principal *altepetl* of the valley of Mexico and its surroundings<sup>64</sup> and thereby foreshadowing later political developments.

From Teocolhuacan the Aztecs and the eight *calpoltin* marched together until reaching a large standing tree, beneath which the Aztecs built a small altar

<sup>63</sup> The names Mexi and Tetzauhtéotl also appear as those of the patron god, referred as well as the Demon (or *tlacatecōlotl*, Náhuatl word that missionaries coined for the Devil). Mexi and Huitzilopochtli however are also the names of the Aztec leader, deified after death in Culhuacan and thence identified with the patron god of the overall group.

<sup>64</sup> Unlike codices *Boturini*, *Azcatitlan* and *Aubin* that represent the groups by their collective name, *Mapa Sigüenza* represents them by their named rulers, appearing as well in *Codex Azcatitlan*.

for Tetzáhuītl Huitzilopochtli. The events occurred in this and the following episode are enigmatic. They involve the breaking of the tree (fig. 15), preceded or followed by Huitzilopochtli's mandate ordering the Aztecs to abandon the eight *calpoltin* (*Histoire Mexicaine...* 1998: 68-69, codices *Boturini* and *Aubin*, Alvarado Tezozómoc 1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 19-20,<sup>65</sup> Chimalpahin *Tercera relación* 1998 [c. 1620-1631]: I, 185-187). Immediately, an apparition amidst the desert: Certain characters alluded to as demons or "*mimixcoa*" are sacrificed or enslaved by the Aztecs (*Histoire Mexicaine...* 1998: 70-71, codices *Boturini* and *Azcatitlan*, Alvarado Tezozómoc 1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 21-23, Chimalpahin *Tercera relación* 1998 [c. 1620-1631]: I, 187) whereupon the group adopts a new collective name—Mexico or Mexitin—following Huitzilopochtli's mandate.

López Austin has pointed out the fundamental resemblance between the episode of the broken tree just described and the rupture of the tree of Tamoanchan which, according to other myths, stands at the centre of the cosmos communicating the human world and the divine realm. This incident added onto the Aztecs' sudden separation from their newly found companions, and their acquisition of a new name, suggests the renewal of the exclusive bond that they had with their patron god (López Austin 1989a: 93-95 & 1990: 96). As we shall see in chapter seven the Spaniards well understood the message these episodes encoded, recognising them as the supernatural institution of the political order prevailing in Central Mexico when Cortés arrived.

Other scenes of political segmentation surface in following episodes that show the group's successive abandonment of small misbehaving fractions. One incident occurred in Mechoacan or lake Pátzcuaro; another in Malinalco, where due to her sorcery, Malinalxoch, Huitzilopochtli's sister, was left behind while sleeping. Much later her son Cópil would trace the Mexico to Chapultepec and plot a regional war to avenge their deceit. The third episode depicts an internal

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<sup>65</sup> The episode is very obscure in this text because it mentions the tree and its rupture but omits the eight *calpoltin* from Colhuacan and the god's instruction to leave them behind. Thus it is only in relation with the other sources herein quoted that it becomes clear (see Calneek 1978: 246-247).

schism that is much more dramatic. The incident took place next to Coatepec, the hill where according to Durán (1967 [1579-1581]: II, 31-34), Alvarado Tezozómoc (1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 30-36 & 1980 [1598]: 227-229) and Torquemada (1975 [1615]: I, 118-119), the Mexica built a dam that turned the place into a garden of abundance, so sweet and blissful that Coyolxauhqui and her followers requested Huitzilopochtli to end the migration, thus causing the fury of the god who slaughtered the impatient dissidents. While the incident is omitted in several sources that make mention of Coatepec simply as a visited place, where nothing remarkable happened (e.g. *Historia de Tlatelolco* 1948 [1528]: 32, *Origen de los Mexicanos*), *Codex Azcatitlan* (plates 9-10) and *HMP* (in Garibay 1965: 43-44) rather than as a mundane event present it as the miraculous birth of god Huitzilopochtli, born in armour from the womb of Coatlicue to slay his sister, Coyolxauhqui, and his innumerable brothers who were planning to kill his still pregnant mother.<sup>66</sup>

Following the Aztec's steps after Coatepec, the next important stop is Tula (Tollan). Although usually appearing as just another visited site, unmarked by a particular event, its inclusion in the migration itinerary, however laconic, is definitely quite significant. As we have seen in previous chapters Tula had been the political centre of a meteoric and powerful state, widely acknowledged as the cradle of civilisation, and most Post-Classic polities in Central Mexico saw ostensible Toltec ancestry as a conspicuous source of legitimacy at the level of hegemonic power. Flourishing between the years 950 and 1150, Tula and the Toltecs represent one of the most problematic issues that Mesoamerican specialists confront, partly because textual descriptions seem to be gross exaggerations when compared to the archaeological site of Tula Xicocotitlan,<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> This version is substantially the same as the cosmogonic myth of the birth of Huitzilopochtli, which Sahagún (1989 [1558-1577]: I, 202-204) includes as an independent narrative within the section he devotes to native mythology, not as an episode of the Aztec migration story.

<sup>67</sup> The *Relación de la genealogía...* (c. 1530-1532, in García Icazbalceta 1891: III, 266) asserts that Tula was "the first city ever to exist in these regions." Sahagún described the Toltecs as a virtuous and knowledgeable people living in a realm of agricultural abundance and refined urban life (1989 [1558-1577]: I, 208), who knew all the mechanical arts, invented the calendar and script, astronomy and divination (1989 [1558-1577]: II, 650-654).

the only among several places bearing the name, which archaeological sequence corroborates ethno-historical reports on the composition of the Toltec population and the collapse of the Toltec state.

Archaeological evidence shows that towards the beginning of the eighth century the area where Tula Xicocotitlan was later established—inhabited until then by small groups of agriculturists seemingly encompassed within the economic macrosystem of Teotihuacan—experienced an abrupt increase in population levels followed by a period of steady growth. This evidence and the sudden appearance of ceramic remains of the *coyotlatelco* type—formerly related only to local elites of south-east Guanajuato, Zacatecas and Jalisco—indicate a massive arrival of migrants that coincides with the global contraction of northern Mesoamerican frontiers discussed in chapter two. A flow of migrants that may correspond to a large group of Culhuas who, according to the *Relación de la Genealogía...* (1891: III, 263-267), came from Teoculhuacan led by a certain character called Topilci<sup>68</sup> and established themselves, first in Tulancingo and then in Tula. The civico-ceremonial complexes that constitute archaeological Tula were built only during the following period (AD 800-950), also marked by the proliferation of *mazapa* objects, a kind of ceramic typical of Teotihuacan. Therefore scholars consider that the population of Tula must have comprised two main stocks: the Culhua or Tolteca-Chichimeca that various sources trace back to Teoculhuacan-Chicomoztoc (i.e., immigrants from Guanajuato-Zacatecas-Jalisco), and the Nonoalca, probably a Náhuatl speaking branch of the Teotihuacan descent also mentioned in the sources (Noguez 1995: 190-197 & 201-204, López Austin & López Luján 1996: 182-187, Bernal 1977: 147).

As for the incidents and protagonists involved in the precipitous collapse of the Toltec state the sources are often contradictory. Yet they all present a picture of internal conflict between factions, frequently leading to the exile of the ruler/priest Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl and always resulting in the total erosion

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<sup>68</sup> Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl or just Quetzalcóatl in other sources like Sahagún (1989 [1558-1577]: I, 209-218).

of political unity and, eventually, the complete abandonment of Tula (Zantwijk 1986: 321-337).<sup>69</sup> Despite all the obscurities, scholars agree that Tula's downfall eased the inflow of successive waves of Chichimeca immigrants<sup>70</sup> into the basin of Mexico and surrounding valleys —of whom the Mexica were the last. Also they agree that the Toltec diaspora took a significant group of Tolteca-Chichimeca to the valley of Puebla<sup>71</sup> whereas a smaller group, probably comprising the ruling lineage descent, eventually established itself in Culhuacan<sup>72</sup> (Noguez 1995: 200-201, Carrasco 1971a: 459, Caamaño Panzi 1992: 138, Reyes García & Güemes 1995: 245-246, López Austin 1993: 35, Brotherston 1995: 73-74).

The crucial point for us is that when the Mexica arrived in the valley all five lake-shores were thoroughly filled with towns and hamlets, some founded by the eight *calpoltin* whom they had left at the site of the broken tree. Thus they came to participate, initially, as yet another subordinate entity in a regional network of interdependent but competing *altepetl* with well established mechanisms for power legitimation. Only one of these *altepetl*, Culhuacan, was unequivocally a Toltec successor, since it had been founded by refugees from Tula and maintained dynastic continuity. The rest were later established by Chichimeca invaders, of whom the group led by Xólotl was particularly prominent as the dynasty he initiated in Tenayuca and Tetzaco eventually ruled the entire eastern sector of the valley. Other Chichimeca groups include the Tepaneca, established in Azcapotzalco; the Otomí,

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<sup>69</sup> According to archaeological evidence Tula was nearly deserted early in the thirteenth century.

<sup>70</sup> The term Chichimeca applied to all "rustic," uncivilised peoples whatsoever also served to identify peoples with a common geographic origin in the North. Hence the apparently contradictory use of the label Tolteca-Chichimeca for some groups of Tula founders, who were not uncultured but did come from the North, or the characterisation of ancient local populations within the basin as barbaric Chichimecas (Acosta 1962 [1590]: 320; Benavente 1969 [1565]: 2-3).

<sup>71</sup> The *HTC* (1989 [c. 1533]) and the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan no. 2* (in Yoneda 1991) recount how these Tolteca-Chichimeca sought the alliance of seven Chichimeca groups from Chicomoztoc to expel the Olmeca-Xicalanca.

<sup>72</sup> The *Relación de la genealogía...* (c. 1530-1532), the *Origen de los Mexicanos* (c.1530-1532), the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* (1992 [1570]: 14-17) and Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1985 [c. 1608-1625]: I, 274-288) identify the Culhua with the Toltecs and their lineage with that of Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl.

established in Xaltocan; the Acolhua, who settled down in Coatlinchan, intermarried with Xólotl's Chichimecs and became part of the *tlatocáyotl* of Tetzcoco; the Totolimpaneca, who founded Chalco, and the Xochimilca. Others, like the Totomihuaque, the Tlaxcalteca and the Huexotzinca, to mention just a few, peopled the adjacent valleys to the South (Keen 1984: 20, Carrasco 1971a: 465, Caamaño Panzi 1992: 134, Reyes García & Güemes 1995: 247-251).

By the time the Mexica arrived, the basin of Mexico was dominated by a confederation, sometimes described as constituting a Triple Alliance (*Excan Tlatoloyan* in Náhuatl) where Tepaneca, Acolhua and Toltec peoples were respectively represented by the allied cities of Azcapotzalco, Coatlinchan and Culhuacan (*Anales de Cuauhtitlán* 1992 [1570]: 37, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1985 [c. 1608-1625]: I, 284, 342-347). This was a system of regional politics current at least since the time of the Toltec supremacy. For the so-called Toltec empire was a confederation of three *tlatocáyotl* (Tollan-Otompan-Culhuacan), which was replicated after the collapse of Tula in a new confederation (Xaltocan-Tenayuca-Culhuacan) replaced in turn by the Triple Alliance that Azcapotzalco, the most powerful partner, maintained with Coatlinchan and Culhuacan (Garibay 1962: 9-10 & 13, Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 273-275, 281). Interestingly enough, the Mexica circuit after Tula includes important *altepetl* in all three allied *tlatocáyotl*. First they stopped at various localities in the eastern province of Acolhuacan; then they visited the largest Tepaneca *altepetl* in the western shore of Tetzcoco lake, establishing themselves for a long period in Chapultepec as vassals of Azcapotzalco. Finally, a regional war forced them to leave this location request asylum from the *tlatoani* of Culhuacan, who took them as vassals and allowed them to settle the barren and desolate quarter of Tizaapan.

Sources of Mexica tradition use the period at Tizaapan to establish the Mexica as a cunning and courageous lot, capable of enduring the most difficult situations, who enjoyed the favoured protection of their god, Huitzilopochtli. Being as they were, late intruders, whose customs often collided with the canon



established by local culture, the Mexica awoke suspicion among most of the valley's inhabitants, a situation that their enemy Cópil had capitalised on to orchestrate the war that expelled them from Chapultepec. According to Durán (1967 [1579-1581]: II, 40) and Alvarado Tezozómoc (1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 50-51) the Culhua *tlatoani* granted them Tizaapan hoping they would perish when bitten by the poisonous snakes that swarmed the place, but making the most of adversity the Mexica cooked and ate the serpents.

There is no point in reviewing source discrepancies concerning how Culhua-Mexica relations evolved into the confrontation that put an end to the Mexica stay in Tizaapan. Suffice it to say that neither the excessive tribute obligations, nor the disadvantageous conditions under which they served as mercenary troops had the shattering effect that Culhua nobility expected. On the contrary, the military prowess they displayed in the war against Xochimilco alerted the Culhua *tlatoani*, whose policy thereafter changed. He promoted intermarriage among Culhua and Mexica commoners and gave women of his own lineage to marry high ranking Mexica men. Nevertheless, the sacrifice the Mexica performed to consecrate Huitzilopochtli's temple<sup>73</sup> provoked the Culhua fury and, once again, they were forced to flee and roam the marshy lakeside, taking shelter among the reeds and rushes until discovering their promised land.

The foundation of Mexico-Tenochtitlan is one of the most complex episodes of the migration story. For the purpose of my discussion we simply need to know that in a tiny islet located within Azcapotzalco's territory, near lake Tetzaco's western shore,<sup>74</sup> Huitzilopochtli miraculously delivered his revelation: an eagle devouring a serpent, perched upon a prickly pear cactus

<sup>73</sup> In some sources the sacrificial victim is a Culhua maiden (*HMP*, in Garibay 1965: 54) —sometimes the daughter of the Culhua ruler himself (Alvarado Tezozómoc 1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 54-56, Durán 1967 [1579-1581]: II, 41)— whereas in others the slain victims are four Xochimilca captives (*Codex Aubin* 1963: 40-41, Torquemada 1975 [1615]: 131-132, *Historia de Tlatelolco* 1948 [1528]: 39-41).

<sup>74</sup> Mexica sources claim the islet was uninhabited but 1975-1979 excavations at the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan demonstrated otherwise. Remains unequivocally corresponding to the period AD 900-1200 lie beneath the level of remains dated after 1200 which correspond to the Mexica occupation of the site, i.e., the city of Tenochtitlan (Duverger 1983: 350-351).

tree that grew from Cópil's heart. The Mexica had killed Cópil in ritual sacrifice upon discovering his plot in Chapultepec several years back and they had thrown his heart in the middle of the lake. Now they could recognise the signals that marked the islet where it hit the ground as their ultimate destination, so they finally established their own *altepetl* and named it Tenochtitlan (Near the Prickly Pear Cactus Tree).

The scene is depicted in folio 2r of *Codex Mendoza* (fig. 13), showing a large rectangle within a blue border of stylised water, divided by two intersecting diagonal stripes that create the four sectors into which the city was formally divided. At the centre stands a glyphic sign representing an eagle, a cactus, and a stone.<sup>75</sup> Framing the page is a continuous fifty-one-years count. It begins in the upper left hand corner with the year 2-calli and continues around, ending at 13-acatl; that is, from the apparition of the miraculous signal to the final year of the reign of Tenoch, Mexica ruler since Culhuacan.<sup>76</sup> Also represented at the page bottom we see the Mexica conquests of Tenayuca and Culhuacan, both achieved in this period (Robertson 1994 [1958]: 98, Berdan & Anawalt 1997: 4-5).

Despised by local people as a conflictive band of intruders, the Mexica confronted in the beginning a very difficult situation. Not only were they forced to accept the condition of subjects to Azcapotzalco, given their *altepetl* location within Tepaneca territory; they had also lost their *tlatoani* in the Chapultepec war and therefore had no dynastic ruler, an essential condition for political autonomy. Furthermore, to achieve an effective presence in local politics, the Mexica needed to link their own dynasty to that of an hegemonic *altepetl*, for as we saw above, the *Excan Tlatoloyan* completely structured regional inter-group relations. Every *altepetl* in the valley was part of one of

<sup>75</sup> The glyph is carved in a pre-conquest stone piece known as "*teocalli de la guerra sagrada*," preserved in México City (fig. 16).

<sup>76</sup> Other pictorial representations include the *Tira de Tepechpan* (fig. 2), the *Histoire Mexicaine...* (1998, see fig. 12), codices *Aubin* (fig. 14), *Azcatitlan* (fig. 17) and *Mexicanus*, whereas written records include Durán (1967 [1579-1581]: II, 44), Chimalpahin *Tercera relación* (1998 [c. 1620-1631]: I, 213-215), and Alvarado Tezozómoc (1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 62-68).

three major *tlatocáyotl*, presided each by a hegemonic polity, that together constituted a confederation which represented the major population stocks in the region: Tepaneca, Acolhua-Chichimeca, and Culhua-Tolteca. The Mexica-Tenochca—an early conflict over land distribution had provoked a dissident Mexica fraction to split off, settle down separately in the adjacent islet of Tlatelolco and obtain its first *tlatoani* from the Tepaneca—decided to base their ruling lineage in Culhuacan due to the legitimising character this descent line had as the most closely linked to Toltec ancestry (Broda 1978: 99, Navarrete 1991: 70-71). Later on they also secured Tepaneca blood by marrying their second ruler, Huitzilíhuitl, to the daughter of Tezozómoc, *tlatoani* of Azcapotzalco (Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 278).

The first Mexica-Tenochca *tlatoque* had, as subordinate rulers, very limited power but their participation in their overlord's imperial wars allowed them to benefit from the tribute imposed on defeated towns (Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 272-273 & 277, Hill Boone 1991: 138-139) and also brought them lands. After the 1418 Tepanec conquest of Tetzaco, for example, Azcapotzalco's *tlatoani* distributed a portion of the conquered territory among subordinate allies, granting Huexutla to Tlatelolco and the city of Tetzaco itself to Tenochtitlan (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl 1985 [c. 1608-1625]: I, 347). Thus by the fifteenth century the Mexica had developed such mighty force and strong politico-economic alliances that in 1426, capitalising on Tepaneca succession conflicts they engineered a widespread revolt (1428-1433) resulting in the defeat of Azcapotzalco, for which the collaboration of Tetzaco and Tlacopan was fundamental. After this victory a new Triple Alliance perfectly fitting the *Excan Tlatoloyan* tradition was formalised, its members appearing as the successors of the formerly dominant confederation. Mexico-Tenochtitlan replaced Colhuacan and its ruler took the title of *Culhuatecuhtli* (lord of the Culhua), whereas the *tlatoque* of Tetzaco and Tlacopan, respectively substituting Coatlinchan and Azcapotzalco, took the corresponding titles of *Chichimecatecuhtli* (lord of the

Chichimeca) and *Tepanecatecuhtli* (lord of the Tepaneca). Nominally all three *tlatoquéyotl* were equal but the Mexica were in fact the dominant partner (Carrasco 1971a: 465 & 1977: 174-175, 213-215, 218-221, Obregón Rodríguez 1995: 278-282, Castillo Farreras 1972: 29, Bernal 1977: 150).

This Triple Alliance, the so-called Aztec empire, soon extended its domination beyond the limits ever reached by any previous power in Mesoamerica. Nevertheless, a few highly resistant polities remained independent states until the Spaniards arrived, entrapped within its territory: Tlaxcala and Huexotzinco in the Puebla-Tlaxcala region, Tototepec del Norte and Meztitlán to the Northeast, and Yopitzinco, Tototepec del Sur, and Teotitlan in the South (Davies 1968: 9-13, Carmack, Gasco & Gossen 1996: 87-88). This ancient rivalry also sheds a light upon the significance that collaborating in the Spanish search for *Nuevo México* could have had for the Mexica, Tlaxcalteca and Huexotzinca, whose participation in several expeditions is well documented, as the following chapter shows.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **YOUR PAST IS OUR FUTURE. DOCUMENTING THE CROSS-CULTURAL LOAN**

In previous chapters I discussed how the history of New Mexico's colonisation has been commonly associated with European legendary themes that Spanish conquistadors, bewildered at the scene they found in central Mexico, would have projected onto the geographic and social space they subjected to the colonial rule. Historians have long maintained that a Portuguese legend about seven bishops who supposedly fled from Europe by sea to escape the Moor invasion of the Iberian Peninsula, configured the expedition led by Francisco Vázquez de Coronado (1540-1542) and other subsequent journeys into the area that later became New Mexico. The argument holds that the search for the Seven Cities of Cíbola —first reported by Marcos de Niza and quickly adopted as a primary goal in the north-westward colonial expansion from New Spain— was carried out by gold thirsty Spaniards who seized upon the old myth of the Seven Cities allegedly founded by the Portuguese bishops somewhere across the Ocean (Hodge 1907, Hammond 1956 Horgan 1963, Clissold 1961, Chávez 1968, Udall 1987, Weber 1987 & 1992, Cutter 1992, Pastor Bodmer 1992, Mora 1992).

This "mediaevalist hypothesis," which rests on the assumption that Spanish conquistadors acted on the basis of imaginary geographies tainting their vision with well-known European chimeras, pertains to a historiographic tradition that reduces the ideal worlds of the conquerors to the notion of "the marvellous." A concept that scholars track down to popular culture in mediaeval Europe (e.g., Weckmann 1951 & 1984). Fully developed by Enrique de Gandía in the late 1920s, this interpretation became current in the 1940s, when authors like Irving Leonard (1944 & 1949) and Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (1948) re-wrote the history of early

Spanish colonialism emphasising those cases indicating that Europeans sought in the New World the monsters and marvels of their own culture. Today it is common place to assert that the desire of confirming the existence of the marvellous was such a strong driving force in the Spanish Middle Ages that it shaped the New World enterprise as much as the Crown's imperial project, the crusading spirit so deeply seated in the Spanish consciousness, or the ambitious search for gold and spices (Weckmann 1951: 132, y 1984; Hanke 1959: 3, Ladero 1994: 132).

This kind of perspective, very successful in the contemporary academic world, has resulted in a general disregard of the role that Central Mexican indigenous traditions of ancestral origin played in forging the image of *Nuevo México* that Spanish soldiers and authorities attained throughout the sixteenth century. Moreover, the excessive weight that it attributes to the European imagery also dilutes the importance that Indian political and territorial interests had in shaping the colonising process.

My intention in this chapter is to document the suggestion, posed in different sections of this thesis, that by mid sixteenth century New Spain's imaginary geography comprised an allegedly rich, densely populated country defined in the sources as "the ancient Mexican's place of origin," and that the province of *Nuevo México* was established in the course of the search for this imaginary place. It is my contention that many sixteenth and some early seventeenth century sources using the term *Nuevo México* actually meant the starting point of the Azteca / Mexica migration as described in Nahua traditions of ancestral origin. Therefore I have suggested to interpret the foundation of the province as a transcultural product, the culmination of a process of semantic duplication that began in 1521 with the re-naming of Mexico as *Nueva España*. Likewise I have proposed to see in the exploration and settling of north-west New Spain the will of many conquerors to

"de-migrate" an ancient migration, following back to Aztlan-Chicomoztoc-Teoculhucan the path that the Azteca / Mexica once followed in response to Huitzilopochtli's mandate.

Some of the authors I criticised in chapter five (e. g. Gandía 1929, Clissold 1961, Pastor Bodmer 1992) had already suggested, albeit weakly, that Nahua migration myths could have been among the legendary motifs that fed the conquerors' imagination. However, they contended that Spaniards saw those indigenous narratives merely as the *confirmation* of other European fables through which they had already conceived the nature of the unknown territories. The following quotation by Pastor Bodmer (1992: 107) represents well this interpretation:

In the New World the medieval legend of the Seven Bishops seems to have been mixed with another myth that the Indians in Mexico frequently told: the religious myth of Chicomoztot [sic] that described the origins of the seven Nahua tribes.

Greek and Roman legends concerning the Amazons and the Fountain of Eternal Youth —popularised in the Middle Ages by Sir John Mandeville, Marco Polo, and novels of chivalry— no doubt were widely searched in the Americas, as we have seen in chapter five. Amazons are often mentioned in early sixteenth century documents, including Hernán Cortés' and Nuño de Guzmán's letters. Moreover, the peninsula of California derived its name from those very sources. It is also clear, we saw too, that the fabulous island of Antilla —appearing from the fourteenth century onwards in many European maps, often combined with the story of the Seven Bishops—lent its name to the Caribbean archipelago. However, those stories evaporated once Cortés imposed the Spanish rule over the so-called Aztec empire and, as documents directly related to the exploration of *Nuevo México* make no allusion to the famous bishops, the association must be attributed to the speculation of modern scholars.

On what basis do historians sustain that such imaginations survived the colonising advance in mainland North America? Could the Spaniards keep their mythical monologue once they faced the complex, hierarchical societies of Mesoamerica, towards which they avowedly felt more affinity than towards Caribbean peoples?

New Mexico's early history is characterised by disenchantment. As the conquest progressed North from the mining districts of Nueva Vizcaya settlers saw with dismay that their dreams of rapid enrichment and social enhancement vanished, for neither spectacular wealth nor grandiose urban centres come into view beyond Santa Barbara. Yet lay and religious adventurers gave total credence to all sorts of rumours promising findings similar to the valley of Mexico elsewhere. Such discordance between the "empirical reality" and expectation has disconcerted the scholars, who cannot explain why the Spaniards were so reluctant to abandon their hopes that the North concealed a world of incredible wealth and urban refinement. Certainly the old Aztec capital resembled nothing the Europeans had seen before, but the supposition that these made them blind to everything wondrous except the legends they had grown up with depends upon an extremely simplistic understanding of the intersubjective dimensions of practice. The overwhelming encounter with Mexico-Tenochtitlan provoked wild dreams of wealth and power indeed, but to develop into feasible projects such dreams needed the firm support of solid evidence, and it was Nahua traditions of ancestral origin, indigenous reports concerning currently extant locations, and personal experience which provided that required evidence. Thus it was not a feverish imagination lost in the pursuit of chimeras but the formulation of an **empirical reality** what propelled the Spaniards northwards.



### 7. 1.- Some explicit traces of the Azteca/Mexica migration in colonial chronicles.

The clearest testimonies that link *Nuevo México* to Nahua ancestral migrations are contained in a couple of texts written by soldiers who participated, respectively, in the expeditions led by Francisco de Ibarra (Nueva Vizcaya) and Juan de Oñate (*Nuevo México*), both composed several years after the events their authors protagonised and narrated. One is the epic poem by Gaspar de Villagr , *Historia de la Nueva M xico* (1986 [1610]), which constitutes the most complete account we have on O ate's 1595-1598 conquest expedition. The other is Baltasar de Obreg n's *Historia de los descubrimientos antiguos y modernos de la Nueva Espa a* (1924 [c. 1584]), which contains lengthy accounts on the principal expeditions carried out in the Northwest until 1582, including those that, like Ibarra's, did not necessarily aim to reach the Pueblo area but did search for the mythical land of Mexican origin.

Neither Obreg n nor Villagr  ever use such names as Aztl n, Teoculhuacan or Chicomoztoc. However, both mention the Mexica primeval abode, their migration and the indigenous codices recording the story. Obreg n (1924 [c. 1584]: 10), for instance, wrote that Hernando Cort s and viceroy Mendoza tried to "discover the origin, coming, root and main of the ancient Culgua Mexica" (*descubrir el origen, venida, ra z y tronco de los antiguos culguas mexicanos*), seriously suspecting that they would find many people and riches "to be placed under the mantle of the Catholic faith" (*para sugetarlos al gremio de nuestra santa fe cat lica*). Twenty five years later Villagr  (1986 [1610]: chants I-III) claimed that in those latitudes where *Nuevo M xico* stood, traces of the ancestral migration of the Mexicans abounded. Thus we can confidently assert that the ancient indigenous traditions came to formulate the objective of the Spanish colonial enterprise and to suggest the projection of the name *Nuevo M xico* onto the North. Although often

overlooked, the following paragraph from Obregón (1924 [c. 1584]: 14-15) spells this out clearly:

The first and foremost reason why [the Spaniards] were eager to carry out an expedition to Cíbola, original abode of the Mexicans, was that among the paraphernalia, furniture and treasure of the powerful king Moctezuma, the marquis [Cortés] found chronicles, hieroglyphs, and paintings that revealed the origin, root, and migration story of the Culhuas and the ancient Mexicans.<sup>1</sup>

Now, if conquerors could formulate their exploits on the basis of those narratives it was because they fulfilled two basic requirements to qualify as legitimate, truthful and authoritative knowledge. On the one hand they were chronologically structured as annals—a well reputed format for recording historical knowledge in Europe too—and, although they were orally transmitted, they were also contained in the pictorial codices that conquerors had identified as books,<sup>2</sup> recorded in the form of "hieroglyphic texts". Thus the authoritative character that writing had for Christian culture made of these traditions legitimate knowledge, as it is clear from the following passage by Villagrà:

It is notorious, public voice and famous,  
that from these regions descend,  
those more ancient Mexicans,  
whom the famous city of México,  
so hey named to insure they would always,  
eternally be remembered,  
[...]  
**the truth of which is proved and verified,**  
**by that ancient painted,**  
**hieroglyphs they possess,**  
to communicate and understand each other<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "La causa e razón principal e primera de haber sido codiciado el descubrimiento e jornada de las provincias de Cibola y origen mexicano fue haber hallado el marqués las crónicas, carácter y pinturas, entre los homenajes, muebles y tesoro del poderoso rey Moctezuma, las cuales satisfacían el origen, tronco e venida a estos reinos de los culhuas y antiguos mexicanos."

<sup>2</sup> In fact when Motolinía (1996 [1541]: 121) describes to the King the different kinds of "books" that Mexican Indians had he remarks that only one, the annals ("el de los años y tiempos") is trustworthy and its content can be confidently taken as legitimate, true knowledge. The others are the product of the Devil's invention.

<sup>3</sup> Destas nuevas regiones es notorio, / pública voz y fama que descenden, / aquellos más antiguos Mexicanos, / que a la ciudad de México famosa, / el nombre le pusieron porque fuese, / eterna su memoria perdurable / [...] / cuya verdad se saca y verifica, / por aquella antiquísima pintura, / y modo hieroglífico que tienen, / por el cual tratan, / hablan y se entienden (Villagrà 1992 [1610]: 75).

On the other hand, the fact that there was multiple documents and oral testimonies telling the story fitted well with the criteria for authenticity and credibility current in the Spanish juridical and political practice of the time, which established the veracity of any one given statement through the accumulation of testimonies. Therefore, since many informants from different localities told the same story in a very similar way, certainty over its trustworthiness became ever more strong.

As we saw in chapter six Nahua migration narratives share a general structure that fulfilled political legitimising functions. Most accounts start from a place in the underworld "The Seven Caves" (*Chicomoztoc*), combined in the Azteca/Mexica case with another location surrounded by water: Aztlán. The migrants, invariably instructed by a patron god, who offers a glorious destiny, set out in a long pilgrimage after crossing an arm of the sea, a lake or a stream. Then they continue until finding a signal, previously revealed by the god, which indicates the ending point of the journey: the promised land. In the Azteca / Mexica case, god Huitzilopochtli is the commanding divinity and the waters crossed are those of the lake wherein the island city of Aztlán stood. Apart from the foundation of Tenochtitlán, signalled by the appearance of an eagle perched on a prickly pear tree, the episode concerning the rupture of a tree that marked the first schism of the Nahua migrant group is crucial for the present discussion.

Let us then analyse with detail the passages corresponding to the Azteca / Mexica migration in Villagrà's *Historia de la Nueva México*.<sup>4</sup>

After stating the geographic position of the province that Oñate conquered, Villagrà declares that it is publicly known to be the original homeland of the Aztecs. Then he narrates Central Mexican Nahua traditions of ancestral origin, arguing that they **certify such reputation**, which is also confirmed by the tales the soldiers heard in the frontier settlements of New Spain. According to Villagrà,

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<sup>4</sup> The fragment comes in Villagrà (1992 [1610]: 74-87).

natives in those regions unanimously repeated that far in the North the land concealed a "simple, hollow cave" (*la cóncava caverna desabrida*) from where long before had departed "two brave brothers" (*dos bríosísimos hermanos*) of royal lineage, each guiding a large group of people and animated by the desire to extend the scope of their empire. Not far from where they set out, however, they had an apparition: A well known demon euphemistically alluded to as "that damned" (*aquel maldito*) suddenly rose before them, disguised as an old, horrible woman, to deliver the Devil's instructions. Over the head this grisly woman carried an enormous piece of pure iron in the shape of a turtle shell. After declaring that she approved of the brothers' ambition of power and glory she commanded one of them to return home, as their father was old and sick, while she instructed the other to follow the destiny of his noble fate and continue down the road until founding Mexico-Tenochtitlan. I quote the words that Villagr  attributes to the Demon, which correspond to the mandate of Huitzilopochtli that, according to the Nahua myth, prompted the Azteca / Mexica migration:

[And you must settle down]  
 on a hard and solid rock,  
 entirely surrounded by clear water,  
 where a tuna cactus will be planted,  
 and perched upon the wide, thick cactus leafs,  
 an impressive eagle, beautiful, enormous,  
 fiercely feeding herself will tightly,  
 grasp in her claws a large serpent,  
 [...]  
 For there **He** wants to have established,  
 the high and gentle metropolis,  
 of the powerful state,  
 which he expressly orders,  
 to be named Mexico Tenochtitlan<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "...donde en duro y s lido pe asco, / de cristalinas aguas bien crecido, / vi edeis una tuna estar plantada, / sobre cuyas gruesas y anchas hojas, / un  guila caudal bella disforme, / con braveza cebando se estuviere, / en una gran culebra que a sus garras / vereys que esta rebuelta y bien asida / que all  quiere se funde y se lebante, / la metr poli alta y generosa, / del poderoso estado se alado, / al cual expresamente manda, / que Mexico Tenuchtitlan se ponga..." (Villagr  1992 [1610]: 82-83).

The passage, it must be noted, contains the central elements of the Azteca / Mexica migration as Nahua traditions recount them. The place of origin, Chicomoztoc, represented by "the simple hollow cave;" the departure at the request of a god, Huitzilopochtli (here the disguised Demon), and the emblematic signal of the eagle devouring a serpent as indicative of the arrival into the "Promised Land" (the Valley of Mexico). Furthermore, it also contains, in a somewhat distorted form, the **tree-breaking** episode that, in some versions of the indigenous narrative (e.g., *codex Boturini* plate III, Alvarado Tezozómoc 1992 [c. 1600-1610]: 19-20), marks the moment when, following Huitzilopochtli's mandate, the Aztecs parted with the other Nahua groups (the eight *calpoltin*) and changed their name for that of Mexica. An episode that Villagr  expressed, first, with the Demon's instructions ordering one brother to return home thereby enabling the other to proceed; and secondly, with the piece of **broken** iron that the Demon used to indicate —marking the soil as if it were a map— the way in which the migrants had to settle the territory once they reached the "promised land:"

And standing on her toes,  
she raised her thin yet powerful arms,  
and then propelled her monstrous cargo [the iron piece],  
[...]  
and as it hit the solid ground,  
trembling, totally perturbed,  
it broke to pieces that sprinkled all around,  
and in this very way, following the pattern of those marks,  
[the Mexica] later on divided their domains<sup>6</sup>

Villagr  does not reveal the sources upon which he based his account of the Azteca / Mexica migration. Most probably he used oral information, though he could have used some of the accounts written by missionaries on this topic in the second

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<sup>6</sup> "Y levantando en alto los talones [...] / alz  los flacos brazos poderosos, / y dando a la monstruosa carga vuelo [...] / la portentosa carga solt  en vago, / y apenas ocup  la dura tierra [...] / cuando temblando y toda estremecida / qued  por todas partes quebrantada, / [Y as ], de aquesta misma suerte traza y modo, / la poderosa tierra [m s tarde] dividieron..." (Villagr  1992 [1610]: 83-84).

half of the sixteenth century. It is difficult to know whether he saw any of the indigenous pictorial documents that he characterised as "ancient painted hieroglyphs." However, his oral sources were certainly well informed. Many captains in Oñate's army had access to first-hand information on the Indian civilisation that the conquest had destroyed: Juan de Oñate's father, Cristóbal, had arrived with Hernán Cortés and, when Vázquez de Coronado left for Cíbola, he became governor of Nueva Galicia. Like him other captains in the army he commanded had direct kinship links with first conquerors and settlers. As for the events concerning the colonising process prior to Oñate's expedition it is quite possible that Villagr  obtained most of his information from oral sources as well. On the one hand he frequently remarks, when speaking about things he did not personally see, that his assertions are based on eyewitness testimonies. On the other hand, we know that many of his fellow soldiers had participated in earlier expeditions. Nevertheless he seems to follow closely the history by Baltasar de Obreg n (1924 [1584]). Also, he may have known the reports by N  n ez Cabeza de Vaca (1906 [1642]) and the passages on the conquest of Nueva Vizcaya, C bola and *Nuevo M xico* contained in early printed chronicles such as Mendieta's *Historia Eclesi stica Indiana* (1997 [1597]: II, 59-64, 471-474, 495-502).

The most remarkable aspect of the first chants in Villagr 's poem, however, is not the degree of detail to which they reconstruct past events that the author may have known either by word of mouth or through other texts. It is those remarks that Villagr  makes as an eyewitness what seem specially outstanding. That is, the empirical evidence that verifies, in his opinion, most of the Aztec migration story. Particularly revealing is the way in which he articulates Nahua myths, his own experience, and the reports concerning the Seven Cities that Spanish soldiers constantly obtain from Indian informants.

To begin with, Villagr  asserts that just as the ruins of Classical Rome, "that iron heap remained right where it was planted" (*aquel moj n que all  qued  plantado*), standing as a monument on the way to *Nuevo M xico*. Therefore, he continues, every soldier in O ate's army —including himself— could see it, realising in complete amazement that it certified the Mexica story. Moreover, to convince the reader he argues "as an eyewitness" (*como testigo de vista*) that the metal was as pure and fine as *Copella* silver, and that no iron vein that could explain its provenance existed in the vicinity (Villagr  1992 [1610]: 84-85).<sup>7</sup> Secondly, he mentions the ruins of a large city —most probably La Quemada— and the abundant ceramic remains that the army constantly came across:

That it is from this new territory that first departed,  
the refined Mexicans is indicated,  
by the large, destroyed city,  
that we all can see in Nueva Galicia,  
with its massive buildings turned to ruins,  
which the natives of the land,  
assert was founded,  
by the new Mexicans who left,  
from the land we now search for,  
[... and beyond this place the soldiers  
everywhere they walked discovered]  
patent traces, marks and signs,  
of the truth we now pursue,  
for throughout all those deserted lands,  
and without looking for it,  
we always found plenty of ceramics,  
of quality good and bad,  
sometimes gathered in large piles,  
sometimes spread around, dispersed<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The large pieces of virgin iron that are the object of Villagr 's speculation in this passage are the fragments of a meteorite. They were obviously an outstanding landmark in the time when O ate led his army to *Nuevo M xico* and they still exist today, though not in the place where Villagr  saw them, that is, where the meteorite hit the ground (Stephen Lekson, Curator of Anthropology, Museum of Natural History, University of Colorado: Verbal communication).

<sup>8</sup> "Y haber salido destas nuevas tierras, / los finos mexicanos nos lo muestra, / aquella gran ciudad desbaratada, / que en la Nueva Galicia todos vemos, / de gruesos edificios derribados, / donde los naturales de la tierra, / dicen que la plantaron y fundaron, / los nuevos Mexicanos que salieron, / de aquesta nueva tierra que buscamos, / [...y desde aqu  la soldadesca por todas partes encontraba] / patentes rastros, huellas y se ales, / desta verdad que vamos inquiriendo, / a causa de que en todo el despoblado, / siempre fuimos hallando sin buscarla, / mucha suma de loza, mala y buena, / a veces en montones recogida, / y otras toda esparcida y derramada..." (Villagr  1992 [1610]: 86-87)

It could be argued, of course, that this is a *post-factum* interpretation, elaborated after the province was established and in a time when the colonial and metropolitan authorities had put into question the convenience of keeping it as a colony thereby making it necessary to find justifications for its maintenance. On the other hand, there is sufficient proof to assert that, in publishing his poem, Villagr  sought to back up his request to be appointed governor of a mining region, for while writing the text he was negotiating in Spain the corresponding royal charter.<sup>9</sup> For both reasons it could be strategically convenient to present *Nuevo M xico* as the Aztec ancestral homeland and to prove that many other conquerors since Cabeza de Vaca and Cort s himself had tried to find the place. Nevertheless, earlier documents (letters, reports and petitions) deriving from the 1580s expeditions to the Pueblo area and from other enterprises not necessarily linked to the exploration of that region, also refer to *Nuevo M xico* in such terms that an association with the original Aztec homeland, when not explicit, is inescapable.

The first document I want to bring forth is the one Brotherston and Gallegos (1990) call the *Tlaxcala Codex*, the final section (f. 236-317) of Diego Mu oz Camargo's *Historia de Tlaxcala* (number 242 of the Hunter Collection of the University of Glasgow). It is a sixteenth century pictorial manuscript that consists of a series of 156 scenes primarily depicting the battles that Tlaxcalan Indians fought against other native peoples as part of the obligations deriving from their alliance with Cort s and other European captains. The *Codex* no doubt is related to the so-called *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, painted around 1550, as it contains almost the same scenes, with the same order and the same N huatl glosses (Brotherston & Gallegos 1990: 117-118). However it expands the *Lienzo* to include the conquests of

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<sup>9</sup> Official documents concerning this petition are reproduced in Francisco del Paso y Troncoso's edition of Villagr  (Villagr  1900: II, 5-81).



Guatemala, Oriente, Nicaragua and Oaxaca, as well as Vázquez de Coronado's expedition to Cíbola (Cipolla in the *Codex* glosses). This final scene, that occupies the last folio in the *Codex* (Acuña 1984) shows an enclosed town with seven entrances, or gateways (fig. 18) that resonate with the seven Chicomoztoc caves (Brotherston & Gallegos 1990: 134-135). Reason why Brotherston (1995: 74) thinks that the document "reflects the ancient history as if repeated achetypally in sixteenth century events.

The *Tlaxcala Codex* is an indigenous document, painted by indigenous scribes, and herein lies its importance for the argument of this thesis because, while it was the Spaniards alone who conceptualised Mexico as a *Nueva España*, the toponymic projection of Mexico onto the Northwest was the product of the collaborative construction of Spaniards and Nahua Indians, involved at least since the decade of 1540 in the common enterprise of subjecting the Chichimeca territory. This is clearly stated not only in the *Tlaxcala Codex* but also in another pair of indigenous documents that, in addressing the Mixtón War, are far from portraying Nahua troops as merely "participating in Spanish conquests."

Plate 1 of the *Códice de Tlatelolco* (fig. 19), painted in the second half of the sixteenth century, shows for instance the armies that viceroy Mendoza commanded to fight in that war, but while small mounted characters at the bottom of the page represent the Spanish troops, with their captains (including the viceroy himself), large standing Indian warriors represent the leading *caciques* of the Indian companies, indicating that for the scribe the war was somehow an indigenous enterprise. A similar attitude of pride is manifest in the account that Francisco Acauzitli, *cacique* of Tlalmanalco, wrote about the performance of his people—whom he personally commanded—in that war (AGN, Historia, vol. 4, No. 5, f. 483-508).

After the Mixtón War many Nahua Indians from Central Mexico went along in the conquering expeditions heading northwards. As I explained in chapter four, an important Mexica group collaborated with Francisco de Ibarra and founded the village of Nombre de Dios. It is not impossible that Indian collectivities such as this one contributed to convince the Spanish captains that the search for the ancestral Nahua homeland was a feasible enterprise. Obregón (1924 [1584]: 39-41) asserts in his chronicle that Francisco de Ibarra's uncle, Diego, was determined to "discover the *Nuevo México*, which in those days was called Copala" and which many people thought to be the place of origin of the "ancient *Culguas Mexicanos*". The 1563 *Relación de lo que descubrió Diego de Ibarra en la provincia de Copala, llamada Topiamé* (AGI, Patronato 21, No. 4, R. 3) and the *Relación de las cosas de la gobernación de la Nueva Vizcaya e informaciones referentes al servicio de Francisco de Ibarra*. (Patronato 20, No. 5, R. 16) provide the corresponding first-hand testimonies.

Although Francisco and Diego de Ibarra did not use the expression *Nuevo México* as a toponym, they did say about certain places that they could well be a "New Mexico," and also stated openly the desire to find the Mexican ancestral homeland. On the other hand, it is precisely to this period that the first documented uses of the term as a place-name thus far identified belong. The earliest is a report by friar Jacinto de San Francisco (1561). I hereby quote the relevant passage:

Hoping to witness in my own days another conversion process like that of this land, **I set out from this city** in the company of two other friars, more than two years ago, **in the search for *Nuevo México*, the existence of which is known since we arrived in [New Spain], although it has not yet been verified [...]** and we came to a point one hundred and fifty leagues from this city, where there are many different people [...]. And this [exploring enterprise] I would undertake wilfully [...] in order to contribute [...] to opening the way to Santa Elena and to the new land where Francisco Vázquez de Coronado went,

and many leagues beyond, so that [...] *Nuevo México's* truth could be finally established.<sup>10</sup>

Note that the friar here does not refer to the region later identified as *Nuevo México*. The term, in the text, is the name of a place indeed but not a known place. *Nuevo México* appears in his discourse as an elusive, hidden object, the existence of which the Spaniards struggle to verify. A place, in short, that conquerors and missionaries dreamt about on the basis of Indian tales. An interesting document dated a few years later represents the first moment when the mythical goal was reified; that is, a chart recording the act of taking possession of "*Nuevo México's Lake*" discovered on November 8, 1568 by a certain Francisco Cano, lieutenant mayor of the mines of Mazapil.<sup>11</sup>

## 7. 2.- A mirror image: Mexico-Tenochtitlan and *Nuevo México* /Cíbola/Copala.

The similarity between Aztlán and Mexico-Tenochtitlan has not only been the subject of intense academic debate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Just as modern scholars have done, the Spaniards noted from the start the patent similarity that indigenous painted books and oral traditions attributed to the two furthestmost points in the migration epic of the Azteca /Mexica. As I said in chapter six, none of the pictographs on this topic that Cortés and his men saw in the early contact years seems to have survived. Nevertheless, the unquestionable resemblance between the representation of Aztlán in the *Mapa Sigüenza* (fig. 8) and that of Mexico Tenochtitlan's foundation in the *Histoire Mexicaine...* (fig. 12) and the

<sup>10</sup> "Con deseo de ver en en mis días otra conversion semejante a la de esta tierra, salí desta ciudad en compañía de otros dos religiosos, habrá más de dos años, en demanda del Nuevo México, de quien se ha tenido noticia desde que a esta tierra vinimos, aunque la certinidad no se ha visto [...] y llegamos ciento y cincuenta leguas desta ciudad, a donde hay gran diferencia de gentes [...] La cual (demanda) yo tomaba y tomaría con gran voluntad [...] para que [...] se abriera camino desde aquí a Santa Elena y a la tierra nueva donde fue Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, y muchas leguas más adelante, y muy en breve y en poca costa [...] saberse la certinidad del Nuevo Méxicco." Letter from Jacinto de San Francisco to the King, Mexico, July 20, 1561 (In García Icazbalceta 1889, II: 241-243).

<sup>11</sup> *Toma de posesion de la Laguna de Nuevo México. Testimonio dado por el escribano Pedro de Valverde*, 10 November 1568 (in CODOINAO: XV, 535-540).

*Codex Aubin* (fig. 14), and between these and the emblem representing the foundational miracle engraved in the pre-conquest monolith known as *Teocalli de la guerra sagrada* (fig. 16) demonstrate that for indigenous people both places mirrored each other.

Somehow the narrative of the migration as contained in the standard pre-conquest version invites verification. Already in pre-conquest times Moctezuma I (1439-1469) sent a group of wise men to follow his ancestors' pilgrimage route back to the land of origin but they could not follow the traces beyond Tula, so they appealed to magic (Durán 1967 [c. 1579-1581]: II, 215-222). Modern scholarly interpretations of these narratives, as we saw in chapter six, aim either to unravel the symbolic significance of this similarity or to reconstruct the migratory path in order to locate Aztlán. For some scholars this would amount to solving "the problem of the degree of credence that Mexican indigenous traditions in general can be accorded" (Kirchhoff 1961: 59). Curiously enough, in his attempt to overcome the difficulties that Moctezuma's envoys had solved through magic, Kirchhoff engages in a sort of "de-migration" structurally very similar to the one that sixteenth century conquerors also carried out. Like them, he matches the localities mentioned in ethnohistorical sources with present day localities by comparing the landmarks described in the chronicles and codices with those observable on the ground. This type of verifying strategy depends on assuming an essential similarity between the principles that rule the way in which the cognisant subject formulates his relation to the world and the principles that articulate the understandings of the alien discourse mediating his relation to the object he wants to cognise, which entails of course identification. As we saw in chapter two it was precisely this cognitive operation what opened the space for the transcultural negotiation that made the Spaniards believe there was another indigenous metropolis where they could repeat their exploits.

For the Spaniards *Nuevo México* was Aztlan, even if they did not spell it out by using the term. A European coastline map published in the 1580 *Atlas* by Vaz Dourado (map 10) indicates how far was this a widespread assumption in the period preceding the foundation of the province that Oñate conquered. The chart, intended as an instrument for navigation, shows in a central position the Pacific Ocean seashore of North America, including Baja California. Although it contains almost nothing else, two identification elements on the <sup>right</sup>~~left~~ extreme of the page resonate with images of Aztlan as they appear in two or three prototypical codices such as the *Codex Boturini* and the *Codex Azcatitlan* (figs. 9-10), and also with the "map of Tenochtitlan" attributed to Hernán Cortés (map 8). One above the other, a pair of brain-cell-looking figures interconnected by a narrow line (or thread or channel) clearly represent two lakes. The one in the bottom is marked with the legend "*Fernaocortes. atomoporar Matecuma MEXICO*" so it obviously represents Mexico City; the one at the top has no legend but I contend it is *Nuevo México*.

Tenochtitlan mirrors Aztlan in that it is a lake, among other things, and *Nuevo México*, represented in this map exactly North from Mexico city, does the same. Let us not forget that already in 1568 Francisco Cano claimed to have discovered "*Nuevo México's Lake*" somewhere around the mining district of Mazapil (CODOINAO: XV, 535-540). Furthermore, other explorers in the same period—and after—who identified *Nuevo México* with other geographic locations, also refer to a densely populated lake district and, as I show right below, some even reproduce additional elements typically signalled by modern scholars as characterising the mirror relation between Aztlan and Tenochtitlan in the native tradition.

Friar Pedro de Espinareda, a Franciscan missionary in the mines of San Martín, Nueva Vizcaya, who collaborated with Francisco de Ibarra and was, with

Jacinto de San Francisco, one of the founders of the village of Nombre de Dios (Barlow & Simsor 1943: 14-24), wrote in a letter dated January 20, 1567:

I affirm that [...] about nine years ago, travelling over the land of Pánuco —coast of the Northern Sea— with other missionaries during the enterprise I said above, I knew from the Pánuco natives that further inland, approximately one hundred and fifty leagues towards the North, there was a **great lake surrounded by large settlements which had plenty of gold**, although I rather believed it was copper **and I understood the place was called the White Mexico** and certain Spaniards wanted to go and see but they were lost on the way [...] And after I came to this land of San Martín, a fellow missionary named **friar Cindos [Jacinto de San Francisco]** **heard the same news** from these people and I also say that **the Viceroy sent captain Francisco de Ibarra to Copala, which I understand is precisely that place** but following his own ideas and dismissing ours he went towards the Southern Sea to Sinaloa [...] Thus I think it would be a great service for God and the King to discover this land [Copala / the Lake district above mentioned] because two things then could be done, one to convert those souls and the other to open the way for these mines so that the Spaniards here could find relief and join efforts with Melendiz's conquest [of Florida] to prevent the French or any other rivals from finding their way into [the region].<sup>12</sup>

Note that nearly twenty years later Obregón (1924 [1584]: 39-41) asserted that Copala was *Nuevo México's* former name, but note particularly that Espinareda's contention that the lake was called "the White Mexico" resonates with the fact that both Aztlán and Tenochtitlán, as we saw in chapter six, were associated to "whiteness" in the Nahuatl tradition (see p. 235 above).

After 1539 and until approximately 1600, the imaginary geography of northern New Spain comprised a number of places with a non-fixed position that

<sup>12</sup> "Digo que [...] habrá nueve años que andando yo y otros religiosos por la tierra de Pánuco, costa de la mar del norte, en la demanda que tengo dicho, entendí de los naturales de Pánuco que adelante, hacia el norte, ciento y cincuenta leguas, poco más o menos, había una gran laguna y grandes poblaciones alrededor de ella y que tenían cantidad de oro, aunque yo entendí que era cobre y que se llamaba el México Blanco y ciertos españoles quisieron ir a verlo y perdiéronse en el camino [...] y después que vine a esta tierra de San Martín, tuvo un mi compañero que se llamaba fray Cindos la misma noticia de los de acá y como el señor visorrey envió a Francisco de Ibarra por capitán a lo de Copala, que según tengo entendido es esto y él rigiéndose por su parecer y dejado el nuestro se fue por la mar del Sur para irse a la Zin.a [Sinaloa...] y así tengo entendido que se hará gran servicio a Dios y a Su Mg. en descubrir esto porque se podrían hacer dos cosas, la una convertir aquellas ánimas y lo otro abrir camino para estas minas [...] y los españoles se remediarán y juntarse a esta derrota con la conquista de Melendiz y quitarse a la ocasión que los franceses o otros contrarios no hallen donde entrar." Letter by friar Pedro de Espinareda to Lic. Orozco, judge of the *Audiencia de Guadalajara*, Nombre de Dios, January 20, 1567 (AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara 51).

oscillated as follows. Initially all the vast unknown territory beyond the frontier of New Spain, between Florida and California, was divided in three zones: Quivira to the Northeast, in the Great Plains; Cíbola in the North, on the margins of the Río Grande river (today Río Bravo), and Copala to the Northwest, somewhere in the Colorado river above the California sea. From the 1560s on different sections of this overall area were known as *Nuevo México*, although little by little the region associated to this name became more definite as toponyms construed upon indigenous references were assigned to specific locations. Thus while Baltasar de Obregón claimed that Copala was *Nuevo México's* former name, by the time Oñate conducted his conquering enterprise Quivira and Copala both fell outside the boundaries of the province of *Nuevo México*, which had become clearly identified with Cíbola, that is, the Pueblo Indian country. This ambiguity is significant, particularly the confusion between Copala and *Nuevo México* as it indicates that ancestral Nahua migration stories somehow configured the Spanish representation of the land long before Villagrà spoke it out loud. Some reports since Francisco de Ibarra's days place Copala (a lake densely surrounded with cities frequently considered the Mexica ancestral homeland) North from California. May we affirm that Spaniards interpreted the California sea as the water stream that migrant Mexica crossed in the initial stage of their journey?

From the 1580s on explicit connections between *Nuevo México*, the ancestral Aztec homeland and a still occult lake district thoroughly urbanised multiply. The chronicle by Baltasar de Obregón and the *Relación breve y verdadera del descubrimiento del Nuevo Mexico, que descubrimos nueve compañeros que salimos de Santa Barbola, en compañía de tres religiosos de la orden de señor Sant Francisco* (Cartas de Indias I: 230-33), which reports on friar Agustín Rodríguez' 1581 journey to the Conchos river, are clear examples of this kind of mixture.

According to the *Relación*, the party set out from Santa Barbara on 5 July 1581. After walking thirty one days across a territory inhabited by naked Chichimecas ("*jente desnuda chichimeca*") and then nineteen days more without seeing any people at all, the expeditionaries met an Indian who said that one day further they would find abundant maize and people dressed in colours, like the Spaniards, and he did not lie, for

"...in August 21, we discovered a town that had forty five houses, two and three storeys high [...] and later on we discovered five more villages [...] And two days later came a *cacique* [...] from whom we knew that further ahead there was a great number of towns...."<sup>13</sup>

All in all the party discovered sixty one towns, the houses of which stood close to each other along well delineated streets and often clustered around *plazas*. According to the report, friar Bernardino Beltrán, a monk who shortly after entered the region with captain Antonio de Espejo, "was told about a large lake nearby, surrounded with many settlements of many people who go about navigating in canoes, the prows of which they ornament with large, brass-coloured globes" (*Cartas de Indias* I: 232-33).<sup>14</sup> About Rodríguez' and Chamuscado's expedition Obregón (1924 [c. 1584]: 251-253) wrote that as their march progressed, the expeditionaries, ever more frequently came across dressed people who reported that others beyond lived in large houses and "spoke the Mexican language" (*hablaba la lengua mexicana*). Also throughout the region they saw willow grain deposits (*trojes*) "that seem almost like those of the Mexicans" (*que imitan a las de los mexicanos*), and as they knew that further ahead Indians were bellicose they had no doubt of their kinship to "the ancient Culhua-Mexica" (*no dudaron ser estos de la misma población de los antiguos culguas mexicanos*).

<sup>13</sup> "...a veinte y un dias del mes de agosto, descubrimos un pueblo que tenia quarenta y cinco casas de dos y tres altos ... y luego hallamos y descubrimos otros cinco pueblos [...] Y a cavo de dos dias bino un cacique [...] nos ynformamos dellos que adelante avia grandissima suma de pueblos y a los lados..." (*Cartas de Indias* I: 230-31).

<sup>14</sup> "Dieronle noticia de una muy grande laguna, de muchas poblaciones y gente, y que en ella andan en canoas, y que en las proas traen de color de alaton unas bolas grandes..."



There is one last point I must address to demonstrate the relation that *Nuevo México*, understood as a transcultural imaginary world, has with Nahua traditions of ancestral origin. The most frequent explanation that traditional historiography formulates for the meaning of the term *Nuevo Mexico* is that the Spaniards, overwhelmed by the sight of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, engaged in the frantic search for another, similar place. But to postulate the existence of a *Nuevo México* entailed more than imagining a replica of the pre-conquest Aztec capital. In the popular usage of the time *México* was not only used to designate Mexico City. Very frequently it alluded to the region Hernán Cortés initially conquered, where Náhuatl was spoken, and Náhuatl in fact was generally called "*lengua mexicana*," as we saw in various quotations throughout this thesis.

The peculiarity of the toponym rests on the fact that it is the only sixteenth century example where the adjective New precedes an indigenous place-name. This is not simply the result of the projection of the expectations that Mexico-Tenochtitlan awoke. The sixteenth century exploration of New Spain's Northwest was characterised by the massive participation of Nahuas from the basin of Mexico and the Puebla-Tlaxcala valley. The chronicles written in Náhuatl by indigenous authors, which attribute great importance to that participation, speak about "*Yancuic Mexico*".<sup>15</sup> Regularly translated as "new" (*nuevo*), the word *Yancuic* has ambiguous connotations. In Náhuatl it means "the new" as the "the most recent" but also "the original," "the primeval."<sup>16</sup> Thus *Yancuic México* may also be translated as "the first, the original México," that is, Aztlán. This was precisely the sense that many Spanish conquerors, at least since the decade of 1560, gave to the expression, even when in their own language the word *nuevo* or *nueva* (new) meant a very different thing: "another," in the sense of "a second thing of the same kind," the

<sup>15</sup> Alvarado Tezozómoc's *Crónica Mexicáyotl* (1992 [1598]), for instance.

<sup>16</sup> (Federico Navarreta and José Rubén Romero: personal communication).

"recently created" (*recién hecho*) and the "never seen before" (Fernández Gómez 1962: 716-717).

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: and ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.

Deuteronomy 12: 2-3 (King James Version)

The paradox that Spanish conquerors experienced in confronting urban life in Mesoamerica and the ambivalent attitude they assumed before indigenous culture after witnessing the strange yet familiar marvels of Mexico-Tenochtitlan inscribe the fundamental questions inspiring this thesis. Like everywhere else in the New World, conquerors acted here as if programmatically guided by Yahweh's prescription in Deuteronomy, laying waste to Indian settlements with spectacular thoroughness. They demolished the people's altars, destroyed their buildings, and burnt the images of their gods. A suppressive performance that indigenous records of colonial history depict dramatically<sup>1</sup> and which modern literature on sixteenth century colonial discourse has extended to European conceptualisation of Amerindian otherness in general, frequently claiming that the power of representation exercised by European conquerors as a cognitive strategy for domination was so entrenched in their own cultural categories that

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<sup>1</sup> See for example plates 10 and 13 of the *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala hecha por Diego Muñoz Camargo* (1584-1585, in Acuña 1984), showing respectively, the "burning and conflagration of the idolatrous temples of the province of Tlaxcala" and the "conflagration of all the clothes and books and attire of the idolatrous priests."

their understandings and behavioural patterns remained unaffected by indigenous customs and ideas. Nonetheless, and without denying that the profound asymmetries and the violence of colonialism had important repercussions at the level of representation, my analysis shows that within Mesoamerica indigenous views were neither completely neglected nor entirely suppressed. On the contrary, they became part of the conquerors' cognitive repertoire, moulding their expectations and informing their interpretation of the landscape and people they subsequently came across.<sup>2</sup>

I shall begin my conclusions by briefly recapitulating the principal points the thesis has demonstrated and will then continue to weave them into recent debates concerning the definition of culture and the nature of asymmetric cross-cultural interaction.

### **8. 1.- Recognising Self in the Other.**

The propositions developed in this thesis are fundamentally four:

1) Nuevo Mexico came into being as the transcultural formulation of an "imaginary world," incorporated towards the mid sixteenth century in the conquerors' hypothetical map of mainland north America among the unknown territories awaiting to be "discovered". Its construction and reification involved the convergence of two parallel historical processes. On the one hand, the gradual accumulation of testimonial and second hand reports concerning a distant province to the Northwest of New Spain where cotton clad people, allegedly exploiting rich deposits of precious stones and metals, inhabited large and refined cities. On the other hand, the conqueror's growing conviction that they could locate, and should appropriate, the place where Mexican ancestry

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<sup>2</sup> Following Rapport & Overing (2000: 50) I take cognition to be "the knowledge which people employ so as to make sense of the world, and the ways in which that knowledge is acquired, stored and retrieved."

ultimately came from according to Nahua traditions of ancestral origin and migration.

Before it was a colonial province with concrete territorial boundaries Nuevo Mexico was a disembodied object of colonial desire. For the Spanish conquerors and probably also for their Nahua Indian allies it was the original Mexico, Aztlán Chicomoztoc, traces of which they sought in several regions to the North of New Spain until deciding it corresponded to the area inhabited by the groups today known as Pueblo Indians. Thus Amerindian historical discourse, in this region at least, was far more important in framing Spanish expeditionary activities than the corpus of European mediaeval imaginations traditionally regarded as the topical horizon of the sixteenth century Spanish colonial enterprise. This circumstance, like the extensive adaptations that characterised the Hispanic style of municipal government set up in central Mexico (Gibson 1952 & 1964, Lockhart 1992 & 1999), shows that the colonial order in New Spain, far from spelling the end of indigenous culture, established a complex mixture of native and Hispanic elements that should lead us to place more emphasis on the intersubjective character of cross-cultural engagement.

2) This process of cultural and institutional salvage, which apparently did not occur in the Caribbean, was possible in central Mexico because the conquerors recognised conspicuous affinities between this region and their own motherland. A recognition that the coinage of the toponym Nueva España and the posterior construction of *Nuevo México* codify.

The term Nueva España has been traditionally interpreted either as a signal of colonial appropriation, or as the expression of perceived geographic affinities between Mesoamerica and the Iberian Peninsula. If we consider only those testimonies relating to the period when the toponym was devised these two interpretations seem self-evident. However, compared to other previously

formulated place-names such as La Española, which connotes, unequivocally, a possessor-possessed relation, the term Nueva España propounds a conceptual relation of homology between Spain and its American replica. Yet even when Cortés, in justifying his act of naming, spoke about topographic, climatic and "other" resemblances, the similarities that seem most significant, and which carried the most weight in considering Mesoamerica another, New Spain, pertain to the sphere of social life and politics, not to the realm of nature (see pp. 39-52). Unlike Caribbean savages, New Spain's native inhabitants had palaces, roadways and market-places, and most importantly, they also had an organised religion —albeit in the perverted form of idolatry— and a system of domination whose structure seemed uncannily parallel to the political order of old Spain, in that it subordinated the local sovereignties to the regional ones, and these in turn to the central power, in a successive hierarchical scale that culminated with the great *tlatoani* of Tenochtitlan. It is no coincidence that in New Spain the conquerors translated the Náhuatl word *tlatoani* as *señor*, thus placing the rulers of the subordinate indigenous states on the same level as European princes, dukes, and counts, while in the Caribbean they had been content to use the Taíno word *cacique*, or the Spanish terms *rey*, *régulo*, *reyezuelo*, to distinguish any individual who exercised authority without further describing the nature of such authority.

In this sense Carmen Bernard and Serge Gruzinski (1992: 11-37 & 40-56) are right to suppose that after the encounter with Mesoamerica the Spaniards distinguished two types of societies, making an explicit connection between the presence of religion, which they marked by characterising objects of worship as "idols," and the existence of a political order resembling the one their own society had inherited from Roman times in that it had institutional forms of authority and a juridical system.

The contrast is clear in the texts I reviewed in chapter one. The Spaniards' exclusive use of the indigenous word *zeme* to designate the objects that people in the Caribbean worshipped or invested with supernatural attributions correlates with the almost complete absence of social and political description that characterised this phase of conquest. Contrastingly most accounts concerning the exploration and conquest of Mesoamerica, which substitute references to *zeme* with references to "idols" and introduce such terms as "vassals", "lords" and "law", contain reasonably detailed passages on the native political and social order. Therefore it seems clear that conquerors perceived *zemes* as the cultic counterpart of a lawless, disjointed society whereas they took idols as a sign of civilisation, in the Roman-derived sense of "civic oriented community life."<sup>3</sup>

It is common to see in the colonists' application of European categories such as idolatry or emperor their incapacity to bridge incommensurability. Nevertheless, the "recognition" argument I propose takes a different perspective. It assumes that such recourse to their own terminology must count as evidence for the fact that colonists could actually relate conceptually to the social reality they intruded, even if they partly misrepresented it. Hence the importance of reading New Spain's documentation against earlier evidence from the Caribbean islands, where a deep sense of alienation had rather resulted in descriptive reticence.

As I noted in chapter one, the Spanish relationship to the *zeme* ought to be compared to the Portuguese idea of the "fetish" as described by Pietz (1985: & 1987). That is, a venerated object essentially different from all the worshipped

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<sup>3</sup> This is also exemplified by the Spanish use of the term *Behetría*. In mediaeval Spain the word designated a group of peasant lineages free to change their lord within or outside the community to which they belonged. By the sixteenth century the institution had already declined, defeated by the monarchy. Nevertheless the term subsisted with a different meaning, denoting confusion and disorder. In Peru the Spaniards used it in this sense to characterise the least centralised societies outside the sphere of Inka rulership (Bernard & Gruzinski 1992: 28-29, Platt 19: 8).

objects familiar to the Europeans before international mercantile capitalism put the Portuguese in touch with West African forms of handling the supernatural. Unlike Christian images and pagan "idols," the objects the Portuguese called "fetish" were not iconic representations of divine beings but supernaturally powerful objects in themselves, and this is precisely what the Spaniards took *zemes* to be. Yet while in the period and region that Pietz discusses the category of the "fetish" came to substitute the category of the "idol" as the embodiment of Christianity's other, in sixteenth century Hispanic America "*zemes*" only temporarily displaced idols in the Spanish consciousness, and this was due to the fact that the Caribbean experience of incommensurability was followed by the surprising experience of identification in Mesoamerica.

3) The Spanish experience of witnessing an unexpectedly readable alterity in central Mexico had major epistemological consequences. Above all it opened a space for cognitive negotiation between indigenous and Spanish wisdom that made communication across cultures possible. The fact that conquerors could label the strange world that lied before them with the same categories they applied to their own society, and material artefacts (books, temples, idols, vassals, lords, etc.), induced them to conceive of the way in which Nahuas and Europeans respectively represented past happenstance as analogous forms of knowledge. This is to say that conquerors granted credibility to Nahua migration stories and acted accordingly, following the trail of the kingdom that the ancient Mexicans of those narratives had abandoned centuries before.

The authoritative status accorded to a form of indigenous discourse that Spaniards interpreted as the local historical memory challenges the general validity of the thesis (Pagden 1986, McGrane 1989, Greenblatt 1991: 119) that European contact with the Amerindian reality was invariably —and



exclusively— mediated by culturally constituted representations, primarily consisting of the central themes of Christian cosmology and a heterogeneous collection of archetypes of Oriental and Ancient alterity. While this certainly applies to particular historical periods (early phases of any one nation's colonial enterprise in America), and particular moments of personal experience (initial confrontation with the exotic when arriving in America for the first time), such imported symbolic structures receded in the process of engagement. The Spanish aim to subject New World people and territories to political control, economic exaction and cultural/religious conversion certainly entailed the assault on indigenous institutions, beliefs and habits. However, in the particular case of New Spain the Mexica society, shattered by the Spaniards in the political front, went on to take centre stage in the collective imagination of the colonial world. Often it substituted Europe as the referent against which other indigenous societies were defined, while the mythical history of its remote origins provided the colonists —be they Spaniards or "Indian friends"— with a prospective horizon, also serving them as chart for landmark decoding.

4) The conquest of New Spain's north, and specifically of the kingdom of *Nuevo México*, must be interpreted as a product of the intersection between Hispanic and Nahua identity. Beyond the lust for power and glory, the Spanish wish to retrace the past of the ancestral Mexica migration responded to their deeper Christian convictions. For the Judeo-Christian West, the origin holds innocence. If the Mexicans represented for the Spanish the conceptual challenge of a civilisation as worthy as that of Europe but perverted by demonic, bloody sacrifice and idolatry, perhaps the return to the Mexicans' origin would mean retracing the path of the fall. Perhaps Aztlán / *Nuevo México* seemed to the Spaniards to be the same Indian civilisation they so admired in Mexico but without the Devil, for was it not Satan in the figure of Huitzilopochtli who

ordered the Aztecs to abandon the lacustrine paradise in which they lived, afterward commanding them to change their name as well and take on that of Mexicans?

But if the colonists' advance through the unknown lands north from New Spain represented for many Spaniards an enterprise aimed at recuperating the Aztec greatness in its pristine state, for many Central Mexican Nahuas—massively incorporated in such enterprise as "auxiliary" troops—it represented, perhaps, the opportunity to recover, at least partially, the original autonomy they had lost with the imposition of Mexica domination. Thus the political significance of ancestral migration stories was renewed through colonial engagement. Before the Spanish conquest, as we saw in chapter six, such stories "represented a way to [...] discuss the relations existing among different groups and the respective positions they occupied within the regional political structure" (Navarrete 1991: 71), serving to legitimise territorial occupation and political authority, both within any one particular *altepetl* and among various individual *altepetl* linked in a dominant-subordinate relation. After the conquest they continued to be the common idiom of regional power legitimacy but now they also became the arena for the negotiation of collective rights and privileges viz a viz the Spanish overlordship. Therefore, in analysing the colonial situation in Hispanic North America we must extend our inquiry beyond Indigenous-Spanish relations and interactions to focus as well upon the way in which the presence of alien Spaniards affected the relations between different indigenous groups and different sectors of any one indigenous society.

## 8. 2.- Localising the Euro-American encounter: intersubjectivity and the transculturation process.

Many years ago, in a now classical collection of essays titled *First Images of America. The Impact of the New World on the Old*, John Elliott (1976: 14-17, 21) argued that the repercussion of New World realities on European cultural configurations is obscured by the fact that preconceptions deriving from the Judeo-Christian and the classical traditions guided European perceptions, functioning as a sieve for the selective contemplation of novelty. Nevertheless, he contended, both traditions were diverse and contradictory enough as to allow for the incorporation of new impressions, which became less and less dependent on the established European cosmology as personal experience proved more authoritative than Authority itself.

Much recent writing on the conquest of the Americas, though focusing as well on the European's cognitive response to Amerindian culture and society, takes an almost opposite direction, as it has as major concern the analysis of what Stuart B. Schwartz calls "implicit ethnographies" (1994: 2-3). That is, the series of understandings about Self and Other that are not necessarily articulated or codified but permeate the way in which people meeting across cultures think about, and act before, the "Other" they confront. In this sense it is closer to the kind of postcolonial critique developed by Edward Said (1995 [1978]) and Homi Bhabha (1994) than it is to Elliott's perspective. Like Said it emphasises how, in confronting the external world, Europeans have re-structured their self identity, refashioning their experience of otherness through the construction of an essentialist discourse that solidifies the contrast between ruler and ruled in such a way that the righteousness of colonialist practice becomes naturalised. This is what Bhabha terms colonial discourse, which he describes as a construction that

represents the colonised as a population of degenerate types who are in need of an externally imposed structure of administration and instruction (1994: 70).

Stephen Greenblatt, for example, studies the "representational practices that the Europeans carried with them to America" (1991: 7) and maintains that rather than reflecting "knowledge of the other," early representations of the New World and its inhabitants were devised to "act upon the other" which resulted from imagination, not from reasoning upon empirical observation (*ibid.*: 12-13). Also Bernard McGrane (1989) and Peter Mason (1990 & 1991), among others, analyse European representations of America as a language for domination based upon pre-established notions of the exotic. Thus McGrane identifies three successive paradigmatic discourses on the non-European; the first of which, Renaissance cosmography, measured America against the Christian myth of the fall, paradoxically robbing indigenous culture of its non-European distinctiveness while recognising the human essence of indigenous people as *non*, but nevertheless, potential Christians (McGrane 1989: 7-26). In a similar vein, Mason's analysis of the European imagery of the exotic projected onto the New World rests upon the premise that the inability of European observers "to go beyond their own familiar frames of reference" (1990: 21) was a function of the spoliation and the political domination they exercised.<sup>4</sup> In contrast with these authors, Tzvetan Todorov (1999 [1982]) contends that Europeans could understand the American "Other" because they had developed in writing a powerful technology for the mastery of signs, which native Americans lacked, and that this contrast regarding the capacity for rapid adaptation to the unforeseen explains the Spanish apparently inexplicable

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<sup>4</sup> Studies on the "implicit ethnographies" of Amerindian people had been done before the issue became an important question concerning Western constructions of the non-European world. Pioneering works on that field were done by Miguel León Portilla (1984 [1959]) and Nathan Wachtel (1977), who titled their respective books *The vision of the vanquished*. León Portilla's book is rather a critical compilation of testimonies reflecting the indigenous view of the conquest of México whereas Wachtel's is a study on native perceptions of the Andes' Spanish conquest.

success in subduing complex and populous societies such as the Aztec. In his view, however, that Spaniards could understand the Aztec world did not imply cultural exchange, or cultural appropriation on the part of the colonisers.

All these interpretations share the conviction that the challenge the colonisation of America represented was merely an external stimulus in the reconfiguration of the West, since Europeans responded with their own cultural resources to the cosmological disruption that New World realities brought about. This undoubtedly illuminating critique of colonialism, as I stated above, has overlooked the epistemological ruptures that might have occurred in the process of subduing the Other. Ruptures that not only showed alternative possibilities in that history but also contribute to explaining why Amerindian peoples succeeded in resisting their absolute assimilation into the West. In the picture of complete European imperviousness presented by recent scholarship, Amerindian people and their culture scarcely contributed new forms of thought to the resulting order of things. Furthermore, they appear as absolutely devoid of a space for negotiation in their dealings with their new dominators, divested of any sphere of meaning in practice, and subjected to a process of total erasure. The possibility that in certain moments their own discourse could have contaminated the colonisers is neglected for the sake of the more general critique of the oppressiveness of colonial representation.

Part of the problem I see in this literature is that it views the Euro-American encounter in terms of discrete, opposing totalities, losing sight of the specificities of local negotiations, sectorial realignments and small-scale processes of resignification. Thus although my principal concern —like that of Elliott and his postcolonial successors— lies with the assessment of New World encounters from the perspective of the European experience of cultural dislocation, I have abandoned the "overall European civilisation perspective" to

address a particular intersubjective space. That is, the social field constituted by a concrete set of Europeans who arrived in America to stay and the Indian groups they interacted with, which I view as a new emergent socio-cultural reality in its own right. As J. and J. Comaroff (1997: 25) made clear in the introduction to volume two of their study on missionaries and colonialism in nineteenth-century Africa, "Colonial societies rarely consisted [...] of two discrete worlds, each whole unto itself, caught up together in the interdependencies of a Hegelian master-slave relationship." Rather, they "were increasingly integrated totalities." Whence the importance of studying the "localised cultural forms" that emerged in "European worlds abroad" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997: 23).

What does it mean, then, to address the intersubjective dimension of colonial encounters and why is it important at all? If the claim of many postcolonial critics that any discourse about another culture is more a form of self projection than reliable description of the Other is right (Said 1995 [1978], Boon 1982, Clifford & Marcus 1986, Marcus & Fischer 1986), how could we then achieve an understanding of the process whereby two or more contacting cultures intermesh?

To answer these questions I shall quote J. and J. Comaroff's assertion (1997: 24-25) that, although the historical dynamic of the opposition between coloniser and colonised has led to discursive objectifications that represent both fields as distinguished by irreducible contrasts, neither of them was ever an "undifferentiated sociological or political reality." To emphasise intersubjectivity, therefore, is above all to break dual, oppositional representations through and recognise, at the concrete level of localised encounters, that each of the contacting "social fields" is constituted by different agents with different interests. Moreover, it entails realising that even the same person's response to the confronted Other is frequently unstable and ambivalent, varying according

to particular circumstances or assuming different attitudes towards different aspects of the Other's reality.

Once we recognise the heterogeneity and polyvalence of colonisers and colonised it becomes clear that their interaction creates entanglement, as the outlook and interests of certain social groups in each side may be closer to those of certain groups in the opposite field than they are to those held by competing sectors of their own "culture /society." Thus if we search beneath the grand level of imperial project enforcement and behind the curtain of pre-given representational systems we shall find cross-cultural interaction to be a complex process of realignment and conceptual re-definition that entails, as the sixteenth century quest for *Nuevo México*, an uneven mixture of imposition, resistance, collaboration, borrowing, revivalism, and misunderstanding. This very circumstance implies that we can indeed access the process of entanglement by contrasting the vast array of visual and discursive representations of Self and Other, and their interaction, that the actors involved in any given encounter produce.

In the second place, addressing intersubjectivity entails acknowledging the instability of every sign and cultural product. Ideas, technologies and institutions seldom remain identical to themselves when entering a process of cross-cultural engagement.

Nahua traditions of ancestral origin and migration, for example, remained a fundamental point of reference in the colonial world but had different meanings for different social actors. Among central Mexican natives they continued to cement self-identity, though modified to prove autochthony as in the text by Sahagún's Mexica informants concerning the peopling of New Spain discussed in chapter six (see p. 215),<sup>5</sup> or activating, as I suggested for some

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 29, book 10 of Sahagún's *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España* asserts that Mexico was peopled by several human groups who arrived by sea from Panutla and were

groups of non-Mexica Nahuas, a collective urge to recover the land of ancestral origin and with it the autonomy of primordial times. Spanish settlers and colonial authorities of course invested the theme with yet other different meanings. What is important here is that all these divergent interpretations—and the practical usage to which they were put—contributed importantly to pave the way for the Spanish conquest of north-west New Spain and were later on locally appropriated and re-signified, providing one of the most powerful symbols around which the 1680 Pueblo Indian rebellion articulated. Furthermore, in the post-colonial worlds that resulted from the Spanish conquest of mainland North America and the imperial growth of the United States—that is, present day Mexico and the Southwest of present day United States—the Aztec migration and the Nahua original homeland are still socially and politically relevant, yet their significance is far removed from their original sense. In Mexico they have long served the official ideology through which the State promotes national identity and achieves legitimacy, claiming the Mexica

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guided by their god to Tamanchan, in the South. Then, after granting the land to the people, the god and the wisemen left, taking the books away and promising to return. Reason why the people had to compose other new books as best as they could. After this episode the narrative tells how the original group divided itself in sub-groups, all of which left Tamoanchan and dispersed. Some went to Teotihuacan and then continued, divided in groups of different languages, until reaching the northern deserts of Chicomoztoc where they became hunter-gatherers but they finally returned, each in a different moment, to the southern provinces they had abandoned before. According to López Austin we must read in between the lines the following statement: "We Mexican, are part of the original people who came to this land following the will of God. He gave us this land to profit but warned us that he would return. We are neither complete newcomers, nor Chichimeca and have the same right to this land as those who did not go to Chicomoztoc, or those who went and returned before we did." Prior to the Spanish conquest, López Austin explains, the Mexica based their territorial claims on the "right of conquest," but as the argument ceased to be pertinent once the Spaniards conquered them, the notion of the "divine gift" became more important in the narrative. Nevertheless, names of particular indigenous deities had to be omitted as these were all considered demons by the Spaniards. Whence the use of such abstract forms to address the divinity as *Totecuyo* (Our Lord)—used in pre-Hispanic times for any god; *Tloque Nahuaque* (Owner of what is Near and what is Besides), or *Yohualli Ehécatl* (Night and Wind, i.e., the invisible and non-touchable). All of these terms were current and well-established words in the Náhuatl language when Cortés arrived. The passage, therefore, is a secularised history, a strategic adaptation of the traditional story for European consumption, aimed at preserving local knowledge and discourse but turned credible for Christian readers. The narrative had to convince the Spaniards but also needed to keep the indigenous canon to maintain authoritative status before other non-Mexica Nahua groups (López Austin 1985a: 327-330 & 1994a: 48-51, 64-69. Also Alva Ixtlilxochitl, in *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca* (1985 [c. 1608-1625]: II, 28), explains the Mexica arrival to the valley of Mexico as a return.



arrival in central Mexico as its own foundational origin (Florescano 1998). In recent years, however, the myth has been re-appropriated by subaltern sectors of Mexican society who contest the social and cultural project enforced by the State. Likewise, Chicano resistance culture in Southwest United States adopted Aztlán as main identity symbol to fight against Anglo-American marginalising racism, urging a return to indigenous roots and denouncing the imposition of Western modernity and its attendant social and ecological "disasters" (Anaya & Lomelí 1989, Brotherston 1998).

In my introduction I outlined two basic models for the assessment of cross-cultural interaction between Europe and non-European societies current in contemporary scholarship. I observed that whether they focus on the European experience of "the Other", as the "mediaevalist" (Gandía 1929, Hanke 1959, Weckmann 1951 & 1984, Pastor Bodmer 1992) and the "Western alterity system" (Pagden 1982, Hulme 1986, Mason 1990 & 1991, Greenblatt 1991, McGrane 1989) perspectives do, or whether they concentrate on the response of imperialised Others to the European intrusion, as in Sahlins' structural theory of history or the multiple works on native acculturation and native resistance all over the globe, these models do not allow a proper appreciation of the cultural intricacy that characterises colonial societies.

If, as stated above, "European worlds abroad" were never refractory micro-Europes successfully —or unsuccessfully— imposing alienation onto the natives, neither were they simple mixtures resulting from the juxtaposition of culturally specific objects, practices, institutions and representations that one can isolate to compile an inventory of the elements contributed by each contacting group. They have always been intersubjective spaces of contamination. This is where Bhabha's well known and sometimes contentious notion of "hybridity" (1990 & 1994: 38, 111-116) offers a significant advance in thinking on the topics

we are here considering. "Hybridity" usefully defines the situation outlined in this thesis in that it entails a lot more than the combination of culturally specific practices, objects and ideas. The concept remarks the opening up of "a contingent, borderline experience [...] *in-between* coloniser and colonised" (1994: 206-207) which entails "deformation and displacement" of the discriminatory principles upon which domination rests (Bhabha 1994: 111-112). And this indeed occurred when the Spaniards recognised Mesoamerican institutions as constitutive of a political order similar to their own, consequently submitting their judgement to the authority of indigenous historical knowledge, though still retaining a general derogatory attitude towards Indian culture and individuals. Also the notions of "transculturation" (Ortiz 1995 [1940]) and "colonial semiosis" (Mignolo 1994b & 1995) can serve to assess the process of hybridisation that unsettles, according to Bhabha, the representational modalities that have characterised colonial discourse. Addressing the dialogic dimension of cultural creativity, both categories challenge the assumption that hierarchical relations must necessarily take the form of a monologue that would reduce the possibilities of colonised peoples to overt, violent resistance or to perform as the passive recipients of Western inscription.

The notion of colonial semiosis, which encompasses the whole variety of semiotic interactions taking place in colonial situations including colonial discourse (Mignolo 1995: 7), underscores multi-directionality thereby suggesting that cross-cultural, albeit colonial encounters entail the multivocal agency of innumerable individuals who are at once objects and subjects, never fully autonomous, never fully conscious of it as Talal Asad has observed (1993: 16-17). Likewise, Ortiz' (1995 [1940]: 97-103) concept of transculturation forces a non-centric approach to the process of cultural transition that incarnates in colonial societies born from the permanent relocation of people. Transculturation is not

about colony-metropole relations but about the economic, institutional, aesthetic, epistemological, linguistic, ethical and sexual repercussions of social and geographic displacement. It cannot be spelt in terms of the opposition between colonialist intruders and imperialised natives because the local field it concerns, as the intruding one, is heterogeneous as it regards to both culture and power. Not all those foreign groups transplanted to colonial Cuba, the case which the term originally referred to, shared in the position of power,<sup>6</sup> nor were they members of the same cultural matrix. By the same token, indigenous peoples were far from constituting a unified social field.

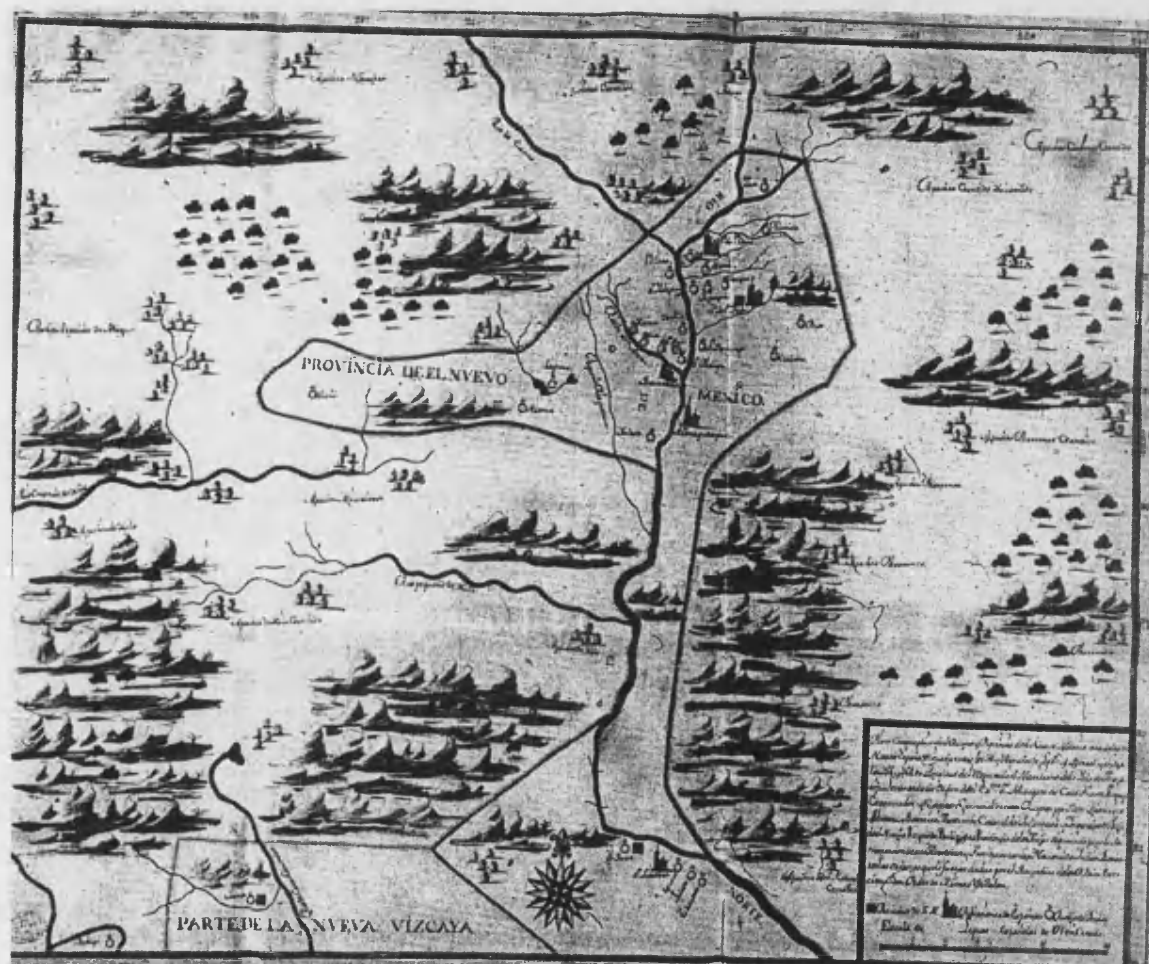
The sixteenth century quest for *Nuevo México* was clearly a result of the process of transculturation through which colonial New Spain acquired its most distinctive features. A process where colonial semiosis as manifest in the manifold resignification and mutual contamination of Aztec ancestral history and Christian sacred history played a central role. In this sense it can also be categorised as a way of world-making, a concept that Nelson Goodman coined to indicate that the order of any given representation of the world we perceive, its objects and relations are not found but fabricated in a refashioning process that turns old worlds into new through different interpretive operations (1978: 7-17, 1984: 21). Although Goodman's worlds are neither specific depictions of particular places nor historical narratives of any kind but the overall intellectual systems through which our scholarly perception of socio-cultural reality is organised (functionalism, structuralism, etc.), we can extend his argument to define those collective processes of imagination that, like the quest for *Nuevo México*, entail the translation, through interpretation, of one pre-extant world

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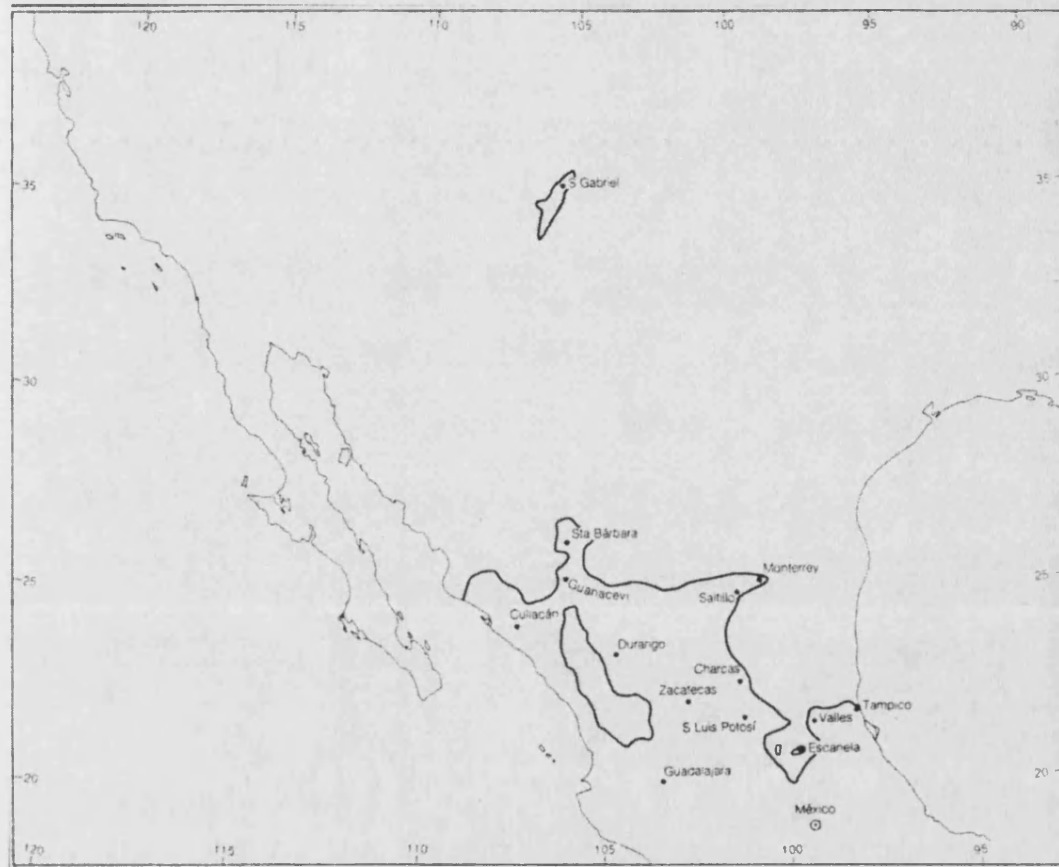
<sup>6</sup> Think that alongside Iberian conquerors / settlers the colonisation brought into the island considerable numbers of Africans from the Atlantic regions of that continent including Senegal, Guinea, the Congo, Angola, and Mozambique. Also sporadic waves or a continuous flow of such culturally diverse immigrants as Amerindians from the mainland, Anglo-Saxons and even Asians from Macao or Canton (Ortiz 1995 [1940]: 98).

(the original abode of Nahua traditions of ancestral origin) into another (a politico-territorial entity to be searched and colonised).

## Maps



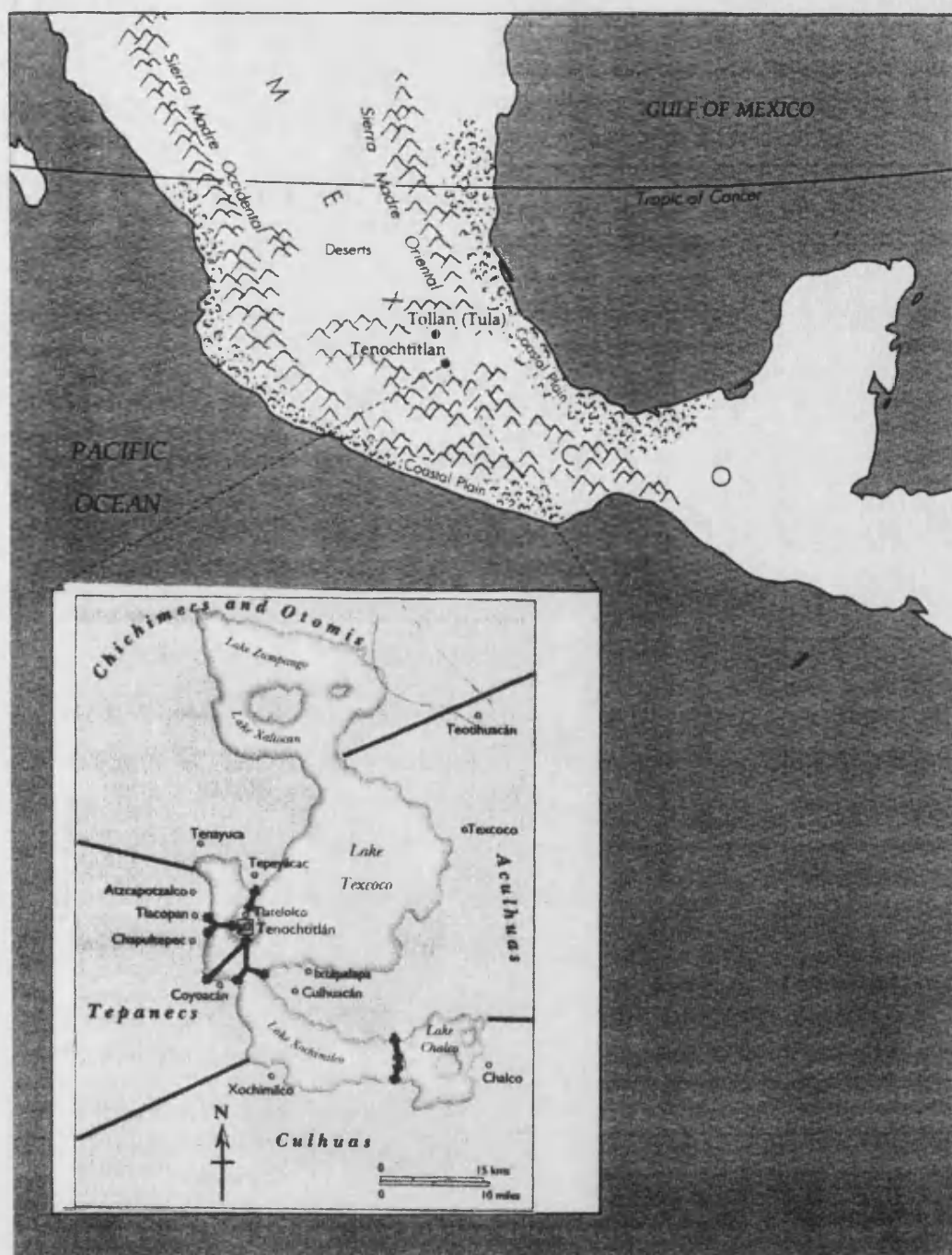
Map 1.- **Provincia del Nuevo México.** Map drafted in the late seventeenth century (AGN).



MAP 2. *Extent of Spanish Control in 1600*

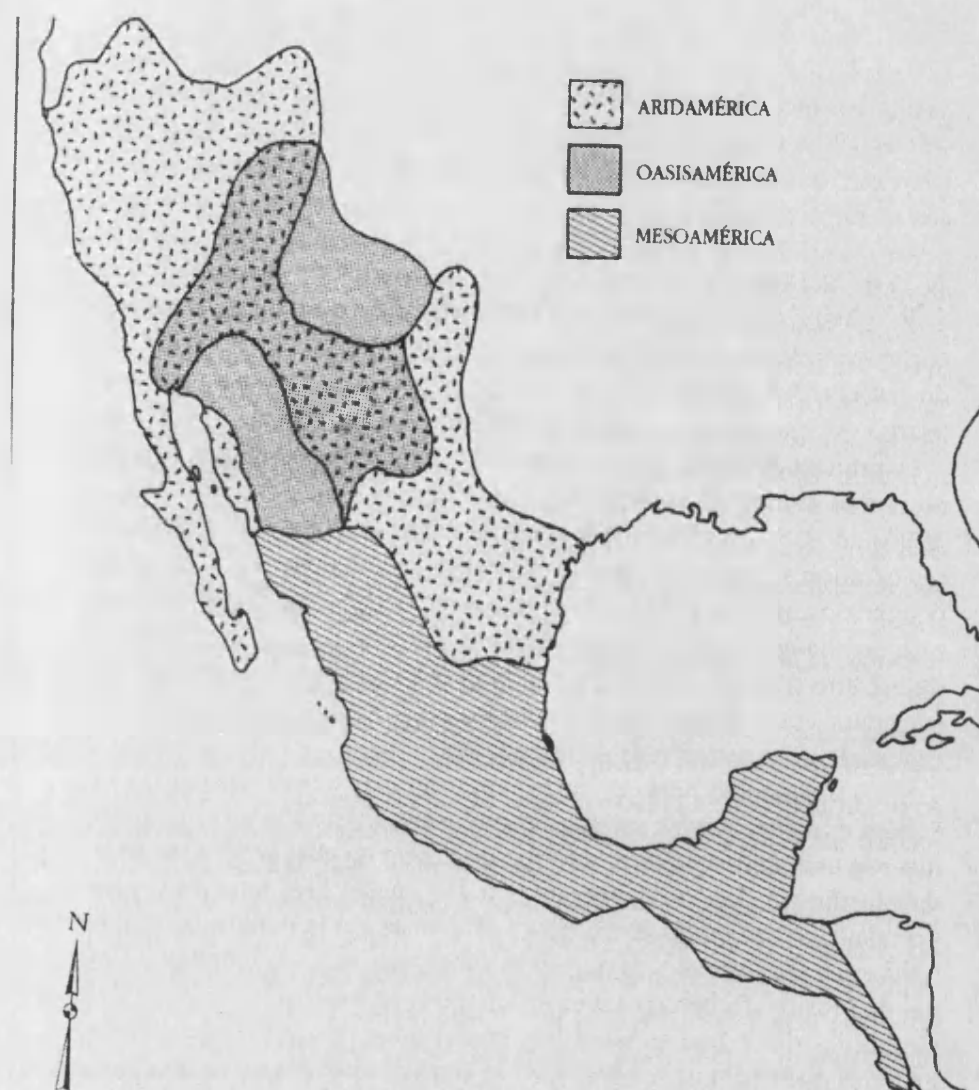
Map 2.- Extent of Spanish control in 1600 (Source: Gerhard1982: 5).

## MEXICO, 1519



Map 3.- Mexico in 1519, with a detail of the Lake basin and Tenochtitlan. (Source: Berdan 1989: 33 )





Map 4.- Mesoamerica, Arid America, Oasis America (Source: López Austin & López Luján 1996: 16).

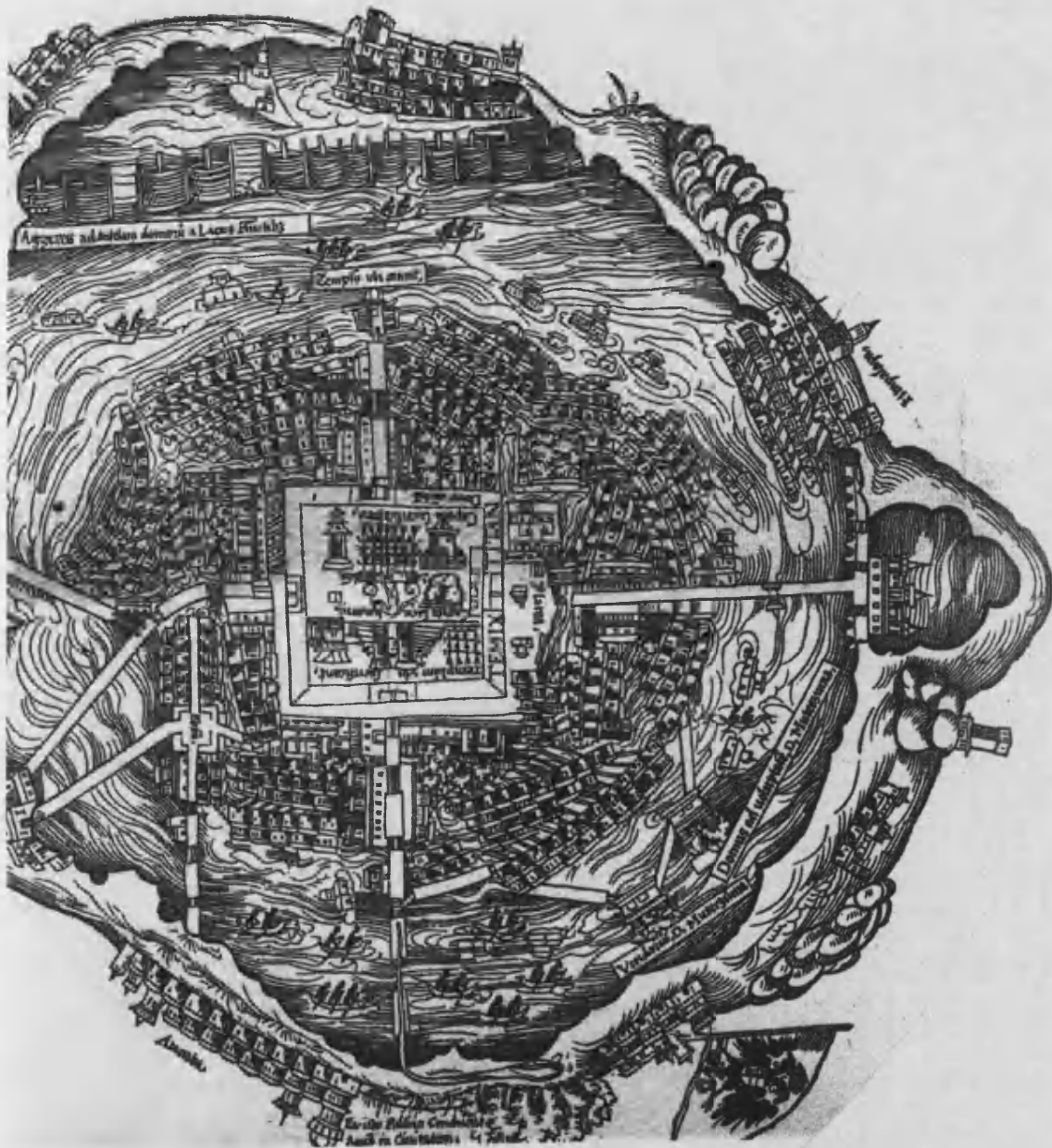


Map 5.- **Regions of Mexico** (Source: Handbook of Middle American Indians)

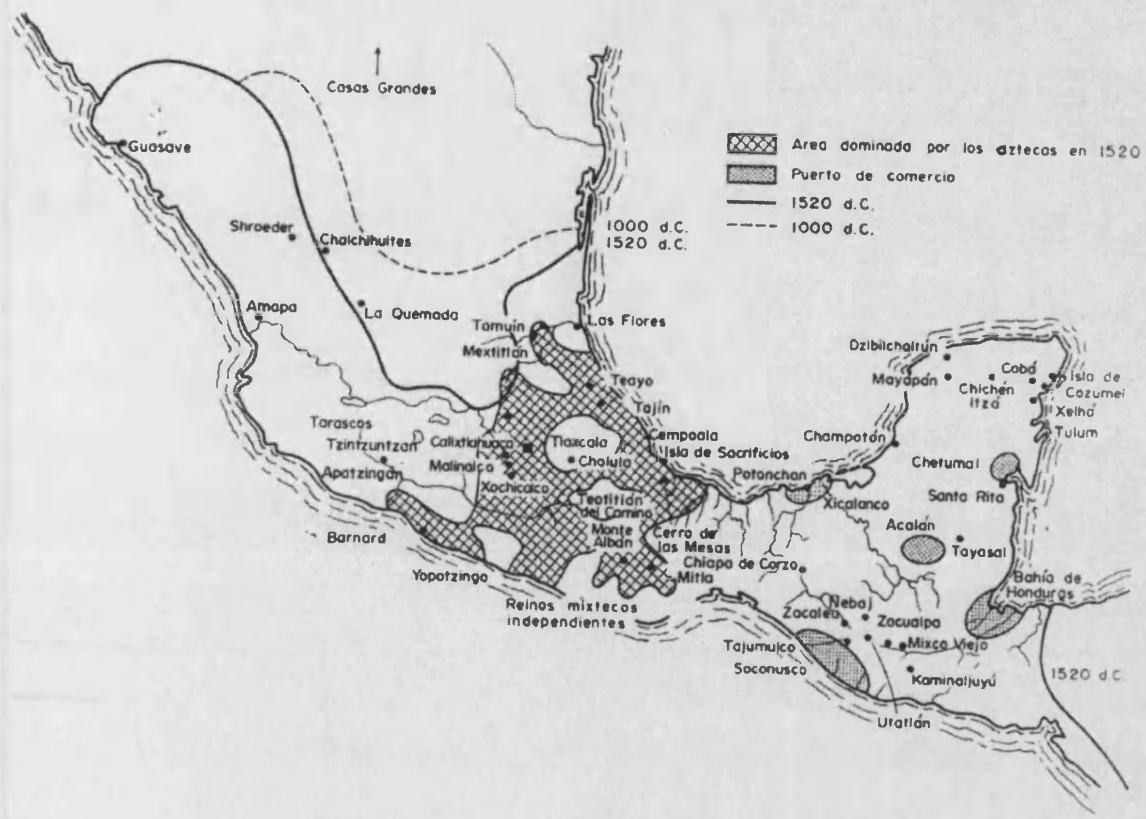


Map 6.- Central Mexico (Source: Handbook of Middle American Indians)





Map 8.- Map of Mexico-Tenochtitlan attributed to Hernán Cortés. Nuremberg, 1524 (Source: Mundy 1996: xii).



Map 9.- Mesoamerica in the Post-Classic period. (Muriel Porter, *Los Aztecas, Mayas y sus Predecesores*, 1981)





## Illustrations



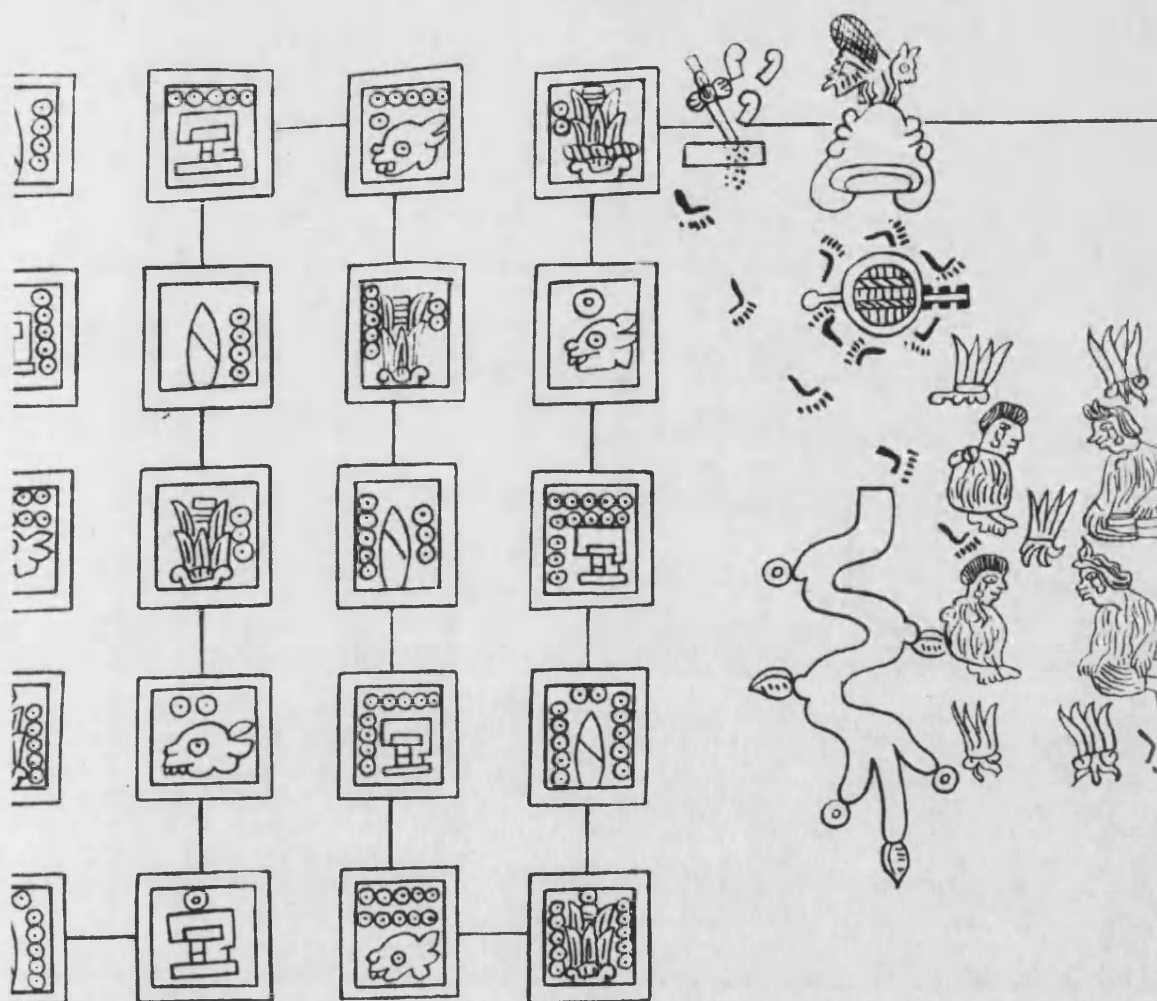


Fig. 1.- **Chapultepec.** *Codex Boturini*, plate XIX. (From the 1964 edition by Corona Núñez). The scene represented besides the group of year-signs represents the defeat of the Mexica in the war that expelled them from Chapultepec.

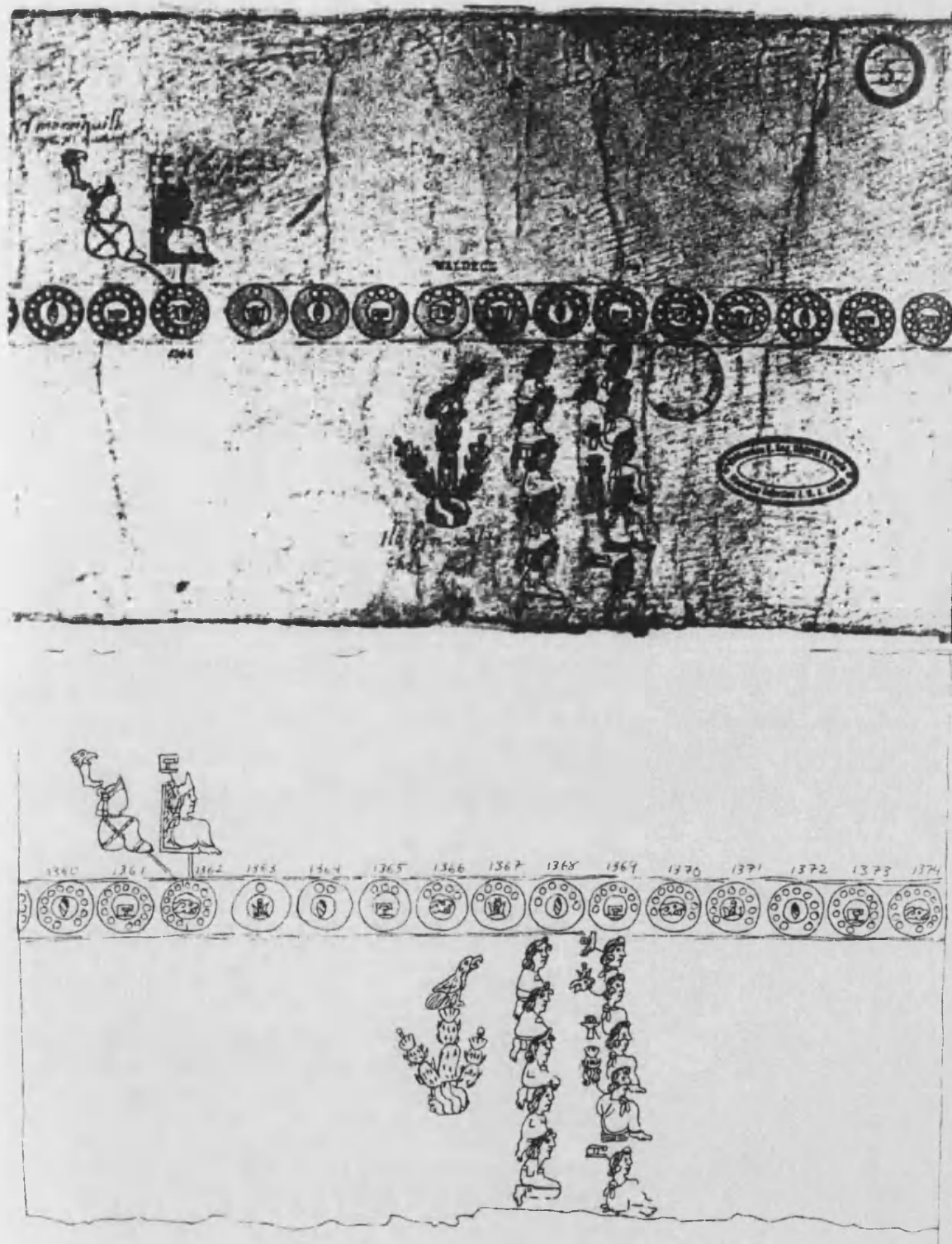


Fig. 2.- **Foundation of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.** *Tira de Tepechpan*, plate 5. (From the 1996 facsimile edition by Noguez). The lower part of the register shows the foundation of Tenochtitlan in the year 4-Tochtli (1366). The upper part shows the death of Ixciauhtli, Chichimeca ruler of Tepechpan, and the enthronement of his successor in the year 13-Tochtli (1362).

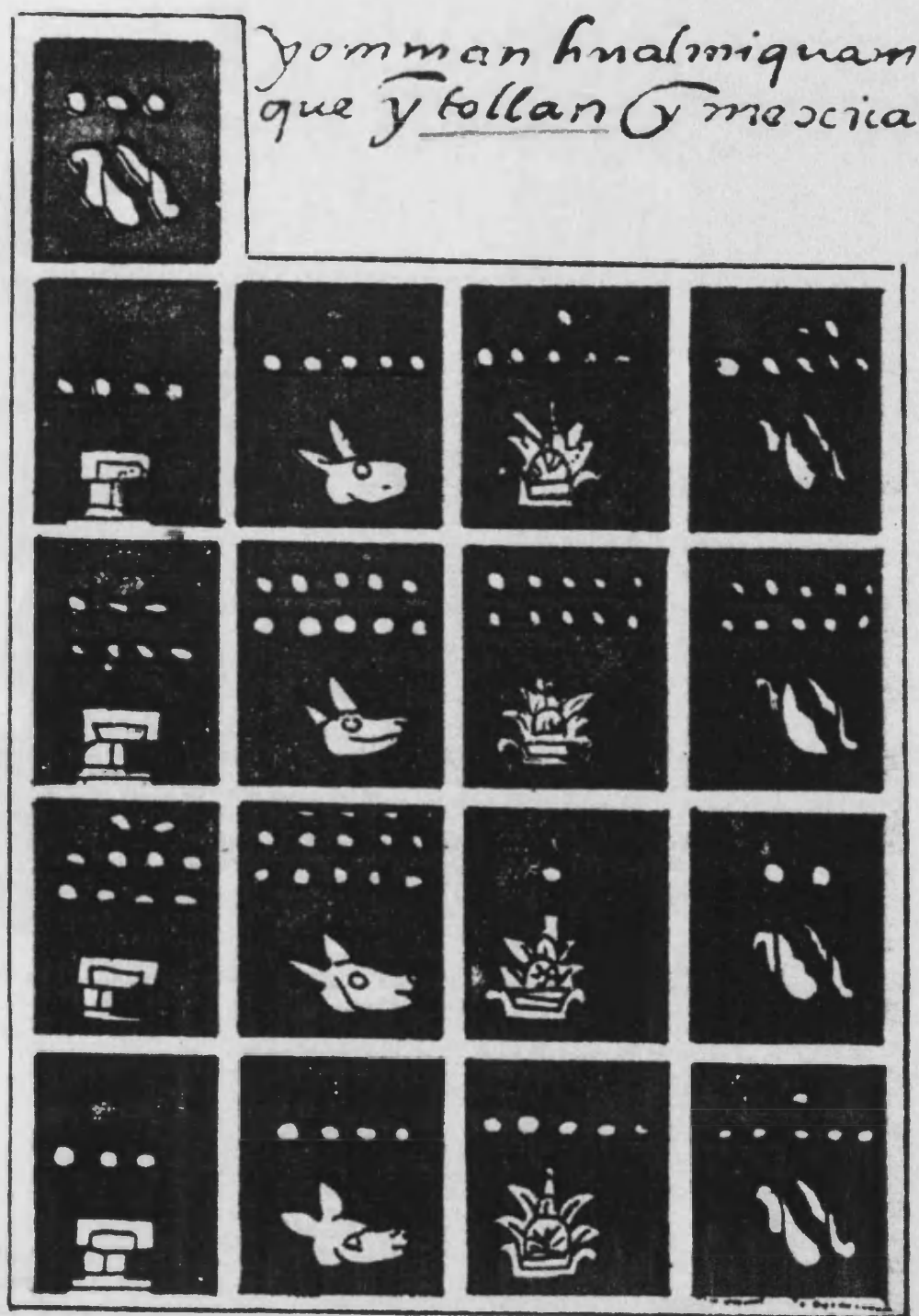


Fig. 3.- Year-sign grouping .*Codex Aubin*, page 12. (From the 1963 edition by Dibble).

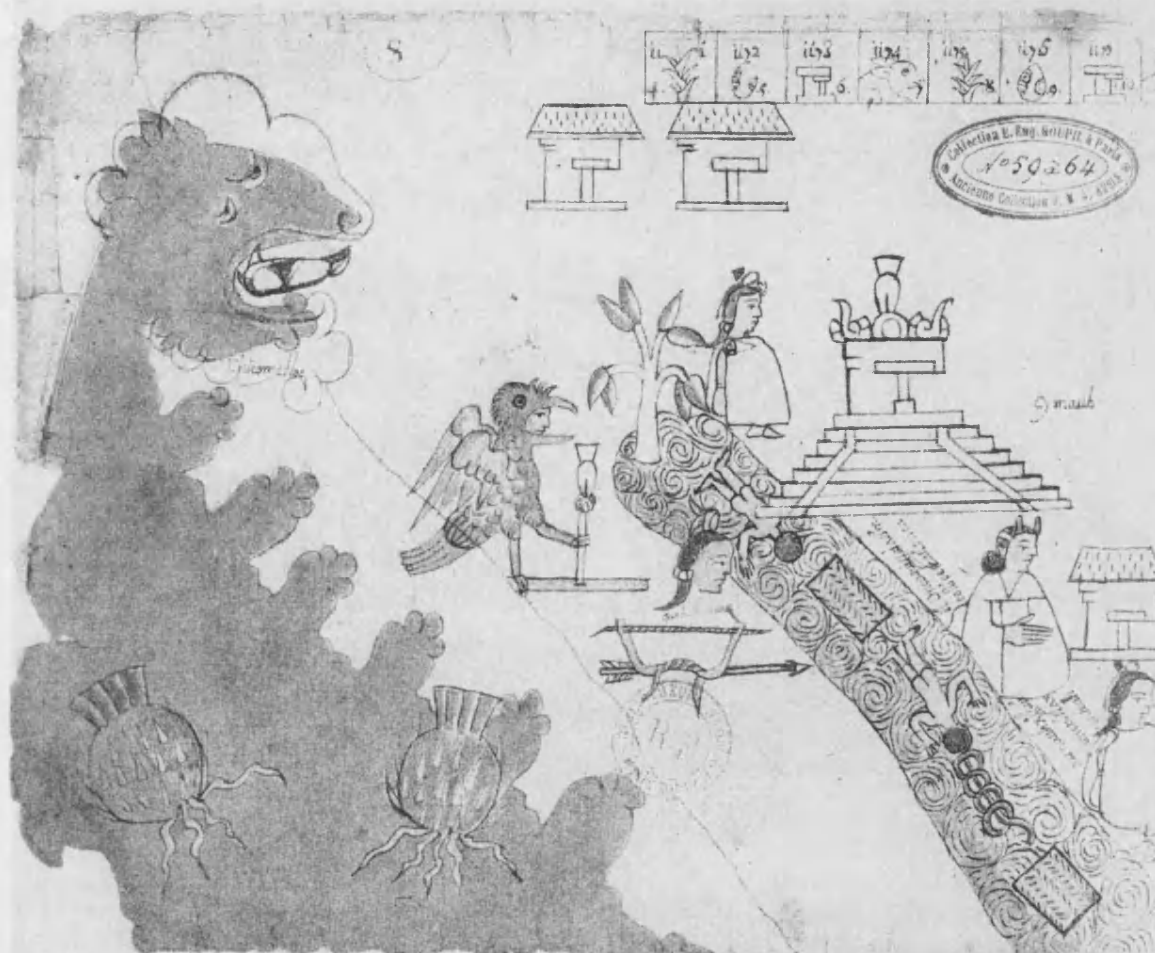


Fig. 4.- **Chicomoztoc.** *Codex Azcatitlan*, plate IV. (From the 1995 facsimile edition by the National Library of France). Here Chicomoztoc is represented as a hill with an animal head resembling that of a bear. It is a distortion (due to European influence) of the indigenous glyph for cave (*oztotl*) consisting of a monster opening the mouth. The caves, that could be mistaken for the animal's feet, appear in the lower part of the hill.

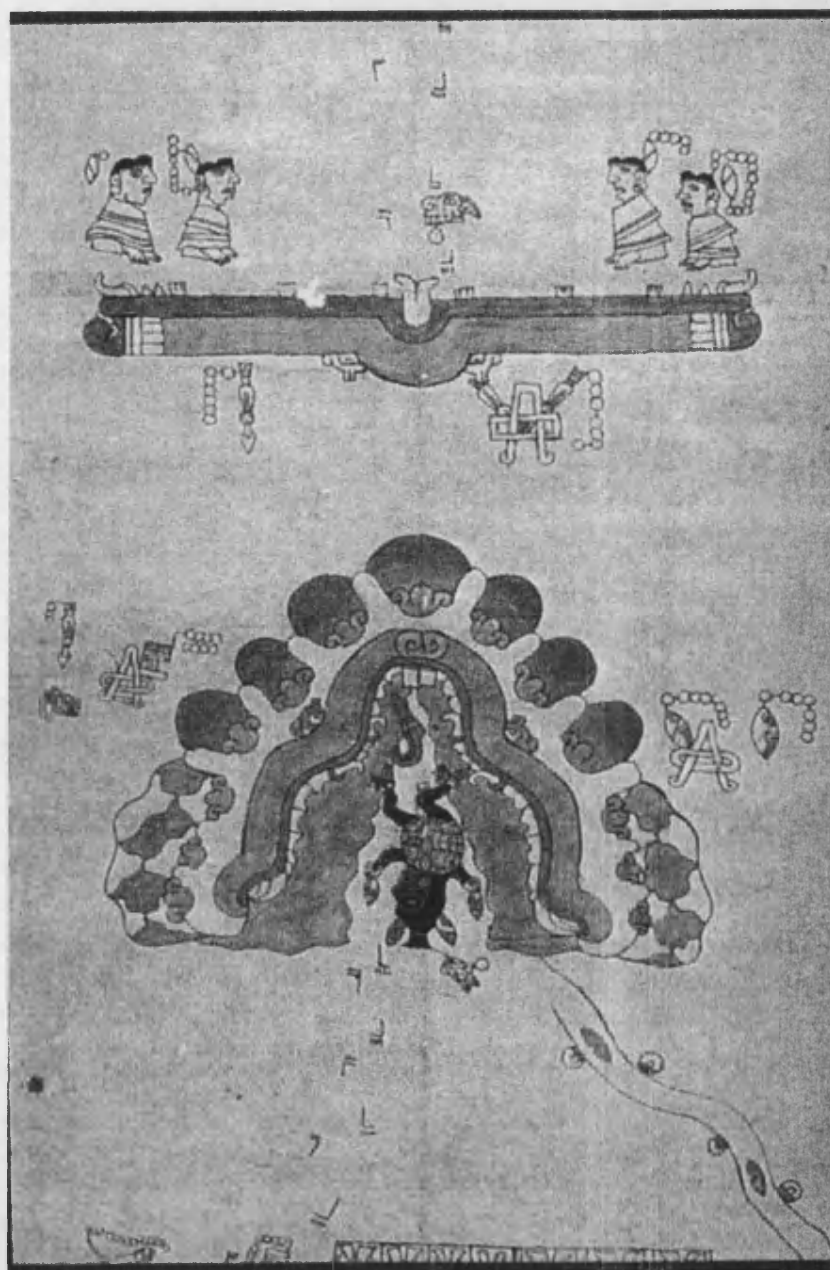


Fig. 5.- **Chicomoztoc.** *Selden Roll*, plate 2. (Copied from Brotherston 1995: 128).





Fig. 6.- **Chicomoztoc.** *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, f. 16r. (From the 1989 facsimile edition by Kirchhoff, Guemes & Reyes García ).



Fig. 7.- Chicomoztoc. *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan* No. 2. (Copied from Yoneda 1991: 123).



Fig. 8.- **Aztlan.** *Mapa Siguenza.* (Copied from Florescano 1990: 637).



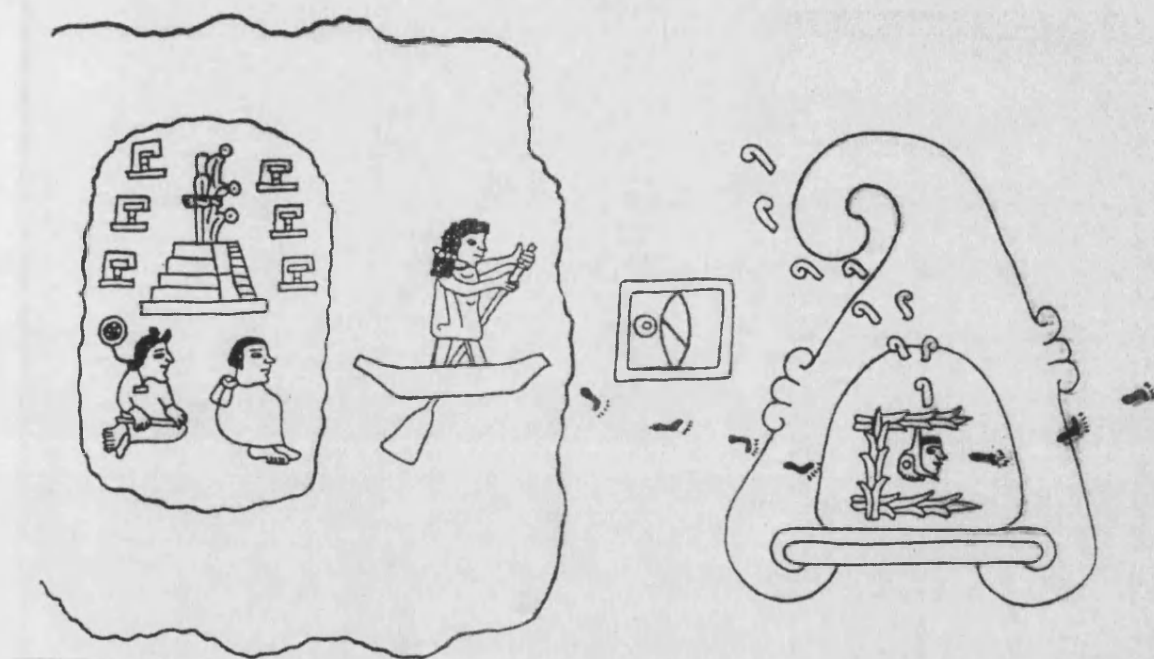


Fig. 9.- **Aztlan.** *Codex Boturini*, plate I. (From the 1964 edition by Corona Núñez).



Fig. 11.- Aztlán. *Codex Aubin*, page 1. (Copied from Brotherston 1995: 53).

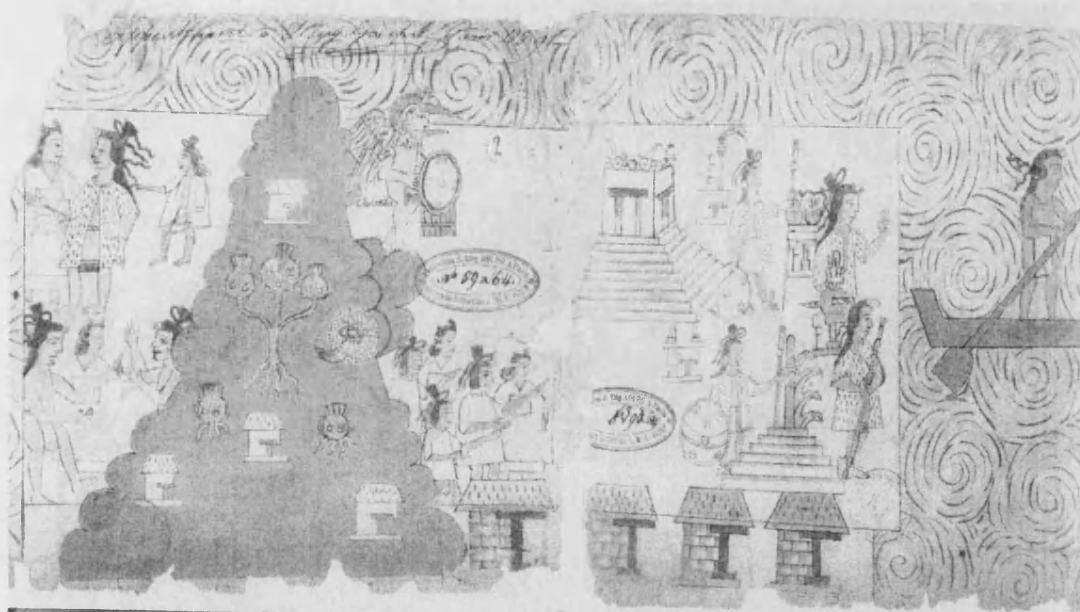


Fig. 10.- **Aztlan.** *Codex Azcatitlan*, plate I. (From the 1995 facsimile edition by the National Library of France).



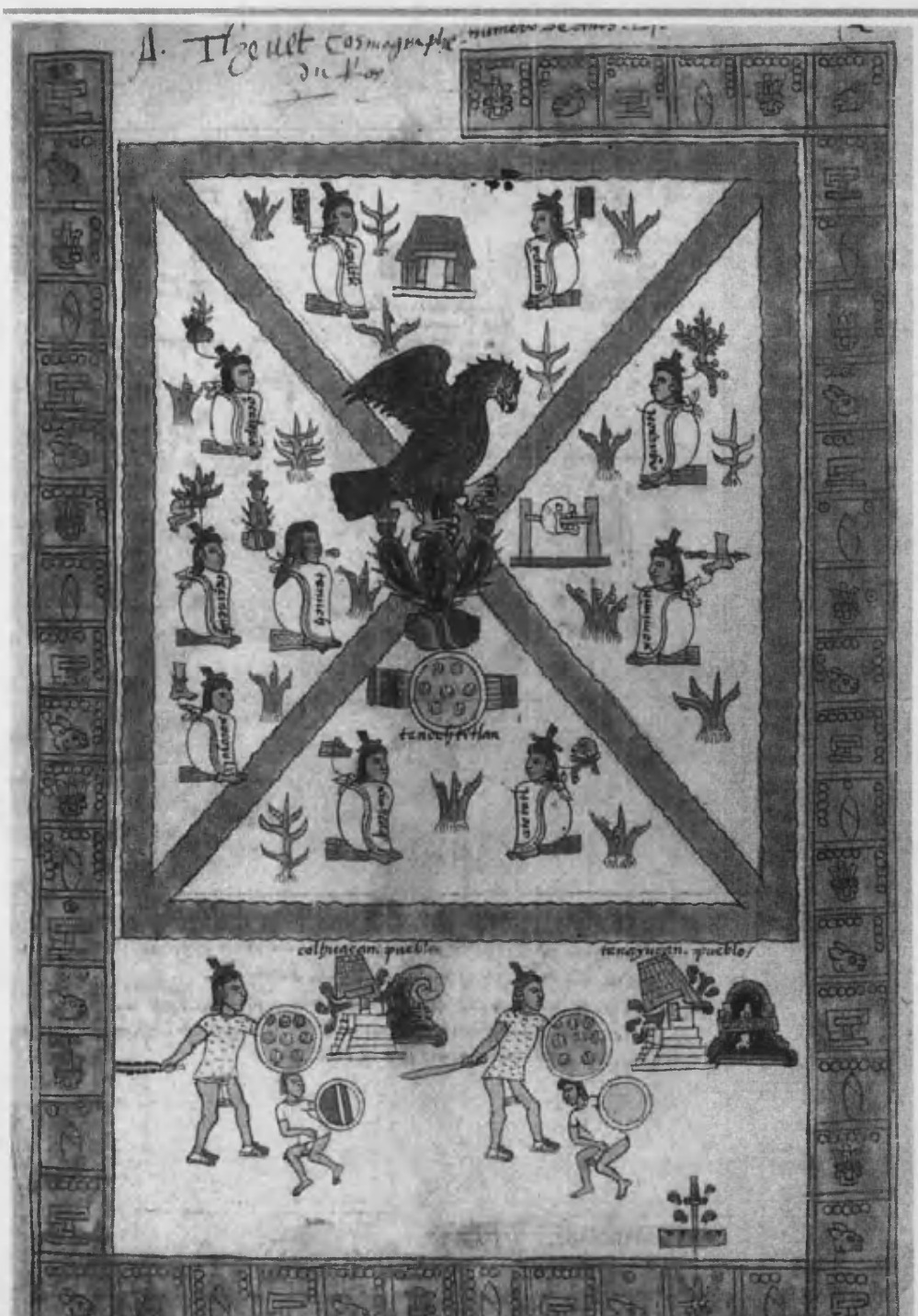


Fig. 13.- **Foundation of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.** *Codex Mendoza*, f. 2r (From the 1997 critical edition by Berdan & Anawalt).





Fig. 14.- Foundation of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Codex Aubin. Page 15. (From the 1963 edition by Dibble).

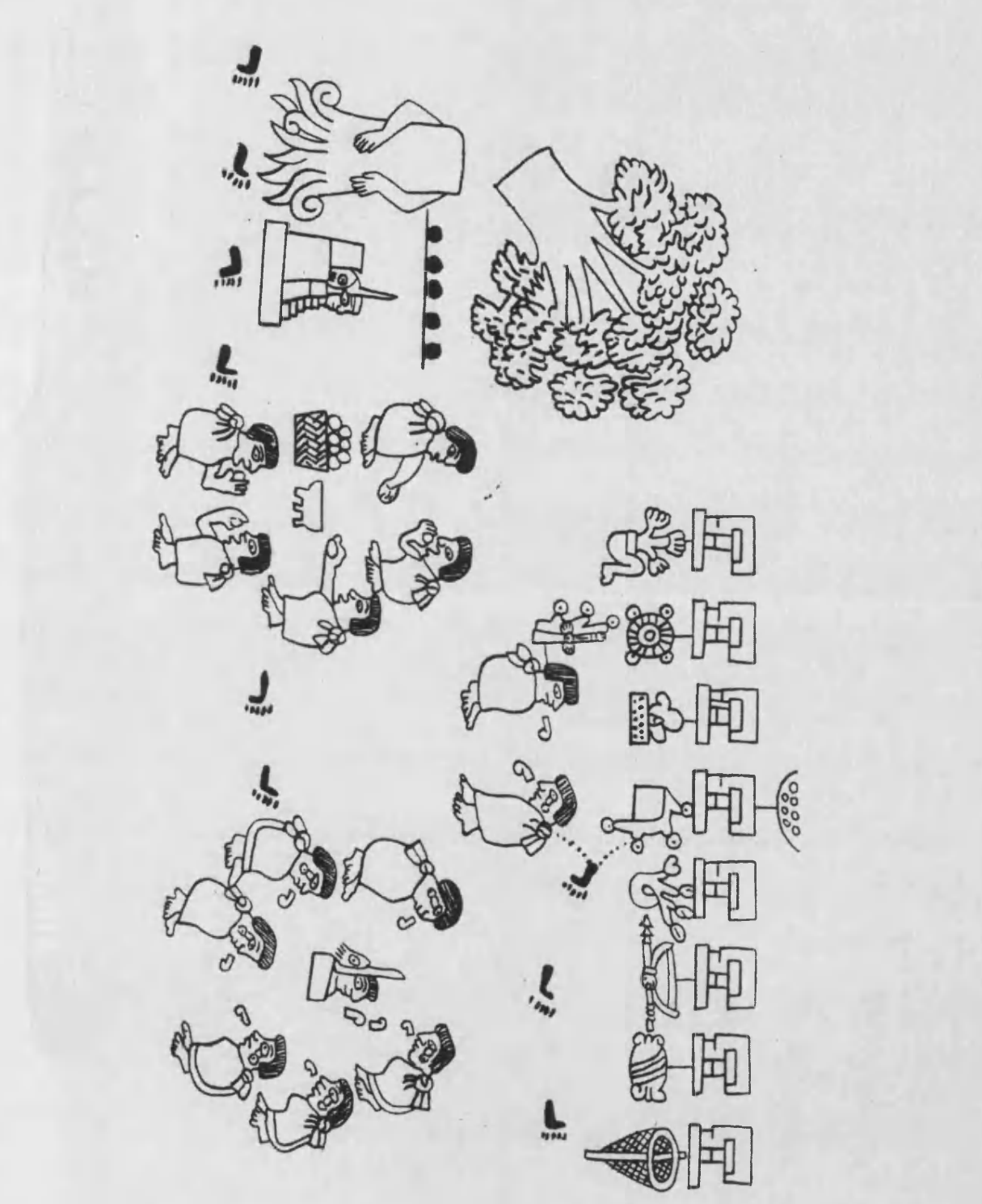


Fig. 15.- **The breaking of the tree.** *Codex Boturini*, plate III. (From the 1964 edition by Corona Núñez).

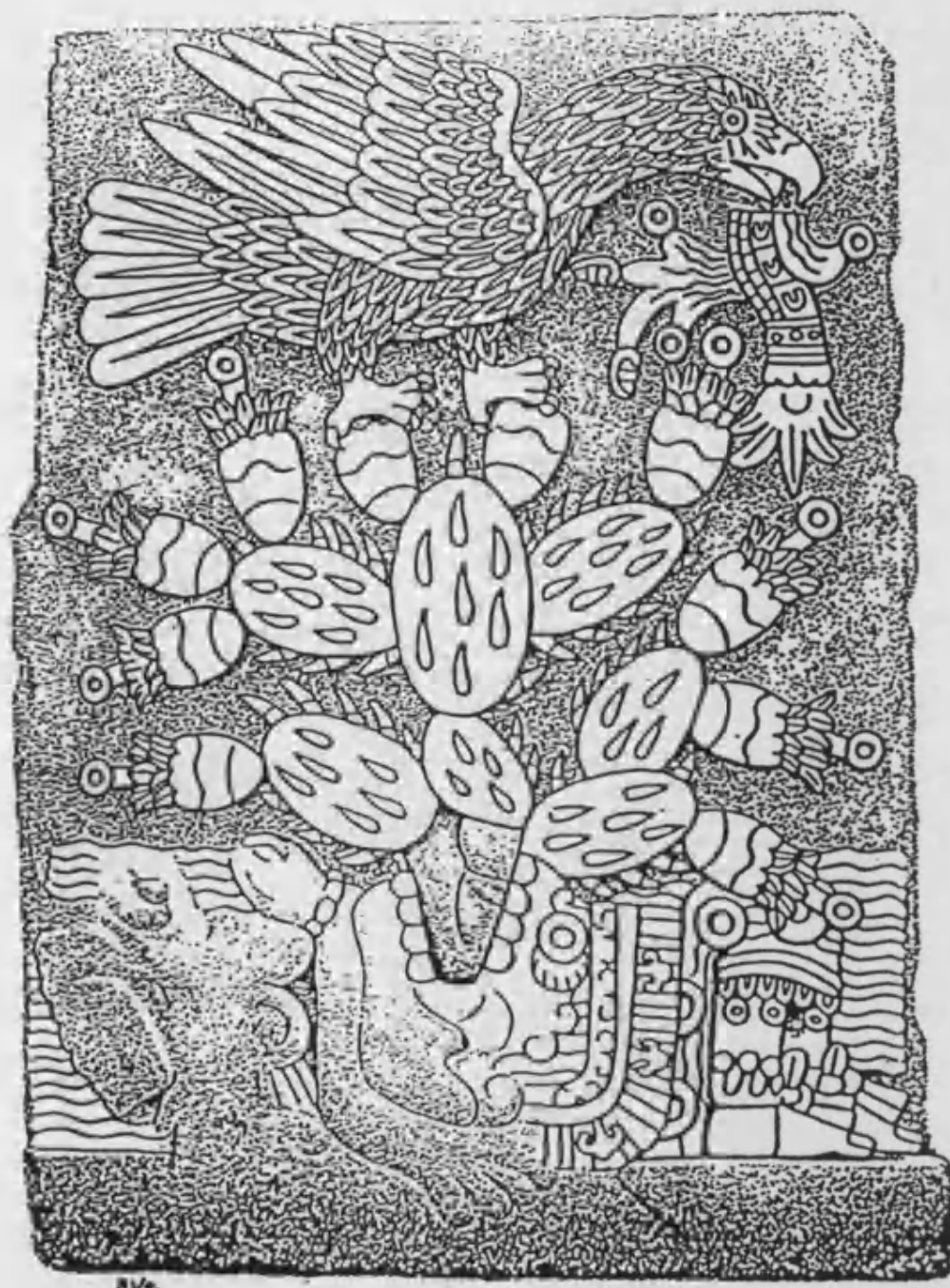


Fig. 16.- **Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada.** Engraved monolith preserved in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, México. The figure represents the signal that marked the foundation of Tenochtitlan, which served as the toponym glyph that identified the city (Drawing copied from Florescano 1990: 647).



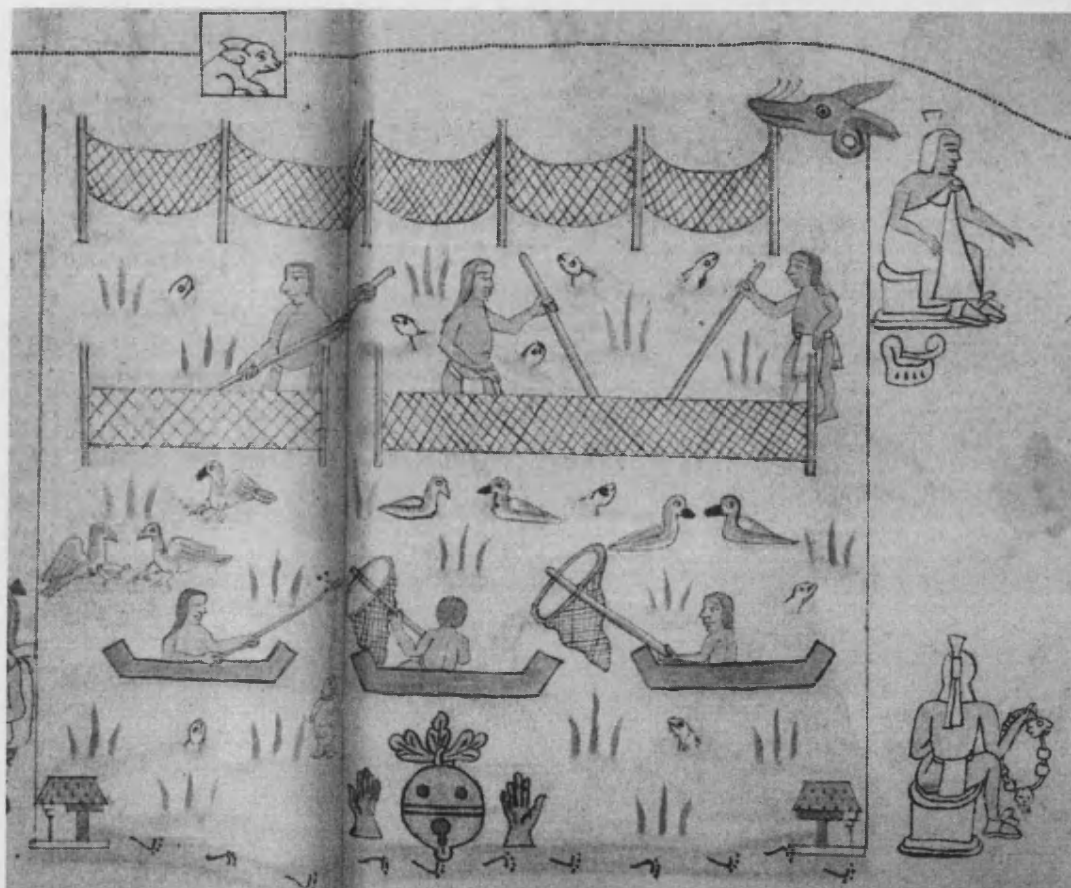


Fig. 17.- **The life in Tenochtitlan.** *Codex Azcatitlan*, plate XIII. (From the 1995 facsimile edition by the National Library of France). The scene represented here shows everyday life in the lacustrine environment of Tenochtitlan.



- a entada que hizo San Diego con los señores de las siete  
ciudades en el año de don. Alonso de Mendoza y en todo se  
hallaron los tlaxcaltecos en su tierra y en la de los señores de la tierra.

Fig. 18.- **Cipolla (Cíbola / Zuñi)**. *Tlaxcala Codex*, in Diego Muñoz Camargo's *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala*, f. 317. (Copied from Acuña 1984). The drawing represents the city of Cíbola, with seven gates (four in the large building of the central square and three in the small building of the lower right-hand corner) that resonate with the seven caves of Chicomoztoc.



Fig. 19.- The army that viceroy Antonio de Mendoza commanded to fight in the Mixtón War. *Códice de Tlatelolco*, plate 1. (Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, picture by Fernando Osorio Alarcón, CNCA / INAH / MEX).

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