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The Foundation, Settlement, and Political Dynamics in La Montaña de Guerrero, Mexico (14th-16th Century)



Research Year: 2005

Culture: Mixtec, Nahuatl, Tlapanec

Chronology: Post Classic – 16th Century Colonial Era

Location: La Montaña de Guerrero, Guerrero State, Mexico

Sites: Totomixtlahuaca, Tlacoapa (Tlacopa, Tlaxcalixtlahuaca, Metlapilapa, Cuilapan Huehue yxtlahuaca, Xochitonalá, Acatepec y Malinaltepec);

Zitlaltepec, Metlatónoc (Citlaltepec, Cochoapa); Tlapa (Atlamajac, Ixcateopan, Totomixtlahuaca, Yoallan)

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Abstract

The Montaña de Guerrero is an area of Mesoamerica rich in pictorial manuscripts. This project is a study of three "lienzos" of the sixteenth century (*Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca*, *Lienzo de Aztactepepec y Citlaltepec* and *Palimpsesto de Veinte Mazorcas*). The analysis of these historical manuscripts is important for understanding the pre-Conquest and Colonial history of this region. The *Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca* or *Códice Condumex* is a tlapanec document, the *Lienzo de Aztactepepec y Citlaltepec* or *Códice de las Vejaciones* is from the mixtec town of Zitlaltepec, and the *Palimpsesto de Veinte Mazorcas* is a codex of the ancient dominion of Tlapa-Tlachinollan, a political and economic center of the Montaña de Guerrero.

Resumen

La Montaña de Guerrero es un área de Mesoamérica, rica en documentos pictográficos. En éste proyecto se analizaron tres lienzos del Siglo XVI (*Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca*, *Lienzo de Aztactepepec y Citlaltepec* y *Palimpsesto de Veinte Mazorcas*). Estos documentos históricos-cartográficos, narran sucesos de la historia indígena prehispánica y colonial de la Montaña. El *Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca* o *Códice Condumex* es un documento tlapaneco, el *Lienzo de Aztactepepec y Citlaltepec* o *Códice de las Vejaciones* fue realizado por mixtecos y el *Palimpsesto de Veinte Mazorca* es un documento del antiguo señorío de Tlapa Tlachinollan, centro político y económico de la Montaña de Guerrero.

Submitted 11/18/2006 by:

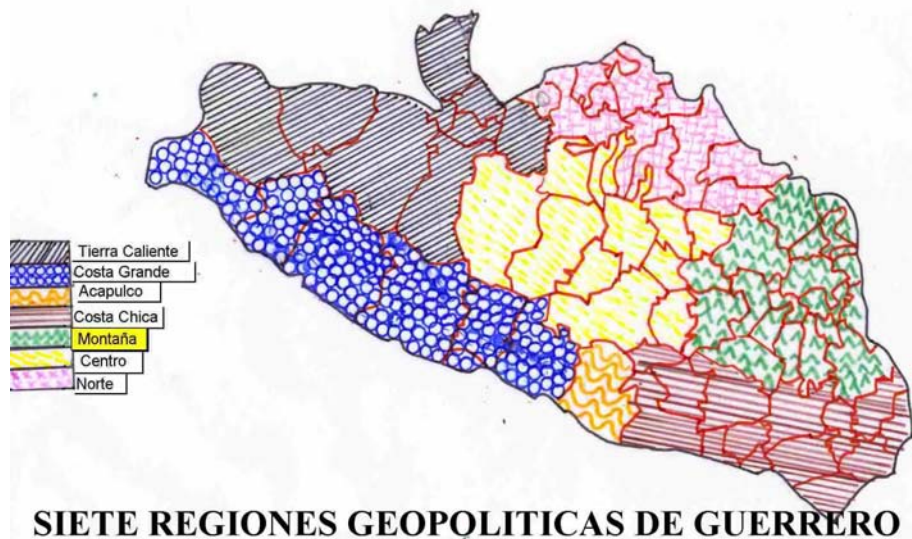
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Introduction

La Montaña de Guerrero is a region which consists of 19 municipalities bordering with the state of Puebla to the north, and Oaxaca to the east. The following indigenous groups live here: Tlapanec, Mixtec, and Nahuatl. The presence of these ethnic groups makes this region the one with the highest indigenous population in the state of Guerrero. Therefore, history and culture in La Montaña de Guerrero are very rich, but they have not been thoroughly studied.



Part of this history is found in documents known as codices and *lienzos* (lienzo: cloth or canvas), painted from the Prehispanic period to the end of the 18th century. The themes covered by these documents include the territoriality, founding, history, conquest, Christian evangelization, lineages, and political struggles, of the towns in La Montaña.

This project consisted of an ethnohistorical and iconographic study of three lienzos from La Montaña de Guerrero. The first one is known as *Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca* or *Códice Condumex*. It belongs to the Tlapanec town of Totomixtlahuaca, located on the banks of the Tameaco River in the municipality of Tlacoapa. The second document is the *Lienzo de Citlaltepec y Aztactepec*, from the Mixtec town of Zitlaltepec, in Metlatónoc. Finally, the third document is the *Palimpsesto de Veinte Mazorcas* [Palimpsest of Twenty corn-cobs], belonging to the cacicazgo [chiefdom] of Tlapa. These three documents are of a historical-cartographic kind, and were painted in the 16th century. The *Palimpsesto de Veinte Mazorcas* was reused on three later times.

Totomixtlahuaca

The *Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca* explains the conflict about land between the towns of Xochitonala and Ocoapa. This problem is part of a series of struggles between *señoríos* [chiefdoms] in La Montaña de Guerrero, which have occurred from Prehispanic to modern times. The following are some of the towns that were subject to Totomixtlahuaca in the 16th century: Tlacoapa, Tlaxcalixtlahuaca, Metlapilapa, Cuilapan Huehue yxtlahuaca, Xochitonala, Acatepec, and Malinaltepec.



Figure 1. Detail of the Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca (Cerón 2004).

The *Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca* is currently found in the Condumex Historical Archive. This institution gave a copy to the town, which is kept in the *comisaría* [local authority] of Totomixtlahuaca.



Copia del Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca

Figure 2. Copy of the *Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca* (Cerón 2006).

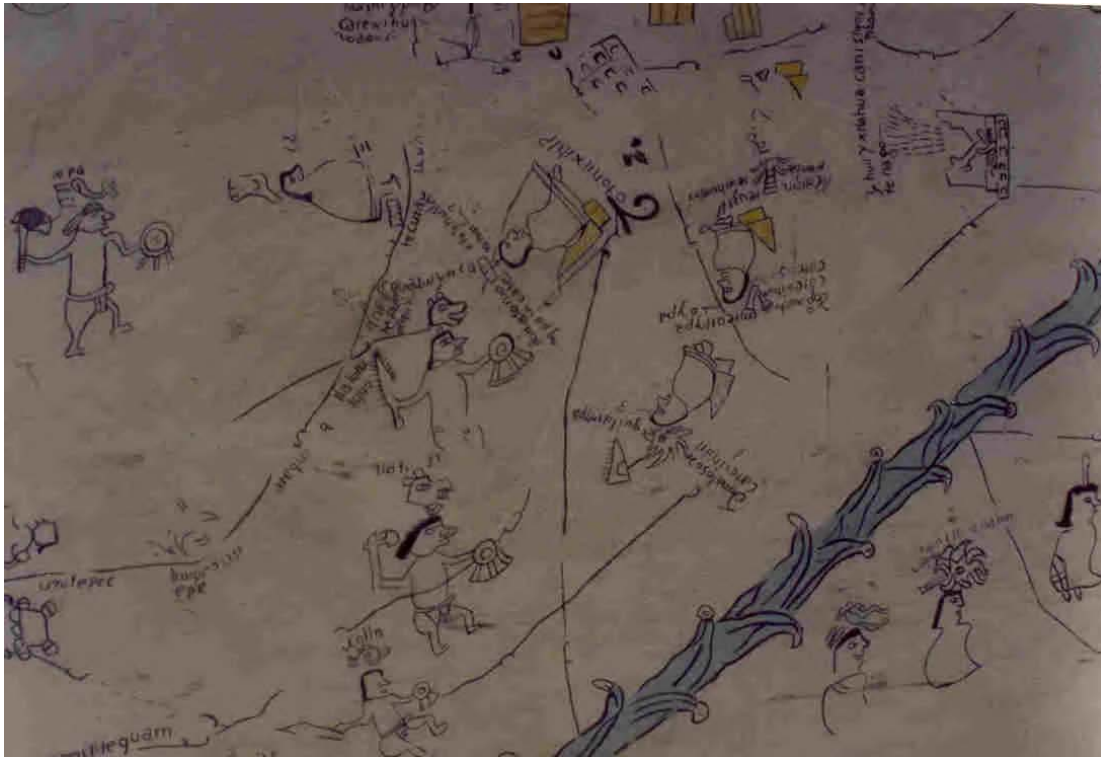


Figure 3. Detail of the copy of the *Lienzo de Totomixtlahuaca* (Cerón 2006).

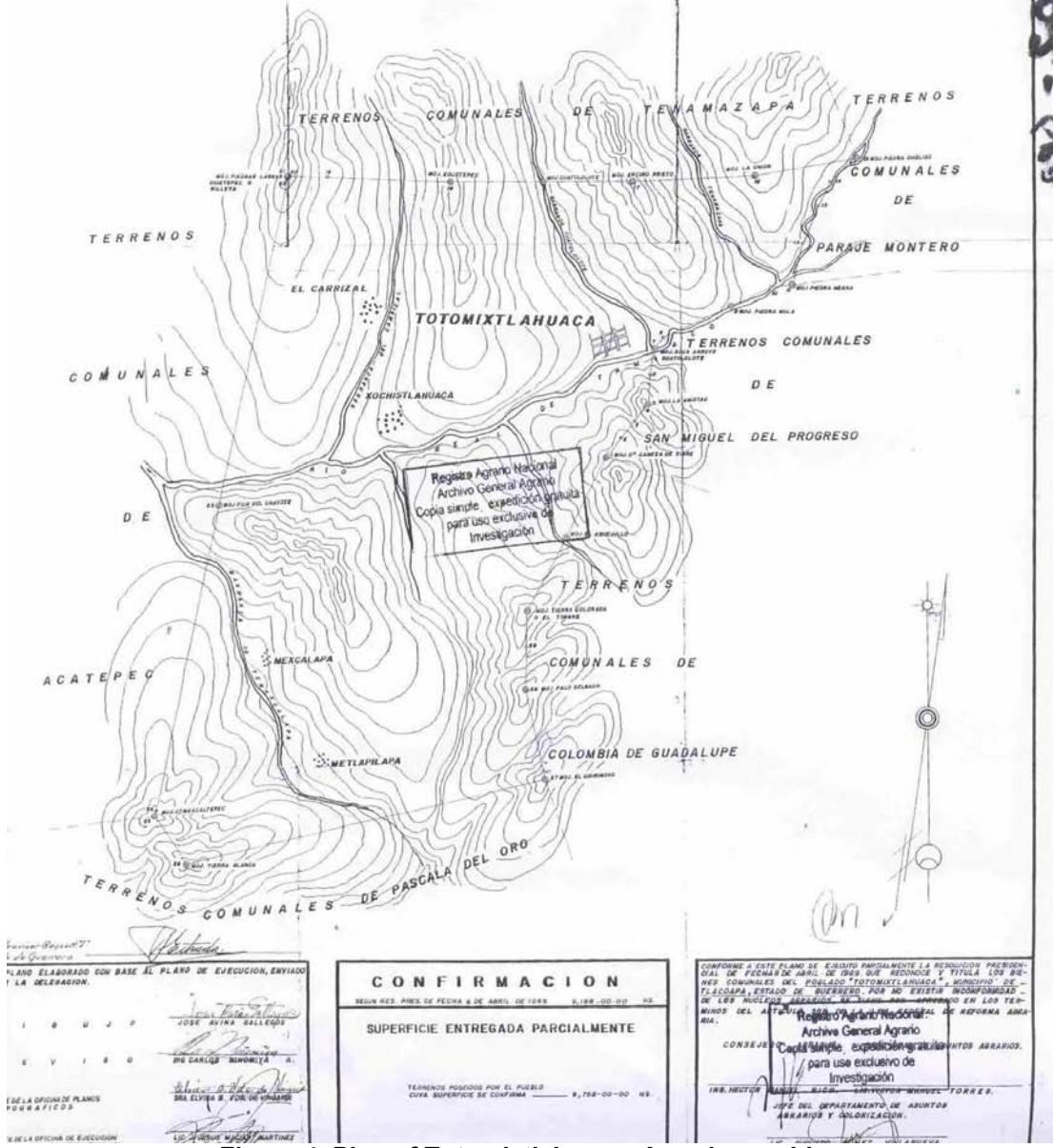
The territory belonging to this town at the time the *lienzo* was painted (1564) included the municipalities of Tlacopa, Acatepec, and Malinaltepec, in the region of La Montaña, as well as San Luis de Acatlan and Ayutla, in the Costa Chica region. This extensive territory is crossed by two great rivers: the Temeaco River, flowing from west to northeast, and the Teocuitlapa River.

PLANO DE TOTOMIXTLAHUACA. ARCHIVO AGRARIO

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PLANO ELABORADO CON BASE AL PLANO DE EJECUCION, ENVIADO A LA DELEGACION.
 I B U J O
 E V I S O
 JOSE AYMA BALLEGOS
 JOSE CARLOS BARRONIA
 DEL ELVIRA B. FORDE VILLARDE
 LIC. JESUS MARTINEZ

CONFIRMACION
 SEGUN RES. PRES. DE FECHA 8 DE ABRIL DE 1969. N. 188-00-01. NS
SUPERFICIE ENTREGADA PARCIALMENTE
 TERRENOS POSIDOS POR EL PUEBLO
 CUYA SUPERFICIE SE CONFIRMA 9,708-00-00 NS

CONFORME A ESTE PLANO SE EJECUTO PARCIALMENTE LA RESOLUCION PRESIDENCIAL DE FECHA 8 DE ABRIL DE 1969 QUE RECONOCE Y TITULA LOS BIENES COMUNALES DEL PUEBLO TOTOMIXTLAHUACA A MUNICIPIO DE TLAHUACA, ESTADO DE BUENAVISTA, POR NO EXISTIR INDETERMINACION DE LOS TERRENOS RESERVADOS PARA EL PUEBLO EN LOS TERMINOS DEL ART. 27 DE LA CONSTITUCION FEDERAL DE REFORMA AGRAARIA.
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 JEFE DEL DEPARTAMENTO DE ASUNTOS AGRARIOS Y COLONIZACION.

Figure 4. Plan of Totomixtlahuaca. Agrarian archive.

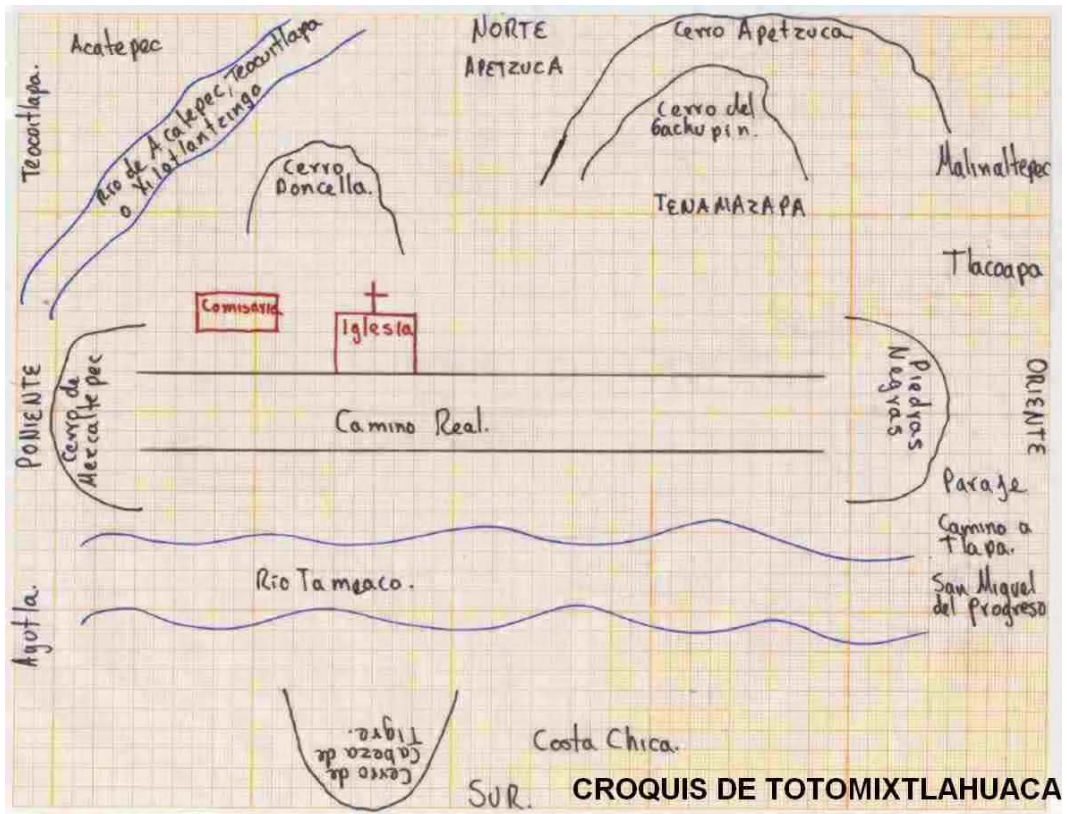


Figure 5. Sketch map of Totomixtlahuaca, indicating important places in the town.



Figure 6. The Tameaco River in Totomixtlahuaca (Cerón 2006).

In colonial times Totomixtlahuaca, as well as Tlapa, were cabeceras [head towns] of Indian towns, therefore in the 17th century the Augustinian friars, who spread the Gospel in the area, built a convent –of which all that remains are some walls.



Figure 7. Wall of the Augustinian convent in Totomixtlahuaca (Cerón 2006).

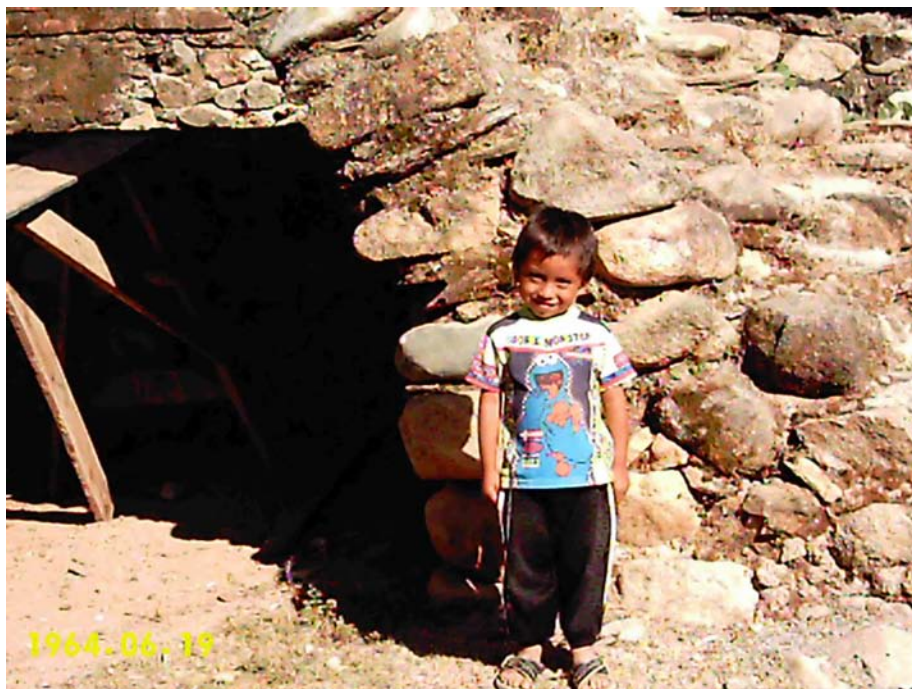


Figure 8. Wall of the Augustinian convent (Cerón 2006).

The oral history of the inhabitants of Totomixtlahuaca mentions that a long time ago the town was smitten by a “pestilence” during which most of the people died, and the remaining people left to other communities. Then the town was left in ruins, losing its head-town status, and Tlacoapa became the political center. Once Totomixtlahuaca was abandoned the properties of the town were lost, among them the 16th-century *lienzo* and the image of the town’s patron saint, which could not be moved out of Totomixtlahuaca prior to the town’s looting. Don Enrique Galindo, an inhabitant of Totomixtlahuaca, says the following about this:

“They couldn’t take El Señor del Santo Entierro [Lord of the Holy Burial], they say they found Him hereabouts about half a kilometer from here where we are, at the foot of a little hill there is a gully... Well, imagine how many years He spent there under water and sun, how many years. When the people began to come down to make their slash-and burn plots the trees were thick... then they found Him around there, how many years He spent there, but the image of the Lord is clean, nothing happened to it, then they picked Him up and made Him a little house of grass and now the Lord is there...”



Figure 9. Cabeza de Tigre Hill, Totomixtlahuaca (Cerón 2006).

Zitlaltepec and Metlatonoc

The *Lienzo de Citlaltepec y Aztactepepec* is an indigenous document belonging to the Mixtec chiefdom of Metlatónoc-Citlaltepec. This *lienzo* narrates the death of the lord Ciuacoatl at the hands of the *encomenderos* [Spanish colonists who were granted Indian laborers by royal decree] of Jicayan de Tovar, and the founding of the town of Citlatepec. This historical-cartographic document points out the location of Citlatepec, Cochoapa, and Metlatónoc, which formed a single town. Its territory bordered to the west with Malinaltepec, to the east with Oaxaca, to the south with Jicayan de Tovar, and to the north with Atlamajalcingo del Monte.



Figure 10. The *Lienzo de Citlaltepec and Aztactepec* (Cerón 2004).

In this *lienzo* we can see a church near the name glyph for Citlaltepec (Hill of the Star, or Yucukimi in Mixtec); this place is located in the “Pueblo Viejo” [old town] of Zitlaltepec, where ruins were also found of pyramidal foundations, indicating there was a very old settlement at the site. Likewise, on one of the walls of the new church in Zitlaltepec there is a fragment of stone carved with the shape of the mask of Xipe Totec. Little archaeological research has been carried out in Guerrero’s Mixtec zone. Archaeological data could help us to elucidate the region’s Prehispanic history.



Figure 11. Detail of the church in Citlaltepec (Cerón 2006).



Figure 12. Ruins of the old church in Zitlaltepec (Cerón 2006).



Figure 13. Pyramidal base in the old town of Zitlaltepec (Cerón 2006).



Figure 14. Colonial bell from Zitlaltepec (Cerón 2006).



Figure 15. Church in Zitlaltepec (Cerón 2006).

Zitlaltepec is located to the west of the Piedra Parada River, at the southeast there is the representation of a very big hill whose name is Cerro de La Garza (Hill of the Heron, or Atzactepepec in Nahuatl, Kuzami in Mixtec). This is a characteristic feature of both the *lienzo* and the actual topography of Guerrero's Mixtec zone. Metlatónoc is located to the east of the Piedra Parada River, this town is currently the head of the municipality. Its Mixtec name is Yatiano, meaning "broken river".



Figure 16. Cerro de la Graza [Hill of the Egret] as shown in the *Lienzo*.



Figure 17. View of the Cerro de la Garza (Cerón 2006).



Figure 18. Church in Metlatónoc (Cerón 2005).

Finally, I would like to point out that the inhabitants of Zitlaltepec had no knowledge of the existence of the *lienzo* which used to belong to them centuries ago. At present the *lienzo* is in the Museo Poblano de Arte Virreinal [Puebla Museum of Viceregal Art] in the city of Puebla, therefore we gave a photographic copy of the *lienzo* to the town authorities.



Figure 19. Authorities and people of the town of Zitlaltepec (Cerón 2006).

Palimpsesto de Veinte Mazorcas

The *Palimpsesto de veinte mazorcas* is an indigenous document which used to belong to the *cacicazgo* [chiefdom] of Tlapa, in the Montaña de Guerrero. This document is now in the National Library of France, and there is a copy in the town of Ixcateopan.



Figure 20. Copy of the *Palimpsesto de veinte mazorcas*, which is found in Ixcateopan.

As mentioned above, the codex has aggregated material which was added at various times, therefore there are three different stories in the same document. The earliest stage pertains to the representation of the Prehispanic lords from

the Montaña de Guerrero, indicating their respective localities, which are as follows: Atlamajac, Ixcateopan, Totomixtlahuaca, and Yoallan, among others. The iconographic style found in this first phase is very close to the one from the Prehispanic period.



Figure 21. Detail of the first stage of the *Palimpsesto de veinte mazorcas*.

The second phase pertains to the representation of four personages with European clothes, one of them is a friar who is carrying a cross in his hands. The gloss under this character reads *Fray gabriel hurtado*. The images of these characters are very similar to the *Lienzo de Tlapa*, which was painted in the 16th century.



Figure 22. Detail of the four characters in the second stage of the *Palimpsesto de veinte mazorcas*.



Figure 23. Detail of the *Lienzo de Tlapa*. BNAHM.¹

Also from this second stage is the representation of the church of Ixcateopan. This town is to the north of Tlapa, on the banks of the Tlapaneco River.

¹ BNAHM. Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia México.



Figure 24. Detail of the church in Ixcateopan. This figure is obscuring a character from the first phase.



Figure 25. Ruins of the old church in Ixcateopan, on the banks of the Tlapaneco River (Cerón 2004)

The third stage, which may pertain to the 17th century, deals with Ixcateopan's boundaries; this town was a subject of Tlapa. The style seen in this third phase is the same as the five folios found on the back side of the Azoyú I codex; both documents complement each other. In the third stage we also find glosses in Mixtec and Nahuatl about the boundaries shown in the codex, represented by hills. The chiefdom of Tlapa and some of its subject towns fought during colonial times for the right to keep their lands. There is an example of these conflicts in the third phase of the *Palimpsesto de veinte mazorcas*.



Figure 26. Detail of the third phase of the *Palimpsesto de veinte mazorcas*.



Folio 1, I

Figure 27. Folio 1L of the facsimile of the *Codex Azoyú* (Vega 1991).

Finally, the city of Tlapa is known as “the heart of the mountain”, since the three ethnic groups of the region concentrate in this city, from Prehispanic times to the present. Therefore, Tlapa is the most important political and economic center in the region. During the first years of the Colonial period, Christian evangelization was concentrated here by the Augustinians. Also in this *cebecera* [head town], the trials and the resolution of conflicts over land were carried out among different towns of the Montaña, such as the ones shown in the three *lienzos* discussed above.



Figure 28. The Tlapa market (Cerón 2002).

Tlapa is currently the economic center of the Montaña, and people from other places within the region, even from the Amuzgo zone and the Costa Chica, take their merchandise to sell in the market on feast days. In this place one can hear and appreciate three different languages: Mixtec, Tlapanec, Nahuatl, and Amuzgo.

The feasts of the patron saints are an important part of the social life of the inhabitants of the Montaña de Guerrero, and this Colonial heritage is still creating economic, religious, and political bonds among the Mixtec, Nahuatl, and Tlapanec. The most important religious feast in the Montaña de Guerrero is the feast of the Señor del Nicho [Lord of the Niche], which takes place in October. During this celebration one can see the three cultures of the Montaña de Guerrero in all their splendor.



Figure 29. Procession during the feast of the patron, the Señor del Niche [Lord of the Niche] in Tlapa, Guerrero (Cerón 2005).

Acknowledgements

Finally, I would like to thank the teachers of the Museo Comunitario [communal museum] of Tlapa: Melquíades Bruno, Zenaida Arriaga, Margarita Morales, and Adolfo Camilo. In Zitlaltepec, teacher Avertano Ortiz, Don Brígido Ortiz and his family, as well as the authorities and the people of Zitla. In Totomixtlahuaca thanks to Don Enrique Galindo and his family, and to the town authorities. In Tlapa Abel Barrera, director of the Centro Tlachinollan, professor Aurelio Rodríguez, and my family in the Montaña, as well as everybody who helped me in one way or another in this research.

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