

Colonial Nahua Heraldry in San Miguel Chiepetlan, Guerrero, during the War of Spanish Succession: Old and New allegiances.

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Introduction

A large number of native land documents and paintings were created during the late 17th and 18th centuries to argue complex land disputes in the framework of the dominant Spanish legal system (*títulos primordiales/Techialoyan codices*) (see Barlow 1943:161-62; Gómez de Orozco 1948:57-68). Originally some researchers considered these documents as mere fabrications done by native forgers (Robertson 1959:195; Borah 1984:33) to supplant proper legal titles that could only be issued by Spanish authorities during lengthy procedures called *composiciones de tierras*¹ (Harvey 1986:162-163). Nonetheless, Gibson (1964:271) noted that native-made *títulos* embodied common goals of Indian societies towards the protection of their lands from alienation, regardless of their limited legal validity. In a similar approach Lockhart (1991:44) observed that these documents transcend the mere attempt to legalize communal lands, being the embodiment of indigenous visions with multiple layers of social memory, meaning, intentions and purposes. Indeed, some of these documents were created to be consumed by native audiences and many of them were never used in Spanish legal proceedings or even seen by Spanish authorities (Wood 1998:203). This reveals a complex genesis in the production and use of these documents that transcends rigid approaches to the practices of indigenous painting and writing in the context of the colonial legal system that ultimately tolerated them as useful instruments that tightened the reliance of the native communities in the Spanish court system (Harvey 1986:162; Kellog 1992:32-34; Wood 1998:170). The existence of this documental group reveals a symbolic allegiance between hundreds of native local governments with the bureaucratic system constructed in the New Spain to represent a distant and absent king; a rapport that certainly needs to be explored for later colonial art (Shreffler 2007:1-4).

One of the most interesting elements in some *títulos primordiales/Techialoyan codices* is the conspicuous display of painted coat of arms supposedly granted by the Spanish Crown to award meritorious actions rendered by corporate groups, embodied in their early Indian rulers, to assist in the conquest and guarding of its American domains.

In this paper I will explore the particular use of three Nahua colonial banners (Lienzos de Chiepetlan, IV, V and VI) as a special category of civic indigenous heraldry that has received less attention than more elaborated coat of arms (Castañeda 2009; Roskamp 2001; Galarza 1987:91). I argue that heraldic insignia is key to understand symbolic and powerful acts of allegiance to the Spanish colonial system.

European Heraldry and its introduction to New Spain.

Geographically European heraldry seems to have developed some of its main features within an area embracing the Low Countries, Northern France and Southern England in the 12th century to denote achievements of empires, states, towns, dynasties, families, individuals or institutions.

¹ Composition of land titles encompassed the registration of all real estate and presentation of proof of ownership to crown officers. The application of the royal laws varied from region to region and went through cyclical programs of enforcement (1593, 1635, 1643, 1646, 1687, 1695, 1709, 1715, 1720, 1754).

With the crowning of the Habsburg Charles as Spanish king (1516) and as Holy Roman Emperor (1519), Iberian heraldry had to accommodate armorial practices from the Benelux region and the German principalities. Of special importance was the inclusion of the heraldic heritage of the new monarch to the already complex coat of arms of the Catholic kings. Thus the usual arms of Isabel and Ferdinand (the charges of *Castilla*, *León*, *Aragón*, *Dos Sicilias* and *Granada*) were impaled with those of Austria, Ancient Burgundy, Modern Burgundy, Brabant, Flanders, Tirol, Jerusalem, Napoli as well as Navarra (Figure 1). The simple “eagle displayed” of Saint John that served as supporter for the charges of the Catholic kings was replaced by the double headed eagle of the Holy Roman Empire; and the simple royal crown of the Catholic Kings gave way to the flamboyant imperial crown of Charles V. In the same manner the necklace of the order of the Golden Fleece was added as an adjunct element around an already overcharged shield. Moreover extra supporters were represented in the form of the Herculean Columns together with the motto *Plus Ultra*.

All these heraldic developments were taking place almost in parallel to the time when the Spanish expedition of Hernando Cortés and large contingents of indigenous allies managed to subdue the powerful Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco and Tacuba. In the following decades after this military deed both Spanish and Indian conquistadors began to request privileges and royal grants to the Spanish Crown. Dominant among the petitions were coats of arms to perpetuate the memory of the event and the deeds of the conquistadors (see entries in Villar Villamil 1933). Thus, European heraldry was introduced to the New World as a well-developed system of iconography specialized in displaying narratives of military and civic achievements. For acts related to the conquest of the Triple Alliance of Central Mexico, Hernando Cortés received a royal coat of arms on March 7, 1525 (Figure 2). Coats of arms were similarly granted to some 117 Spanish conquistadors between 1525 and 1594. In the same period 22 native allied rulers received such honor. Most of the Indian allies got their coats of arms posthumously, granted to their children and grandchildren who managed to endure and accommodate to the colonial administration. In the Spanish realms armorial achievements did not restrict to coats of arms and the right to display them, but usually came attached with other privileges like certain degree of judicial protection from local authorities, the right to bear offensive and defensive weapons and anything else which the grantee was entitled in the content of his grant (Fernandez de Recas 1961: XXI).

Civic coats of arms had a parallel development than individual shields. The Spanish *cabildo* of Mexico City was granted in 1523 its well-known coat of arms. Other large Spanish and Indian political centers followed suit: Guatemala (1532), Chiapa (1535), Guadalajara (1539), Huejotzingo (1553), Michoacan (1553) and Coyoacan (1561) (see Paz y Mélia 1892:282-296). Slowly but surely the practice percolated to smaller political systems, thus by 1559 the *pueblo* of Santa Catarina Texupa, in the Chocho-Mixtec region of Oaxaca, reported to have paid the considerable amount 30 pesos for an official seal depicting the coat of arms of the Habsburg dynasty (Figure 4) (León 1982: folio 26). In 1580 Diego Muñoz Camargo reported that in the *cabildo* and *audiencia* rooms of the municipal building of Tlaxcala the walls were decorated with equestrian portraits of Hernando Cortés plus all the viceroys who had ruled New Spain (Muñoz Camargo 1984:47-48). In the equestrian painting of Hernando Cortés, the Tlaxcateca artists painted a defeated Moctezuma Xocoyotzin with his weapons, ruling diadem and gods broken on the floor under the hooves of Cortés’s horse (Figure 3). Behind Cortés there is the image of an Indian woman (representing the New Spain as one of the West Indies) holding an intriguing heraldic crowned banner, especially folded to display a castle and above it a nopal cactus. The

Relación Geográfica de Tlaxcala (Acuña 1984) shows surviving sketches of the civic paintings that once decorated the municipal building of Tlaxcala. Among them, there is scene with nine Indian rulers dressed in Prehispanic style holding at least eight banners (Figure 4). Each Indian ruler embodies an important native region, at the head of which friendly caciques helped the Spaniards to establish both the political hegemony of the Spanish Crown and the rule of the Catholic faith. With these paintings the cabildo of Tlaxcala wanted to make clear that their caciques and principals led this new arrangement by representing a Tlaxcalteca ruler at the forefront of the provinces holding a heraldic banner with the coat of arms of Tlaxcala/Castilla as a symbolic pledge of allegiance to the Spanish Crown.

The war of Spanish Succession and its impacts on New Spain.

From 1516 to 1700, the vast Spanish realms were governed by the Habsburg dynasty (Kamen 2003:49). Since Charles II, the last Habsburg king, was incapable to procreate an heir to succeed him in the throne of Spain, the most important monarchies of Europe decided to negotiate with anticipation two treaties of partition to find a diplomatic solution to any succession. When the content of these treaties leaked to the Spanish court, somehow the Cardinal Portocarrero managed to make the decrepit Charles II to produce a new will two month before his death in November of 1700. In this document the Spanish monarch named Philip, the Duke of Anjou and grandson of the French King, Louis XIV, as his legal successor on the condition that the Spanish Empire was not to be partitioned. In a calculated geopolitical movement, the French court accepted the “all or nothing” offer made by the Spanish monarchy; thus, the duke of Anjou was anointed in Versailles as Philip V, King of Spain and emperor of all the Spanish domains. This proclamation directly violated the treaty of London. Henceforth, England, Austria and the Republic of the United Netherlands formed the Grand Alliance to prevent France to become the dominant power of Europe by absorbing the imperial positions of Spain. War ensued in February 1702 when the Austrian forces invaded the Duchy of Milan under Spanish control (Petrie 1969:271). At the outbreak of the conflict, things did not go well for Phillip V and his grandfather, Louis XIV. The British and Dutch naval power destroyed in Vigo the Spanish treasure fleet coming from Cuba in September 1702 (Kamen 2003:443), effectively isolating Spain from its American colonies. When Madrid fell in the hands of the Portuguese in 1706 everything seemed to have been lost for the Bourbon King. Perhaps insulted by the defiling of Madrid by the Portuguese army, the Castiles, Extremadura and Andalucia reiterated their allegiance to Phillip V and sent forces to assist him. In April 25th, 1707, the Franco-Spanish army commanded by the Duke of Berwick faced the British-Portuguese forces at the town of Almansa, where the Bourbon forces prevailed. Valencia was recovered and the supporters of the Archduke of Austria were driven to Catalonia, and defeated with the fall of Barcelona (Kamen 2003: 445). With the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, Phillip V kept all the kingdoms of Spain and the Indies, on the condition to renounce all his rights to the French throne. France negotiated with Austria the treaty of Rastadt in 1714, transferring the Spanish territories of Naples, Sardinia, Milan and Tuscany to the Holy Roman Empire, technically ending the War of Spanish Succession.

Impact of the war of Spanish succession in New Spain.

The news of the death of Charles II did not get to the New Spain until March 1701. Since printed copies of his will arrived with the fleet, the vice regal authorities did not hesitate to recognize Phillip V as the rightful monarch. This action was crucial, since those supporting the election of Phillip V took power quickly, preventing open political factionalism to support the claims of the

Archduke of Austria to the throne of Spain. A French fleet arrived to Veracruz in November of 1701 with orders to repair the fortifications of Veracruz and instructions for the Viceroy Count of Moctezuma, perceived as a supporter of the Habsburg house, to return to Spain immediately. The Archbishop Ortega y Montañés was appointed interim Viceroy and accepted the protection of the French fleet. Financial assistance was put together to be sent to Spain. In June of 1702 the Spanish fleet of Veracruz left for La Habana to join a French escort to cross the Atlantic with some fifty million pesos. As mentioned, this Franco-Spanish fleet was intercepted in the port of Vigo by a British-Dutch armada forcing the cargo ships to look for refuge in the upper stream of the river of Vigo. The Spanish officers ordered to burn the ships with the financial aid for the war. The most damaging consequence of the battle of Vigo was that during most of the rule of Phillip V, the trade with the Americas was conducted by French ships and that British pirates created small ports in Tabasco and consolidated its presence in Belize. The War of Spanish succession effectively prevented the unification of France and Spain; nonetheless, elements of French heraldry immediately impacted the Spanish armorial tradition. Phillip V was a Grandson of France and thus had the right to use the coat of arms of the Dauphins of France. Phillip also popularized *El Escudo Grande del Rey de España* (the full ornamented royal coat of arms) (Figure 5).

Land tenure in San Miguel Chiepetlan and their civic coats of arms.

The Lienzos de Chiepetlan IV, V and VI were located together with a group of legal documents related to the rightful tenure of the communal lands of San Miguel Chiepetlan y sus Barrios (*Libro de Títulos de 1758*). These papers can be summarized following a general timeline. In 1691 there was big fire in the village of Chiepetlan that destroyed the church and the building where local authorities kept the land deeds of the community. When the news of the destruction of the deeds spread, the neighboring villages of Tenango, Zacualpa, Quiahutepec and Coachimalco opportunistically invaded the lands of Chiepetlan, harassing the village to the point that its corn bins were put on fire by aggressive neighbors. The native authorities of Chiepetlan looked for assistance from the colonial authorities. Thus, in October of 1696, the Captain Gerónimo Marchena, Lieutenant General of the province of Tlapa, practiced a *composición de tierras* a procedure that involved visiting the landmarks between Chiepetlan and their neighbors. After hearing several witnesses that confirmed the destruction of the old land titles in the fire, he visited the limits of Chiepetlan, listing the position of the landmarks and their names, placing crosses and stone piles to make them visible. Copies of the *composición* were given to each village and everybody swore to respect them. Despite this solemn arrangement the people of Tenango invaded the land tracks in the *parajes* of Teohuaxi y Tututepec. Thus the dispute continued until September of 1711, when the new Lieutenant General of Tlapa, Don Pedro Alvares de Moxardí, performed another *composición de tierras* solving the dispute between Chiepetlan and Tenango and other neighbors, dividing the lands in conflict by equivalent parts (Galarza 1972: 213). This negotiation was confirmed in January 1712 in Mexico City. I believe that it was during this second resolution when the heraldic banners of Chiepetlan were painted, following the then popular style that modern scholars have labeled Techialoyan. Nowhere in the legal file any authority refers to the Lienzos de Chiepetlan. and the only colonial reference that I have of them comes from the *Relación* of the priest Don Joseph Mariano Hurtado de Mendoza who claims in 1777 that he saw five “maps” in Chiepetlan. This indicates that regardless of having been through a successful legal composition of lands in 1712, San Miguel Chiepetlan still felt compelled to possess a set of indigenous documents: 1) a título primordial written by

somebody named Buanaventura Flores; 2) a painted narrative of their story consisting of at least three lienzos painted during or immediately after the composition of lands (Lienzos II, III, IV, V and VI, perhaps those seen by Hurtado de Mendoza); and 3) keeping without disclosure an older lienzo painted during in the 16th century that survived the big fire of 1691 (Lienzo I). The historical experience of San Miguel Chiepetlan reinforces the idea that many codices were not for Spanish legal consumption, but for promoting Indian regional agendas. The passing of the cache of documents from one “cargo holder” to another, probably in a secret act should have been highly prestigious.

Practice in the heraldic banners of Chiepetlan: Conclusions.

I wonder if the three heraldic Lienzos of Chiepetlan were able to create a grand statement of allegiance to the Spanish Crown? Returning to the grandiose layout like that of Codex García Granados (Figure 6), where it is possible to observe how the Colonial period caciques pledged their allegiance to an elaborate *Escudo Grande del Rey de España*, presenting the arms of the Holy Roman Empire with all the charges of Charles V, with two lions rampant as extra supporters. This image makes us guess that the heraldic Lienzos of Chiepetlan could be used to complement a larger “heraldic landscape”. The fact that they were painted as modular charges in independent frames makes them perfect to create different arrangements and narratives, depending on how the people of Chiepetlan decided to marshal them. With this “flexible” and “portable” heraldry, the three banners could be used to parade in front of the town’s church be arranged to create a similar scene as that presented in Codex García Granados (Figure 7). Therefore, many of the coats of arms painted on documents of the 17th and 18th centuries present an overt archaizing agenda intended to fuse the distant past of the first alliance with the Spanish conquistadors lead by Cortés with the more pressing needs of the late colonial period revolving around the acquisition of legal deeds for the communal or cacicazgo lands. These documents respond to the indigenous needs of the late colonial period. The violent transition between the Habsburg and Bourbon dynasties impacted in unexpected way life in New Spain. The need for money to finance the war of Europe started a new cycle of composition of lands, a situation that provoked uncertainty and factionalism in some communities or union and opportunity in others. Some Indian nobles perhaps even saw the possibility of making a new pact with the Bourbon dynasty, the same way as their forbearers created one during the reign of Charles V. Although this aspiration was never realized, it certainly produced one of the most controversial Indians documentation, paintings and heraldry of the colonial period (Harvey 1986; Galarza 1980, 1987).