

**ZAPOTEC RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN THE  
VALLEY OF OAXACA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1580  
"RELACIONES GEOGRAFICAS" OF PHILIP II.**

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**ABSTRACT/RESUME**

The author describes the religion of the Zapotec Indians of the Oaxaca Valley of Mexico. The description is developed from fourteen extant replies to the Relaciones, or questions ordered by Philip II of Spain. The informants were leaders and elders among the Zapotec. In spite of this early data, there are still many questions about Zapotec religion.

L'auteur décrit la religion des autochtones Zapotec de la vallée Oaxaca du Mexique. La description se développe à partir des quatorze réponses, qui existent encore, aux "Relaciones" ou questions prescrites par Philippe II d'Espagne. Malgré cette information brute, il y a encore beaucoup de questions qui se posent à propos de la religion des Zapotec.

In 1577, Philip II ordered his Spanish officials to answer a 50 part questionnaire, which would give "as complete and accurate a description of the Indies as possible" (Cline, 1964:363). The replies to Question 14, "State to whom the Indians belonged in heathen times and what dominion was exercised over them by their lords; what tribute they paid and the form of worship, rites and customs they had, good and bad" (Ibid.:367), form the basis of this paper. Fortunately, fourteen replies relevant to the Valley Zapotecs of Oaxaca exist in Spanish libraries, and are among the numbers concerning New Spain, which were collected by the Mexican historian, Don Francisco del Paso y Troncoso at the beginning of the century (Paso y Troncoso, 1981:11). The Valley *Relaciones* were completed in each head town by the Spanish officials, the Dominican friars, or the few beneficed secular priests, with an interpreter in attendance. Their informants were the Indian officials and other nobles, and old men who remembered pre-Cortesian times, and whose ages, when stated, ranged from 75 to 90 (Ibid:11), although none were given for the Valley.

No Zapotec Codices appear to have survived, although a number have for their Mixtec neighbours, and so the *Relaciones* are, in effect, the only Indian accounts of Zapotec religious practices in existence. However, such books did exist, for in the 1659's a Spanish secular priest in the Valley, Bachiller Balsalobre, examined and then denounced 36 of his parishioners for idolatry. In a letter to the Bishop he referred to men 'wise men' and 'teachers' ", who used books and handwritten notebooks to teach "the same errors that they held in their heathenism." These books, he stated, contained information regarding the pantheon, calendrics, life crises and other rituals, as well as methods of interpreting and counteracting dreams and auguries. The latter included "the songs of animals and birds" (Carmichael, 1959:1-2;6; Berlin, 1957:7-11). He apparently destroyed them, but he did leave an important account of the pantheon in his remote part of the Valley, the Sola de Vega district, as well as of idolatries including rites of passage, and hunting and agricultural rituals.

Before the Valley *Relaciones Geograficas* are analyzed, I would like to put them into their context, and so I shall discuss the geophysics of the Valley, the prehispanic history of the Zapotecs, their stratified society and their military and spiritual conquest by the Spaniards. I shall then consider other post-Conquest descriptions of Zapotec religion so that the statements in the *Relaciones* may be evaluated.

The broad alluvial plain formed by the three-armed Valley of Oaxaca covers some 8,800 km and is situated about 600 km to the south-west of Mexico City at an altitude of 1500 km (Acevedo, 1982:29-30). It has a tropical highland climate. The arms radiate from the state capital, Oaxaca City,

formerly Antequera, which is overlooked from a high ridge by the Zapotec metropolis and ceremonial centre of Monte Alban, one of the largest and most important archaeological pyramid sites in Mesoamerica.

Monte Alban was founded in approximately 500 B.C. (Blanton, 1983a:83), but Zapotec society had been organized into a series of autonomous ascribed-status peasant societies since 1500 B.C. The earliest ritual buildings in the Valley date from that time. By A.D. 900, Monte Alban Period IV, the metropolis was in decline and these peasant societies had evolved into town-states; by this time too, there were some thirty ceremonial mound groups in the Valley, including Mitla, as well as many lesser sites (Chance, 1978:11). Spatially, the town-states consisted of relatively large villages with their dependent hamlets, a settlement pattern which the Spaniard found, and which persists as the modern municipio. The settlement patterns of the period show that the population had increased dramatically, and it is thought that Monte Alban's decline was partly due to this population's increased agricultural needs, and partly caused by the challenge of the elites at the emerging centres further from the metropolis, such as Lambityeco. It has also been suggested that the need to support such a demanding authority had been removed with the demise of the expansionist, Valley of Mexico metropolis of Teotihuacan as a multi-regional power after about A.D. 700 (Blanton, 1983b; Paddock, 1983a:186-188).

At the time of the Conquest, Monte Alban had been abandoned for centuries, and the principal Zapotec priests resided at their palace of Mitla (Burgoa 11:121), whilst other groups lived in the Valley towns and directed their rituals (Paso y Troncoso, 1981:128).

The Valley had been part of the Aztec tribute empire, which extended east into Guatemala, for about 40 years and there was a Nahuatl speaking garrison, Huaxyacac, at the hub of the Valley where Antequera was founded (Chance, 1978:18). Aztec warfare was based on the need for tribute and sacrificial victims as well as political expediency (Vaillant, 1950:217-218), and the Aztecs interfered with neither the government institutions, nor the religious practices of their Zapotec subjects; such major cults as that of *Tezcatlipoca*, Smoking Mirror, gained no hold, although he was known. But the sacrificial one of *Xipe Totec*, the Flayed One, god of Renewal, which was widespread in Mesoamerica, was present during Monte Alban and might have been taken to Teotihuacan by craftsmen from Oaxaca.<sup>1</sup> However, the Aztecs did have a great linguistic impact on the Valley. Many nobles spoke the language in towns dependent upon or in communication with the Aztec emperor Moctezuma II, and place names were and still are in Nahuatl (Burgoa 1:42-43).

There was also a large Mixtec presence in the central Valley. Mixtec territory lay in the Mixteca Alta sierras to the west, en route to the Valley of Mexico, and *they* had probably begun to settle as a result of invasions, or dynastic marriages, some centuries before (Flannery and Marcus, 1983; Paddock, 1983a:272-277). Their cosmology had much in common with that of the Zapotecs (Spores, 1983; Marcus, 1983c). Both had state religions with trained professional priests, but neither had hierarchical pantheons despite their highly stratified societies (Marcus, 1983c).

The Valley was conquered soon after the fall of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, and now the site of Mexico City. Hernan Cortés sent the Conquistador, Francisco de Orozco, reinforced by Nahuatl-speaking allies, to subdue the Zapotecs in October 1521. He reached the Valley after traversing Mixteca territory, fought several successful battles, and sent word that the land was good, and rich in mines (Cortés, 1983:164-5). It was also well populated and thus eminently suited for Spanish settlement and *encomienda* (grants of tribute-paying Indians).

The stratified nature of Zapotec and other Mesoamerican societies eased the Spaniards' administrative tasks, and throughout the Colonial era only nobles could become village officials, unless the Audiencia in Mexico City permitted an exception.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to understand the nature of the hierarchy of a town state. The *cacique* (Coqui in Zapotec), owned extensive lands, administered, governed and maintained his community and waged war. He was polygynous, but Zapotec succession, unlike Aztec, was by legitimate primogeniture, including females. He observed class endogamy and village exogamy, so that his legal marriage was into the *cacique* family of another town. Thus, strategic marriages, and shifting alliances as a result of them, *must have occurred* in the Valley. *There was a King*, or ruler, of all the Zapotecs at the town of Teozapotlan, now known by its Zapotec name of Zaachila (Chance, 1978:16-27). Zaa means cloud, and Zapotecs and Mixtecs acknowledge a common descent, in certain of their myths, as the Cloud People.<sup>3</sup>

The *principales* administered the town and collected the *cacique's* tribute. The *Relacion* of Macuilsuchil states that the people obeyed a principal placed there by the King of Teozapotlan, and *principales* in towns subject to the Aztec emperor, Moctezuma II, collected his tribute, and took it to Mexico. The priests came from this class, or were the sons of *caciques* (Burgoa 11:167-8). The thirty six "teachers" denounced to the Bishop by Padre Balsalobm may have been *principales*.<sup>4</sup> The hierarchy of priests will be described later, but it was the *caciques* and *principales* who performed autosacrifice by letting their blood and offering it to the idols on feathers.<sup>5</sup>

The peasants, the macehuales, farmed, paid tribute to the cacique, and gave services to the other nobles. Tribute to the cacique of Teozapotlan usually took the form of arms or warriors in time of war.<sup>6</sup> In some years a field of maize was cultivated for him by Mitla. Regrettably, Philip II asked whom a town fought, but not "why". However, it seems that, political and territorial reasons apart, warfare was a means of acquiring sacrificial victims for the idols. The serfs, the mayequés, were tied to the huge cacique estates, but possibly had usufruct right to land. They tilled the cacique's land and gave him goods and services. They may have performed similar services for the principales. A document of 1558 shows that a principal of Cuilapan received 13 pesos, 15 turkeys, and 3,000 cacao beans, which were still currency then, per mayequé household, when the fiesta of the patron saint was held (Chance, 1978:26), so this probably continued a pre-hispanic custom for the most important religious celebrations.

The slaves were both taken in war and sold in markets, which *must* have formed a wide network, for the *Relacion* of Miaguatlan states that they came from provinces such as Mexico, Tlascala and Tepeaca. They cost the equivalent of 1 and 1 1/2 pesos in gold dust. *The Relacion* of Ocelotepeque states that they captured many boys and girls when fighting the Mixe and Chontal, kept the best as personal slaves, sent some to Moctezuma, and sacrificed the others. Except when serving the ruler at Teozapotlan, the Valley Zapotecs did not act as a nation. Inter-town warfare occurred and Tlacolula states that it fought Mitla, this despite Mitla's sacred character! It was, I would argue, the articulation of their state religion, based upon the worship of their god, *Bezelao*, at Mitla, and directed by the state priests in their towns, which gave them identity as a group; though not, perhaps, cohesion.

The caciques were extremely vulnerable when the Spaniards arrived, because of the size of their estates and the tribute they received, for these were sequestered if they did not become Christians. The King of Teozapotlan, the most important Valley ruler, was baptized as Don Juan Cortes as early as 1521 (Marcus, 1983b:302). In 1557 Philip II confirmed by decree that noble converts should retain their traditional rights and that the *Audiencia*, the *Viceregal judicial* and *administrative court* in Mexico City, should hear urgently those seeking justice in holding and inheriting their estates.<sup>7</sup> In the Valley of Oaxaca, and unusually, there were still cacicazgo's larger than the Spanish estates at the end of the 18th century (Taylor, 1972:65). Those who converted could be expected to influence their subjects to do the same, and the Spaniards earnestly, and without hypocrisy, desired to save the souls of their new subjects.

Concerning this we must take into consideration the horror of the Spaniards at human sacrifice, which Cortes referred to in his First *Carta de Relacion*, when expressing the need to lead the people to a knowledge of the truth and stop the ills that came from the worship of the devil...the demonio (Cortes, 1983:22-23). The practice was stamped out at the Conquest, but the horror of it, and the drinking and feasting that accompanied it, greatly influenced the teaching of the secular priests and friars: as did their bewilderment at finding practices which seemed to them parodies of Christian ones, as well as much that was to be admired. The Valley Zapotec, for example, had celibate priests, and observed ritual fasting. They also believed in an afterlife, but in a physical replica of the Valleys where every earthly vice could be indulged (Burgoa 11:64). The early conversions were not always successful. When the Inquisition held idolatry trials, the accused was *often* a noble, who, decades after conversion, had turned in secret and despair to his old religion. There were, in fact, few such trials, and very few auto de fe of Zapotec.<sup>8</sup>

The schools which trained the sons of nobles were more successful: no greater iconoclasts existed than the pupils of the School of the Franciscan, Pedro de Gante at Nahuatl-speaking Texcoco, near the Valley of Mexico. They destroyed temples and idols and denounced their fathers for concealing pagan images (Koyabashi, 1974:259). This is the context in which we must consider later accounts of pre-Cortesian religion. I feel they can never be objective.

The Conquistadores always travelled with priests, and when given grants of tribute-paying Indians, in *encomienda*, they were expected to encourage and share in the cost of their conversion (Van Oss, 1986:25-26). They were often lax in this. However, Hernan Cortes, as Marquis del Valle de Oaxaca, held most of the Valley as his *encomienda* from 1529-32, but only four important towns, ETLA, Villa de Oaxaca, Tlapacoya and Cuilapan, from 1533. The Pope allowed him to appoint priests, but this, already being the royal perquisite, was soon revoked.<sup>9</sup>

The great Franciscan, Motolinia, said of him that, though a sinner, he had "a very great desire to use his life and treasure to increase and augment the faith of Jesus Christ, and to die for the conversion of these gentiles" (Motolinia, 1973:219). Thus the Zapotec informants of the *Relaciones* had been subjected to proselytisation for fifty years at least. However, the early secular priests would have preached in Nahuatl using nobles as interpreters; but their Nahuatl was poor. In 1571 the Bishop said of the older experienced priests that they were not familiar with Zapotec, but "know the Mexican language, or something of it. Some more, and others less".<sup>10</sup> Indoctrination in this manner cannot but result in mutual misconceptions and syncretic

religion.

The Crown appointed the mendicant orders as missionaries, and the Franciscans reached New Spain in 1524, establishing themselves in the Nahuatl-speaking area. The Dominicans, however, were not properly established until 1528, and, perforce, had moved out to the Mixteca Alta and the Valley by 1529. In this area they had a near monopoly of missionary work. The first two preached in Nahuatl in the Valley towns, whilst studying Mixtec and Zapotec. Later more arrived, but it was not until in the 1550's that they began to establish monasteries in the towns (Ricard, 1966:64-65, 69; Chance, 1978:43-44). So, in the first decades after the Conquest, when huge numbers were converted at a time, there were few missionaries to minister to them.

The information given about Zapotec religion in the various *Relaciones* varies considerably in quality. Two, those of Cuilapan and Teozapotlan, do not mention it at all. Those in the partido of Chichicapa are extremely informative, and although it is, strictly speaking, outside the Valley, the informants state that they gave allegiance to the Cacique of Teozapotlan and worshipped *Bezelao*, whom they called "the universal god", at Mitla. Whatever was said about religion was mediated by fifty years of Christian teaching and by the Spanish officials who wrote up the reports. They, however, had every intention of stating the true facts (Paso y Troncoso, 1981:116, 139).

The Dominican monopoly of the area gives added importance to the *Relaciones*. The Franciscans wrote great ethnographies and descriptions of religious practices, because, as Sahagun stated, they needed to understand their neophytes' beliefs in order to convert them (Sahagun, 1979:17). The Dominicans had a more austere approach, as befitted the order which mainly staffed the Inquisition, and wrote edifying histories of the lives and missions of their predecessors and colleagues. Fray Francisco de Burgoa's "Palestra Relacion" and "Geografica Descripcion" are written in this mace. They are boring, diffuse and chronologically confused between 16th century material, based upon now lost Dominican archives, and recollections of his own early mission; whilst important facts are scattered amongst his endless biblical citations. His books were published in 1670 and 1674 and all subsequent histories of Oaxaca are based upon them.

Fray Juan de Cordova's "Vocabulario Castellano-Zapoteco" was published in 1575 after he had worked on it for 25 years, mostly in the monastery at Tlacoahuaya. It is full of ethnographic and religious information. Of the latter he had a great knowledge, having interrogated the Cacique of Tehuantepec prior to his idolatry trial.<sup>11</sup> The Cacique had been baptized in 1527, but denounced by a friar for giving refuge to the priests

from Mitla at his palace and attending rites, which included animal and bird sacrifices, and at which, according to Burgoa, he was surprised officiating as high priest (Burgoa 11:350-355). Even so, insofar as religious ceremonies and celebrations are concerned, one cannot gain more than an impression of them, from the definitions scattered through the dictionary. It is as if he had listed separately the phonemes of a language. His "Arte" or grammar also contains information about omens, and certain customs and beliefs, as well as material on calendrics, which has been discussed by the archaeologist, Joyce Marcus.

The Zapotecs had a 365 day secular calendar called *yza* (seasons) and a 260 day ritual, one called *piji*, which was calculated by ritual specialists, the *colonij* (diviners). The *pije* was divided into 4 lightnings (*cocijo*) of 65 days, and the 4 *cocijo* into 5 *cocii* of 13 days, named after the days upon which they began. The day numbers and names are thought, from the manner in which they are fused, to be of great antiquity (Marcus, 1983a:91-92). This was the ritual calendar which Balsalobre found in use in Sola de Vega, and the deities he listed governed it. The *cocijo*, also known *aspitao* (great spirits) caused all events, and so sacrifices of blood were offered to them. Fray Juan de Cordova believed *that pitao* meant god, but it is now thought that it was the life force within a supernatural being or force: *pee* meant wind, breath, or spirit, and the phoneme *pi* or *pe* occurs in many words connected with the sacred: *pigana* or *bigana* (young priest) and *yo'hopehe* (temple), for example. But any thing or creature which was deemed to have *pe* was sacred to an extent. Hence the rituals which accompanied the harvesting of staple crops, as well as deer hunting and trout fishing, in Sola de Vega.<sup>12</sup>

Fray Juan speaks of a creator without beginning, called *Piyetao piyexoo*. He was so intangible that he was not represented by an idol (Marcus, 1983c:345), but such phenomena as earthquakes and lightning were considered as living supernatural forces and called *pitao*, as were their idols, defined by him as "*dioses de los yndios de piedra y palo*": *pitao guie* and *pitao yaga*. So the idols may have been more than mere representations: and, indeed, the modern priest may fear that the images of saints in the village churches are still regarded in this manner. The *Relaciones* do not mention the creator, but rituals to *Bezelaio*, sometimes referred to by name, but generally called the "demonio" or "diavolo" are mentioned in Teticpac, Tlacolula, Taliztaca, Guaxelotitlan and Chichicapa. That of Ocelotepetque states that he was adored as the universal god above all others. He watched over and helped them in their battles and wars, and they invoked him for their crops. They had their own god of war, *Cozichocozee*, and needed him, for they were constantly at war, but above all they revered *Bezelaio*.

Fray Juan de Cordova defined *Bezelayo* as the "Demonio" and as "Dios del Infierno". The etymology is unclear apart from the initial *Be* or *Pe*, so he might, as Marcus suggests, have been "god" of the afterlife (Marcus, 1983c:348NI). His idol was treated with great reverence. The high priest, or great seer, the *Huiatao*, whom Fray Juan refers to as the Pope, lived in the ceremonial centre at Mitla, and was, Fray Juan says, the only one who could enter the sanctuary of the idols to offer sacrifices. Burgoa states that this priest was respected by the Caciques of Teozapotlan, because he was so close to the gods (Burgoa 11:121). There were also the *hueza echa*, the minor priests, and the *huetete* who specialized in sacrifice. They cut open the chests of war prisoners and slaves, and tore out their hearts, which were then taken to the idols by their guardians: for sacrifices were also made to other idols elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> But they also sacrificed small animals, birds and feathers, and this practice continued after the Conquest. The *Relaciones* speak of old temple-sites on hills and caves: and it was in such hidden places that cases of post-Conquest idolatry were sometimes discovered. The generic term used in the *Relaciones* for priest is *bigana*. However, to Burgoa, this was a specific group of whom there were many. They were chosen by the oracle as children, were the second sons of caciques and principales, and were kept apart to preserve their purity (Burgoa 11:167-168). Fray Juan describes an initiation ceremony for them,<sup>14</sup> which, presumably, took place when they entered the most prestigious temples to learn the rites and ceremonies of their cult (*Ibid.*).

The *Relaciones* use the term *bigana* even for the high priest at Mitla (Paso y Troncoso, 1981:152), and Huitzo states that there were twenty to twenty-five in the temples on a hill, and that they showed the people what rites and customs to keep. Miagatlan states that they served as human sacrificers, each town having its order and different idols to adore. It is the only town to mention another god of state importance. This is *Gozio*; clearly *Cocijo*, to whom a man or boy was sacrificed in the spring, for he was the god of rain, or, more likely, the spirit of lightning interacting with clouds to produce rain (Paso y Troncoso, 1981:127-128).

Apart from the state and local gods there were the *Coqui*, who were usually the mummified remains, or the idol, of a cacique. These were specific to a town and so led the Spaniards to posit a huge Zapotec pantheon. We learn from the *Relacion* of Ocelotepeque that theirs had been a culture hero, strong, valiant, and a wise ruler. They sacrificed to him, so that he might intercede with *Bezelayo* for them. This is testified to by the priest and scribe who wrote up the report. The mummy had been found by a previous priest, who had burned it in public. However, in 1577, in despair after twelve hundred townspeople had died in an epidemic, the principales had sacrificed

to the ashes. The priest had discovered this fact in 1579, and in 1580 they were in prison in Antequera.<sup>15</sup>

Mitla refers to its married idols *Coqui Bezelao*, the devil, and his wife *Ponapi Quecuya*. *Ponapi* could be *Xonaxi*, the title of a cacique consort, or of a cacica in her own right. Several towns had *Coqui-Xonaxi* pairs of idols, who were presumably cacique, and Coathan states that men were sacrificed to *Coqui* and women to *Xonaxi* (Paso y Troncoso, 1981:134). However, it is not possible to get a clear picture of the supernaturals, or of priestly functions, from the *Re/aciones*, because of the smudging of categories and roles after sixty years.

The accounts of celebrations underpin this point. All refer to dancing and getting drunk on pulque before their idols. In Mitla they did this in the palace patio before *Bezelao* and *Xonaxi Quecuya*. In Taliztac they danced to music in front of theirs; as, no doubt, they all did. In Teticpac they say they danced and got drunk on mushrooms: and the Mazatec, who still use *psilocybe caerulescens* (Estrado, 1984:54NI) in shamanistic rituals, live in the Canada relatively near. They got "drunk" in such a way that they saw visions and terrifying figures, which suggests collective possession under the guidance of the priests in their shamanistic role. Fray Juan refers to "Vino de los indios" on which they got drunk. This was called *Xinicapezéeelao*, *Pezeelao* being an alternative spelling for *Beze/ao*. However, Burgoa states that plebians were not allowed to drink such beverages or to get drunk at that time (Burgoa li:125).

Then there is the question of cannibalism. This is referred to by several towns with the enthusiasm, I feel, or Fray Pedro de Gante's young iconoclasts. They offered the hearts of slaves to the idols and ate the rest, and often a number of prisoners might have been sacrificed at a time. Joyee Marcus accepts this,<sup>16</sup> but did Valley ritual cannibalism occur? Cortes refers to the anthropophagy of enemies, but not among the Zapotec and not of sacrificial victims. Fray Juan defines it, but gives no context. Burgoa says nothing of it in his study of the Mitla priests and their functions (Cortes, 1983:140, 154, 228; Burgoa 11:121-25, 350).

An insight into Mesoamerican thinking on the subject was given by some Tlaxcalans, who took five captives to Cortes, and said, "If you be a god that eats meat and blood, eat these Indians, and we shall bring you more, and if you be a kind god, here are plumes and incense, and if you be a man here are turkeys and bread and cherries".<sup>17</sup> Humans were food for the gods and the idols' mouths were smothered in sacrificial blood.

Were the Zapotecs really great anthropophagists? During the trial of Francisco Lopez Tenorio in 1537, one witness admitted to eating Christian flesh sent from Mixteca Alta, and another, an old woman, to entering houses

in the guise of a jaguar or puma and eating boys.<sup>18</sup> Do we accept one whilst firmly rejecting the other? It is significant that the Spaniards have confused the Mesoamerican concept of the *nagual* with the European one of the witch: for we have an old woman, ability to transform into several animal species, and the eating of children. I suggest that the consumption of sacrificial victims is a myth resulting from the Church's model of prehispanic religion in New Spain, which was as effective as its model of witchcraft in Europe. Here one of Fray Juan's entries is apposite. Under "Virtual..." he refers to incantations using 'the words of god' and says, These are from their antiquity, so they think it is bad, but it is not, being just like prayers". The references in the *Relaciones* may result from this attitude.

What is myth, and what is the truth? I shall end by admitting to a thread of mythology which may have run through this paper. I refer to the role and identity of the Cacique of Teozapotlan, ruler of the Valley Zapotecs. It has been accepted by every historian of the Zapotecs since Burgoa that this was a Zapotec cacicazgo, and that, shortly before the Conquest, the then cacique had fled to Tehuantepec as the result of Mixtec uprising (Chance, 1978:16-17). This is confirmed by the 1581 *Relacion* of Cuilapan, which also states that it is a Mixtec town (Barlow, 1962:36-38), and by the Lienzo de Guevea, a genealogy. However, recently, a photograph of the original Lienzo has been found which, together with a map and genealogy from Macuilxochitl and the Mixtec Codex Nuttall, shows that various valley towns including Teozapotlan had had Mixtec caciques for centuries before the Conquest. This was first posited by Alfonso Caso, after excavations in Monte Alban, and has now been accepted by Ignacio Bernal, Miguel Covarrubias and John Paddock.<sup>19</sup>

And yet...the *Relacion* of Teozapotlan states that its Nahuatl name means "God of the Zapotec" and later states, "and this everybody agrees, that Teozapotlan is the Zapotec lordship." Then the *Relacion* of Teotitlan del Valle says that they paid tribute to the Senor in Teozapotlan, then to another Senor in Tehuantepec, and later to the Mixtecs at Cuilapan. This latter is true, for the Mixtec cacique of Cuilapan collected their tribute for Cortes (Chance, 1978:38). So after only 50 years, even these facts were fudged. Odd that they did not mention Cortés!

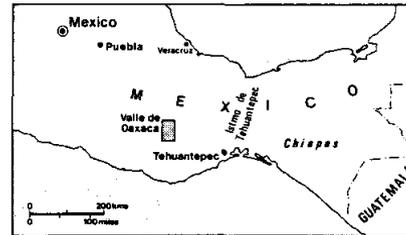
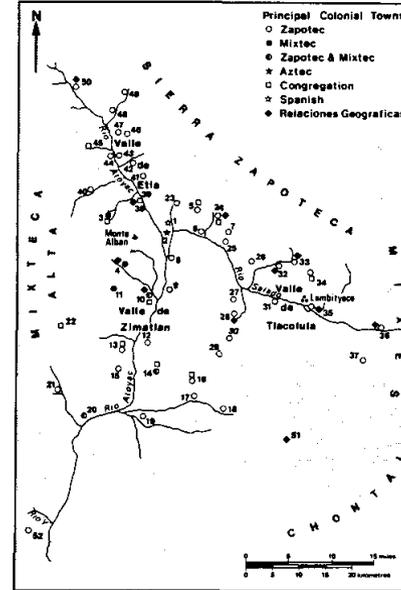
I raise these points in order to demonstrate the difficulty in reconstructing ethnohistory, even from dates so close to the Spanish invasion. It may be that everyone who has worked on 16th century Oaxaca has been the victim of the Zapotec's ideal model of their history, even as they have been the victim of their history, even as they have been the victim of the Church's denigratory one of Mesoamerican religion.

### KEY TO MAP

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| 1. Antequera (Oaxaca)  | 27. San Sebastian Teitipac                 |
| 2. Villa de Oaxaca   | 28. San Juan Teitipac                      |
| 3. San Pedro Ixtlahuaca  | 29. Santo Domingo Jalieza                  |
| 4. Cuilapan  | 30. Santa Cecilia Jalieza                  |
| 5. San Adres Huayapan  | 31. San Juan Guelavia                      |
| 6. San Sebastian Tutla   | 32. Macuixochitl (Macuilsuchil)            |
| 7. Santo Domingo Tomaltepec  | 33. Teotitlan del Valle                    |
| 8. San Agustin de las Juntas   | 34. Santa Ana del Valle                    |
| 9. San Bartolo Coyotepec   | 35. Tlacolula                              |
| 10. Zaachila (Teozapotlan)   | 36. Mitla                                  |
| 11. San Lucas Tlanchichico   | 37. Santiago Matatlan                      |
| 12. Santa Catarina Quiane  | 38. Santa Maria Azompa                     |
| 13. San Lorenzo Zimatlan   | 39. San Jacinto Amilpas                    |
| 14. Santa Ana Zegache  | 40. San Felipe Tejalapan                   |
| 15. San Pablo Huiestepec   | 41. San Pablo Etla                         |
| 16. San Juan Chilateca   | 42. San Sebastian Etla                     |
| 17. Santa Domingo Ocotlan  | 43. Guadalupe Etla                         |
| 18. Santa Catarina Minas   | 44. Soledad Etla                           |
| 19. San Pedro Apostol  | 45. San Adres Zautla                       |
| 20. Santa Ana Tlapacoya  | 46. Villa de Etla                          |
| 21. Santa Cruz Mixtepec  | 47. Reyes Etla                             |
| 22. Magdalena Mixtepec   | 48. Magdalena Apasco                       |
| 23. San Felipe del Agua  | 49. San Juan del Estado (San Juan del Rey) |
| 24. San Miguel Tlaxiactac  | 50. Huitzo (Guaxolotitlan)                 |
| 25. Santa Maria del Tule   | 51. San Baltazar Chichicapa (1)            |
| 26. San Geronimo Tlacoahuaya and San Sebastian Abasolo (San Sebastian Tlacoahuaya) | 52. Sola de Vego                           |

(1) Chichicapa y su partido: Amatlan  
Miaguatlan  
Coatlan  
Ocelotepeque

Numbers 1-50: as in Taylor William B. "Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca." (Stanford University Press, 1972) p. 25.



## NOTES

1. Paddock John. "Tezcatlipoca in Oaxaca" pp. 309-325. Brotherston "Huitzilipochtli and what was made of him" in Norman Hammond (Editor): "Mesoamerican Archaeology New Approaches" pp. 155-66, especially p.160. The great god of the Aztecs, Huitzilipochtli, was probably subordinate to the much older Chichimec god, Tezcatlipoca. Davies. "The Ancient Kingdom of Mexico" p. 223 Xipe Totec originated as patron deity of the Pacific Coast Yopes, p. 171. The cult goes back to the Gulf Coast Olmec c. AD 500. p. 223. He was the patron of the goldsmiths and this may be why he occurs in both Monte Alban III and Teotihuacan. The finest goldsmiths were Mixtecan and there was a quarter of Oaxacan craftsmen in Teotihuacan. Ragghianti & Ragghianti "National Museum of Anthropology Mexico" plates p. 48. Olmec, p. 85. Monte Alban, p. 88 Teotihuacan.
2. Archivo General de la Nacion, Mexico City. Vol 55, Exp 363. 1745 San Bartolomé Coyotepec. In reply to a request from the Corregidor of Oaxaca City; "as requested by the Fiscal, Sebastian de Dios Zorita has been chosen as governor of this town although he is not a cacique."
3. ed Flannery and Marcus op. cit. Preface pxx-xxi. But the Mixtecs might have been rather "The People of the Rain".
4. Carmichael. op. cit. suggests that the thirty-six men accused of idolatry were leaders of the various towns, in the area, p. 3. But Berlin in "Las antiguas creencias" lists sixty-one "maestros", "letrados" or "Colanis", who were tried between 1600 and 1657, and of whom one was a principal and fiscal and one a cantor, pp. 16-17. According to depositions given to Bachiller Balsalobre three more held civil office and another was a church cantor, pp. 37, 40, 43. So we appear to be dealing with shamans, who officiated at life crisis and hunting rituals by virtue of their possession of the "book of thirteen gods." Five were women, pp. 16-17. However, hunts were organized by the town officials and so caciques and principales participated in the accompanying rituals, pp. 36, 39, 41, 42. Moreover, a town's communal fishing could be organized by the Guild of Cantores (Church Singers and Secretaries) pp.47.
5. Relacion de Ocelotepeque. Blood was let from ears, noses, tongues and other members, p. 139
6. Macuilsechil, Tlacolula. Teticpac and Taliztaca specify fighting for him. Teutiltan del Valle and Mitla gave other tribute.
7. Cédula Real 1557. Taylor. "Landlord and Peasant" p. 39.
8. Gay. "Historia de Oaxaca." pp. 219-20. The Cacique of Tehautepec's

lands and tribute were sequestered by the Inquisition. He was a fine man and the friar, who denounced him bitterly repented his action. The six priests from Mitla whom he sheltered refused to repent and died in an auto de fe. Herring Hubert "A History of Latin America" p. 177. The Indians were disciplined by the bishop, not the Inquisition, after 1575, being innocents in the faith. Carmichael op. cit. p. 2. At the Balsolobre trial the principal teacher was imprisoned for repeated offences, but the Bishop fined the others 2 pesos each. They performed various penances for a year.

9. Gerhard. "A Guide to the Historical Geography." Cortes received 22 separate encomiendas in 1529 pp. 9 and 49. Discussion of Cuatro Villas pp. 88-91.
10. "Descripcion del Obispado de Antequera, de la Nueva Espana, hecho por el Obispo del dicho Obispado por mandado de S.M." in ed Garcia Icazbalceta "Relacion de los Obispos" p. 95.
11. COrdova. "Vocabulario" Introduction by Wigberto Jiménez Moreno pp. 10-13.
12. Berlin. "Las antiguas creencias." Harvesting pp. 34-5. Maize= Pinij, Beans = Pizaa, Hunting p. 36, Deer = Pichinaquijx, Fishing p. 37, Trout = Pela chijini. Translations from Cordova "Vocabulario".
13. Burgoa op. cit. Tomo II p. 123, P. 350. Priestly offices from Cordova.
14. "Poner el mastel al mochacho la primera vez que le avia de poner un piganaa del templo."
15. 'This cacique,' states the Relacion, "was descended from a generation, which was stranded on a mountain after the flood and escaped in a boat."
16. Relaciones of Guaxilotitlan, p. 199. Chichicapa, p. 117. Miagudtlan pp. 127-28. Marcus, 1983c, p. 350.
17. "The Chronicle of Andros de Tapia" in ed Fuentes op. cit. p. 31, also Leon-Portilla "Vision" p. 34, says Moctezuma sent captives to be sacrificed before the Spaniards, so that they could drink their blood, thinking that they might be gods.
18. Juicio de Residencia de Francisco Lopez Tenorio, pp. 72, 117, 177.
19. Paddock. "Tezcatlipoca in Oaxaca" pp. 321-2. Paddock. "Senorios Indigenas del Valle de Oaxaca" 1200-1600 d.c." From a lecture, and its printed abstract, delivered at the VII Reunion de Historiadores Mexicanos y Norteamericanos in Oaxaca on 25.10.1985.

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