

The International Emblem:  
From Incunabula to the Internet

Selected Proceedings  
of the Eighth International Conference  
of the Society for Emblem Studies,  
28th July-1st August, 2008, Winchester College

Edited by

Simon McKeown

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE INVENTION OF TRADITION AND AN INDIGENOUS COAT OF ARMS

MICHEL R. OUDIJK

On 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1740 Francisco López presented himself before the Spanish authorities of the town of San Felipe Ixtlahuaca in the Valley of Toluca with a so-called *comprobación* or verification of his nobility in order to have a copy made. Only four months earlier this verification had been checked and confirmed by the chief authority of his district, Don Juan del Castillejo. Based on this document Francisco López wanted to be recognized as a nobleman and, as a consequence, be exempted from paying tribute. The documents presented consisted of three alphabetical texts in Spanish and two coats of arms which today are held in the Colección Antigua of the National Library of Anthropology and History (BNAH) in Mexico City.

The first document is a transcription of a 1588 petition by Don Domingo Ruis Lospe Encate, *cacique* or local ruler of San Felipe Ixtlahuaca, asking for transcriptions to be made of grants that were given to his grandfathers for their participation in the conquest and other services to the king. In the petition Don Domingo explains how he is related to a Don Francisco Ruis Lospe Encate, a Spanish conquistador, and to Don Juan Bautista Queeexochil, a *cacique* from the town of Colohuacan. His genealogical tree is set out in Figure 15.1.

Several aspects of the information from this petition are problematic. Most important of these are the names of the people involved. The first part of the Nahuatl name “Queee-xochil” does not mean anything and, in fact, does not seem to be Nahuatl at all. While the family name “Escalona” does exist, it certainly is not common; but “Encate” is simply unknown from the historical record and it is not even clear whether it is Spanish or Nahuatl. It seems likely that “Lospe” is an unusual way of spelling “López”, while “Palpos” may be Pablo and Antonio is written as “Atonio” or even “tonio”. This tendency of an odd orthography continues in the

place names as Culhuacan is spelled “Coloacan” and San Felipe is given as “San Felispe”. But Don Domingo also has problems with the genealogical relationships as he identifies Don Antonio Ruis as his brother but then assures that Don Antonio is a son of Don Francisco Ruis, as is his father Don Palplos. Finally, the wife of Don Francisco is given as a *Don Juan Gonzalo*, a man! A search through the historical record could not identify any of the people mentioned in the petition, even though the Spanish conquistadors have been investigated extensively, as has the indigenous city of Texcoco where Don Domingo’s grandmother was said to originate.

The second and third texts that were presented by Don Domingo concern grants for coats of arms given by Charles V. The first grant was issued to Francisco Ruis Lospe Encate and lists all of the services rendered by this Spanish conqueror. These involve the discovery of Ocara, Lasaro and Chaponton with his uncle Francisco Ruis de Córdoba, after which he returned to Cuba only to board again but this time with Hernán Cortés on his famous campaign that resulted in the conquest of Mexico.

Both trips are very famous and well documented. However, the first does not involve Francisco Ruis de Córdoba, but rather Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, who sailed with Lope Ochoa de Caicedo and Cristóbal de Morante and landed on the coast of Yucatan. The further references to the discovery of Lasaro and Chapoton confirms that we are dealing with Francisco Hernández, as in 1517 he indeed landed at the town of Lázaro, or Campeche, and shortly after at the town of Champotón, where on both occasions the conquistadors were met with fierce attacks from the local Maya people.<sup>1</sup> The change in the name from “Hernández” to “Ruis” is suspicious as the person who presented the document is Don Domingo Ruis Lospe Encate. This suggests that he changed the names in the grant in order to have it seem that he was directly related to the conquistador and discoverer of Yucatan and therefore Mexico. Don Domingo is thus inflating his patrimony so he would be recognized as a nobleman and subsequently be exempted from paying tribute.

The third text presented by Don Domingo is another grant but this time given on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1551 to his grandfather from his mother’s side, Don Juan Bautista Queeexochil, *cacique* of Colhuacan. The grant is extremely vague as to the merits of Don Juan, and simply mentions that the coat of arms was granted because of his services given to the King of Spain in the conquest of Mexico. Multiple grants to indigenous lords exist as they participated actively in the conquest and colonization of what was to become New Spain.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, these rulers followed Mesoamerican and European traditions and asked compensation for their efforts, normally



implying that they would be recognized as nobility and thus be exempted from paying tribute, as well as receiving the right to certain privileges like mounting a horse, carrying a sword, and using a coat of arms.<sup>3</sup>

Both grants contain a description of a coat of arms that were bestowed upon Don Francisco and Don Juan, respectively, and two versions of each blazon. Although Don Domingo asked for copies, it is not clear why there are two of each in the file and even less so why the two versions are so different.

Figures 15.2a and 15.2b show a blazon of Don Francisco Ruíz which accords with the description given in the grant as a shield with a golden tower on a coloured field and with a lion emerging from the door with a sword in its right paw. The border carries ten golden stars on a blue field and the arms are surmounted with a closed frontal helmet as its crest. The second version is different in style but identical in theme, although the helmet is shown in profile contrary to the description. The mantling, or flowery decoration, does not form part of the shield proper and is therefore often highly varied between one copy and another. It is however interesting to note that in the second version the knight holds the garland of flowers with his two hands.

It seems likely that the tower and the armed lion refer to the military services of Don Francisco Ruis Lospe Encate during the conquest of Mexico. The tower may even be a direct reference to the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan as its siege and conquest is prominently mentioned in the grant. Several shields that were granted to conquistadors of Tenochtitlan contain such a tower, although normally it is situated on an island as is the case of the city represented in Figure 15.3.

The second coat of arms was granted to Don Juan Queeexochil and contains a few more problems. The grant describes it as a shield divided into two parts within one of which is a sphere below a naked arm holding a cross. Around this cross is a sign that reads “Credo in devm patern” (I believe in God the Father), all on a blue field. On the other part of the shield we see a white tower on a field of gold and in its borders three prickly pears on a white field and ten crossed arrows on a coloured field. On its crest stands a closed helmet. While this description fits fairly well, there are some important differences with the actual shields (Figs. 15.4a and 15.4b). Again there is a tower but this time without the element of war or conquest and, consequently, it is difficult to interpret this particular heraldic charge or element. Formally this tower is very similar to that in the shields of Don Francisco. The arrows in the border are clear references to war which may suggest that the tower is too. In other words, it may refer to the conquest of Tenochtitlan. The other half contains the naked

arm with the cross, but the sphere is missing in both blazons. Normally the sphere with a cross is related to the Christian world which would have matched nicely with the naked arm which means something like “industrious person”, the cross which means “faith” or “Christianity”, and the banner which affirms that the carrier of the shield is a true Christian. This latter aspect was important to emphasize in the early colonial period as the indigenous population was considered idolatrous by many Spaniards, even though they were baptized and had received some, or even a considerable, Christian education. It would therefore not disadvantage the bearer to include emblems in his coat of arms which could be read as “I, Don Juan, participated in the conquest of Mexico, accepted the Christian faith, and actively helped in the conversion to Christianity of the Mesoamerican world”. This combination of military conquest and the acceptance of Christianity are often combined in indigenous coats of arms, as these were precisely the elements that were stressed before the colonial authorities as qualities of a particular lord or ancestor in petitions for privileges.<sup>4</sup>

The helmets in the second versions of the shields are peculiar as they iconographically clearly represent *Tlaloc*, the pre-Hispanic god of rain or lightning. Such incorporations of pictographic elements of the pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican writing tradition into colonial indigenous shields are quite common as was shown by Castañeda de la Paz who argues that the combination of indigenous elements in a European format made it possible for the local rulers to communicate with both worlds.<sup>5</sup>

## The Hernández Documents

Recently I have come across another set of documents very similar to those just described. These are held in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City (Ramo Vínculos 272, Tomo 2, ff. 509-516) and consist of a petition and two grants followed by two coats of arms. It is immediately clear that these were written by the very same scribe as those in the BNAH and that the contents are almost identical, up to the point that they must be copies either of each other or of a third unknown document.

What is astonishing, however, is that the petition in the AGN was filed by a Domingo Hernández Bautista, *cacique* of the town of Atlacomulco instead of Don Domingo Ruis Lospe Encate, *cacique* of San Felipe Ixtlahuaca, a neighbouring community (see the map, Fig. 15.5). Furthermore, in this case the first grant was given to Cristóbal Hernández, rather than to Francisco Ruiz.<sup>6</sup>

Lord Charles for the divine clemency emperor of the Romans [*etc.*] Insofar You *Francisco Ruis* resident of the City of Tenostitlan-Mexico which is in New Spain you made a statement that you with desires served us it may be more than fifteen years ago that you went to these parts with an uncle who was called *Francisco Ruis* de Cordoua the first Captain of ours who went with people to discover New Spain and with him you were in the discovery of Ocara and Lasaro and of Chapoton where you had fights and many encounters with the people and they killed twenty and some men and left you hurt in the thighs from which you came [close] to death and afterwards you went with the said Captain to the islands of Cuba and entered in the armed company of Don Hernando Cortes our Captain and you crossed with him to New Spain and you were in all the conquests wars and fights he had with the people of the land and the provinces of Taxcalas and the other towns until the conquest and subjection of Mexico and you were also there in the disruption the people of Mexico did to the said general Captain where you left fighting hurt with many wounds and afterwards you returned with the said general Captain to the City of Taxcala and you were in the conquest of the provinces of Teotan and Ocular and the others that were conquered and with your personal belongings you helped to win and subject and also you went with the said Don Hernando Cortes to conquer the City of Tescoco (11r) and many other towns and the *Spaniards* and Ôyotepeque and you were in the encounter and battle of the natives and they ran you and the said general Captain out from where you left with many life dangers and afterwards you took on the said general Captain the conquest and siege he laid to the City of Tenoxtitlan Mexico and you were in the said siege until he returned to conquer and take from which you left hurt of many wounds and hits especially an arrow in the face and stone on the head from which you came [close] to death and afterwards you were with the said Don Hernando Cortes in the conquest of Panoco and you helped win and pacify it and it was populated with a town of Christians and afterwards you were with the Captain Gonsales de Santiobal in the conquest and pacification of the province of *Metepeque* and afterwards with Nuño de Gusman in the conquest of New Galicia where you served with your person and arms and three horses and two Christian servants for the time of one year and more on your own cost you helped to conquer and take all where you went you felt many dangers and works hunger and necessities [...] (BNAH-Colección Antigua, 757).

Lord Charles for the divine clemency emperor of the Romans [*etc.*] Insofar You *Xptobal Hernand[e]s* resident of the City of Tenostitlan-Mexico which is in New Spain you made a statement that you with desires served us it may be more than fifteen years ago that you went to these parts with an uncle who was called *Francisco Hernand[e]s* de Cordoua the first Captain of ours who went with people to discover New Spain and with him you were in the discovery of Ocara and Lasaro and of Chapoton where you had fights and many encounters with the people and they killed twenty and

some men and left you hurt in the thighs from which you came [close] to death and afterwards you went with the said Captain to the islands of Cuba and entered in the armed company of Don Hernando Cortes our Captain and you crossed with him to New Spain and you were in all the conquests wars and fights he had with the people of the land and the provinces of Taxcala and the other towns until the conquest and subjection of Mexico and you were also there in the disruption the people of Mexico did to the said general Captain where you left fighting hurt with many wounds and afterwards you returned with the said general Captain to the City of Taxcala and you were in the conquest of the provinces of Teotan and Oucuar and the others that were conquered and with your personal belonging you helped to win and subject and also you went with the said Don Hernando Cortes to conquer the City of Tescoco (11r) and many other towns and the *Peñoles* and *Ôyotepeque* and you were in the encounter and battle of the natives and they ran you and the said general Captain out from where you left with many life dangers and afterwards you took on the said general Captain the conquest and siege he laid to the City of Tenoxtitlan Mexico and you were in the said siege until he returned to conquer and take from which you left hurt of many wounds and hits especially an arrow in the face and stone on the head from which you came [close] to death and afterwards you were with the said Don Hernando Cortes in the conquest of Panoco and you helped win and pacify it and it was populated with a town of Christians and afterwards you were with the Captain Gonsales de Santiobal in the conquest and pacification of the province of *Tutepeque* and afterwards with Nuño de Gusman in the conquest of New Galicia where you served with your person and arms and three horses and two Christian servants for the time of one year and more on your own cost you helped to conquer and take all where you went you felt many dangers and works hunger and necessities [...] (AGN-Vinculos 272, Vol. 2).

As pointed out above, the grant given to Francisco Ruíz was somewhat problematical as it referred to a Francisco Ruíz de Córdoba while clearly the famous captain Francisco Hernández de Córdoba was intended. This “error” was “corrected” in Cristóbal Hernández’ grant which indeed refers to Francisco Hernández. Both grants continue giving all Cristóbal’s merits in known campaigns like Hernán Cortés’ and Nuño de Guzmán’s conquests.

This comparison of the two grants makes clear that Francisco Ruíz’ claim was probably manipulated. In changing the name from Francisco Hernández de Córdoba to Francisco Ruíz de Córdoba, an effort was made to fit it better with that of the 1740 petitioner and, of course, with that of Don Domingo Ruis Lospe Encate, *cacique* of San Felipe Ixtlahuaca in 1588 who supposedly had the three texts made. Such manipulation or falsification would also explain the various mistakes in the Spanish of Don Domingo’s texts. This is particularly curious since all these texts in the

BNAH and AGN were written by the very same scribe, Diego de León, but only the BNAH documents contain such mistakes (Fig. 15.6). For example, in Don Domingo's texts there is a clear tendency to use plural forms in singular contexts; thus we find "mis padre" or "mis madre" instead of "mi padre", and "mi madre" or "los qual" and "tierras firme" instead of "lo qual" and "tierra firme". All this evidence strongly suggests that the documents of Don Domingo Ruíz Lospe Encate are in fact forgeries.

Having identified the documents of the Ruíz family as forgeries, it would suggest that those of the Hernández family are originals. We have seen that these seem historically reliable. A comparison of the petitions further suggests that the Hernández documents are authentic:

(9v) In the City of Mexico at nine days of the month of July of fifteen hundred and eighty and eight years before Francisco de Solis Alcalde Hordinario of this City was read this petition Don Domingo *Ruis Lospe Encate* Casique and nobleman of the town of *San Felispe Ystlabanca* of the Jurisdiction of Metepeque appear I before Your Honour with Don *Lord Atonio Ruis Lospe Encatemy* legitimate brother who is of Don *Palplos Ruis Lospe Encate* my deceased father and resident he was of the town of Atitaloquia who had me from a legitimate matrimony with Doña Juana Bapptista de Gusman y Escalona Casica noble of the town of Coloacan and the said our father and Don *Atonio* were legitimate sons of Don *Francisco Ruis Lospe Encate* Spaniards nobleman and native he was of the Kingdoms of Castille of Don *Juan Gonzalo* also Spaniards and both already deceased residents they were of this City of Mexico where they had the post of Correxidor of the town of Atitaloquios and they stayed to live in it until they died and these Dona Juan my mother was legitimate daughter of Don Juan Bapptista *Queexochil* Casique and noble he was of the town of Colohuacan and of Doña *Apolonia* de Gusman y Escalona Casica Mestisa and very noble of the City of Tescoco and being so the said Don *Francisco Ruis Lospe Encate* my grandfather for having been one of the first conquistadors and pacifiers of this kingdom and also the said Don Juan Bapptista *Queexochil* who went in the company of the Spanish soldiers of the general captain Don Hernando Cortes giving record to your majesties in your Royal Council of the Indies of his personal manouvres and works in service of God our Lord and of your Royal Crown who honoured his merits with Deeds of privileges, arms and blazons which these Deeds in the testamentary statement which due to the end and death of these Don *Palplos* my father fell in the possession of Don *Nicolas* my uncle as his testamentary executor (10r) and holder of possessions named by him which we present with the necessary solemnity and oaths before Your Honour and because I live in a different Jurisdiction and distant to that in which lives my uncle and being as I am married and with some legitimate sons and daughters I need from these deeds of privilege an authorized testimony

in a form that gives faith so that in the future I and these my sons and daughters and other descendants will enjoy the honours and privileges that the Royal will of your majesties has given and will give us Your Honour I beg please to provide and order that I will be given to what I refer and ask and so done to my uncle Don *Nicolas* will be returned his originals for his protection and that of my *aunts* and my brothers who are under his tutelage as the executor which I will receive well and in mercy with the Justice I ask and I swear to God and the Cross in due form that it is without any malice that is in this document Don *Francisco de Solis* Alcalde *Hordinario* having seen the Royal Letters and deeds with the testamentary memory to which in this petition is made mention I order that of these is given to Don Domingo *Ruis Lospe Encate* the part he asks to be authorized in public manner and once done the originals be returned to Don *Tonio Ruis Lospe Encate* as he requested [...] (BNAH-Colección Antigua, 757).

(510r) In the City of Mexico at nine days of the month of July of fifteen hundred and eighty and eight years before Francisco de Solis Alcalde *Hordinario* of this City was read this petition Don Domingo *Hernan[de]s Bapp[tis]ta* Casique *Mestiso* and nobleman of the town of Atlacomulco of the Jurisdiction of Metepeque appear I before Your Honour with Don *P[edr]o Hernan[de]s de la Torre y Santeobal* my uncle or legitimate brother who is of Don *Gabriel Hernan[de]s de la Torre de Santeobal* my deceased father *Spaniard* and resident he was of the town of Atitalaquia who had me from a legitimate matrimony with Doña Juana Bapptista de Gusman y Escalona Casica noble of the town of Coloacan and the said my father and uncle Don *P[edr]o* were legitimate sons of Don *Xpobal Hernan[de]s Spaniard* nobleman and native he was of the Kingdoms of Castille of Don *Jua[n]a de la Torre y Santeobal* also *Spaniard* and both already deceased residents they were of this City of Mexico where they had the post of *Correxidor* of the town of Atitalaquia and they stayed to live in it until they died and this Dona Juana my mother was legitimate daughter of Don Juan Bapptista *Quaucxochil casique* and noble he was of the town of Colohuacan and of Doña *Elena* de Gusman y Escalona Casica *Mestisa* and very noble of the City of Tescoco and being so the said Don *Xpobal Hernan[de]s my grandfather* for having been one of the first conquistadors and pacifiers of this kingdom and also the said Don Juan Bapptista *Quaucxochil* who went in the company of the Spanish soldiers of the general captain Don Hernando Cortes giving record to your majesties in your Royal Council of the Indies of his personal manœuvres and works in service of God our Lord and of your Royal Crown who honoured his merits with Deeds of privileges, arms and blazons which these Deeds in the testamentary statement which due to the end and death of the Don *Gabriel* my father fell in the possession of (510v) Don *P[edr]o* my uncle as his testamentary executor and holder of possessions named by him which we present with the necessary solemnity and oaths before Your Honour and because I live in a different Jurisdiction and distant to that in which

lives the said my uncle and being as I am married and with some legitimate sons and daughters I need from these deeds of privilege an authorized testimony in a form that gives faith so that in the future I and these my sons and daughters and other descendants will enjoy the honours and privileges that the Royal will of your majesties have given and will give us Your Honour I beg please to provide and order that I will be given to what I refer and ask and so done to my uncle Don P[edr]o will be returned his originals for his protection and that of my *uncles* and my brothers who are under his tutelage as the executor which I will receive well and in mercy with the Justice I ask and I swear to God and the Cross in due form that it is without any malice that is in this document Don D[o]n Domingo Hernan[de]s Bapp[tis]ta Alcalde having seen the Royal Letters and deeds with the testamentary memory to which in this petition is made mention I order that of these is given to Don Domingo Hernan[de]s Bapp[tis]ta the part he asks to be authorized in public manner and once done the originals be returned to Don P[edr]o Hernan[de]s de la Torre y Santeobal as he requested [...] (AGN-Vinculos 272, Vol. 2).

This further comparison leaves no doubt as to the nature of the forgery of the Ruíz papers, as nearly all the names have been systematically changed. Apart from the aforementioned mistakes in the Spanish, which do not show in its English translation, the odd names and their orthography of the people given in the Ruíz document, makes it even clearer that this has to be the forgery.

The Hernández petition, as the grant, makes much more sense and leaves no doubts in regard to the genealogical relationships or the gender of Don Domingo's ancestors as was the problem with the Ruíz papers (Fig. 15.7). Santeobal is an odd name, but the grant had already given us a clue as to how to read it, as it referred to *Gonsales de Santiobal* who is very well known from the historical record as Gonzalo de Sandoval, a famous Spanish conquistador. However, it is this same Spaniard who gives rise to certain doubts in regard to the authenticity of the Hernández documents. Whereas the Ruíz documents relate him to the conquest of Metepec in the present state of Mexico, the Hernández document claims he was responsible for the campaign against Tututepec, an important and powerful Mixtec kingdom on the coast of the southern state of Oaxaca. As with the rest of the falsified elements in the Ruíz document, the Metepec reference seems to be incorporated in order to associate the text with the region of the petitioner. The Ruíz family comes from the town of San Felipe Ixtlahuaca, also called San Felipe el Grande, which was an important town in the Valley of Toluca in the jurisdiction of Metepec during the colonial period. Although Gonzalo de Sandoval is not particularly known for the conquest of Metepec, he did in the summer of

1521 put down an uprising of the Matlazincos towns of which San Felipe is one.<sup>7</sup> So this information seems to be part of an historical memory in the region. The Hernández document, however, relates De Sandoval with the conquest of Tututepec. Bernal Díaz del Castillo makes repeatedly clear that it in fact was not Tututepec, but rather Tuxtepec that was conquered by De Sandoval.<sup>8</sup> This mistake throws doubt on the validity of the Hernández document as it would probably not have been made by descendants of a conquistador who had participated in the actual conquest.

According to the petition Cristóbal Hernández had two sons with Doña Juan de la Torre y Santeobal; Don Pedro and Don Gabriel Hernández de la Torre y Santeobal. However, a document from 1586 in the Archivo General de Indias casts serious doubts on this:

(3r) Gonçalo Fernandez de Figueroa resident of the City of Mexico son of Christoual de Fernandez deceased one of the first conquerors of New Spain says that the said his father went from the island of Cuba to the said New Spain for the discovery of it in the company of Francisco Hernandez de Cordoua and they discovered de Province of Chanponton that now is called Guatemala and Campeche in which they had many encounters and battles from which the said's father was left badly hurt reason for which and having stood out a lot on this occasion the said Captain Francisco Hernandez de Cordoua sent him with the news of the event to the island of Cuba where after having delivered it he put together with much brevity a fleet and as captain of it Don Fernando Cortes who later became Marques del Valle and during the navigation until arriving to the said New Spain they suffered great works and bad luck and they entered in it [New Spain] doing what they ought to as good soldiers where they conquered many provinces especially in New Galiçia and the province of Sempual and Tecapaçinga and the province of Tasculeta in which they were involved for forty and four days until they won and pacified it where they suffered hunger and works and the same in the province of Choluca and above all the said his father was in the conquest of Mexico when they killed Moteçuma and he was on the road to Tacuba with a lance where he did much damage detaining the Indians that went after the Spaniards as such his service was considerable and having gathered and recovered the men they went to Tepeaca and the province of Ysucar and Tescuco in the company of the said Don Fernando Cortes and there they returned and came with more people against the City of Mexico where his said father did considerable things standing out as a good soldier a son of somebody until they won the said city [...] (Archivo General de Indias, Patronato 79, N. 1, R. 3, 1586).

The information in this petition is very similar to that given in the grant of Cristóbal Hernández and it clearly concerns one and the same person.



There is very little, if any, doubt that this document is authentic, as it was written in the original sixteenth-century hand, on original paper, and is kept in a file with other documents from this year, unlike the Ruíz and Hernández documents which are eighteenth-century copies. The main problem is how to reconcile the information that Gonzalo Fernández de Figueroa is the son of Cristóbal de Fernández, while Don Domingo claims that Don Pedro and Don Gabriel, his uncle and father respectively, were sons of this very same Cristóbal de Hernández. It could be, of course, that the three are actually brothers, but this is unlikely considering that in other petitions brothers ask together for privileges, as a group. It seems therefore more likely that the Hernández documents are forgeries too, although of a rather more sophisticated kind than the Ruíz documents. This would mean that the two sets of texts presented in 1740 are falsifications. An historical contextualization may clarify this problem.

### **Eighteenth-Century Texts from the Toluca Region**

The Mesoamerican pictographic writing systems endured from the sixteenth to the mid seventeenth century, but were slowly replaced by the alphabetical system. The almost unlimited possibilities of alphabetic writing were fully exploited by the indigenous communities which began to produce a rich variety of documents, ranging from the regular notarial texts like wills, letters of sale and petitions, to historical accounts and religious manuscripts. From the second half of the seventeenth century until the mid eighteenth century this development resulted in the production of a certain type of historical document which in the literature is called "Primordial Titles" with a particular off-shoot known as "Techialoyan". While the latter consists of some fifty-six known manuscripts, the first is a group of well over a hundred documents with considerable variety of format, extent, and contents. These texts are written in indigenous languages, frequently with illustrations, particularly in the case of the Techialoyan, and have a focus on local history and territory. Orthography, historical events, chronology, and territorial references are often confusing and, from a western perspective, erroneous, which has led some investigators to consider the titles falsifications. More recently, however, it has been exactly this aspect that has caused scholars to reflect on what history and historiography means in different cultural contexts.<sup>9</sup>

The question of the historical value and authenticity of the titles is complex and multi-faceted. Much of the information can and has been verified by comparative historical research, but this same exercise has also

shown that many data are diachronic or simply erroneous. Part of this problem can be explained if the origins of these sources are considered. There is little doubt that the titles are part of and a continuum of a strong oral tradition which conserves the memory of historical information, but at the same time changes or structures it to its elemental or essential core. So Viceroy Mendoza may be remembered as an archbishop or king residing in Mexico City in Spain from 1521 onwards, which is, of course, factually incorrect. However, what is important is the memory of the introduction of Spanish ecclesiastical and civil authority embodied by Viceroy Mendoza who, with his Council of the Indies, resided in Mexico City representing the King of Spain, recognized as ultimate authority in all of New Spain since the conquest, exemplified in the year 1521 in which Tenochtitlan fell.

At the same time, however, evidence exists of actual falsifications. Stephanie Wood has worked extensively on such material, and more recently Mária Castañeda de la Paz has identified similar practices.<sup>10</sup> Wood has identified a Pedro Villafranca as a *cacique* who produced titles in Spanish for towns in the Valley of Toluca, often based on sixteenth-century original sources, and Don Diego García de Mendoza Moctezuma as a supposed *cacique* from Azcapotzalco who was involved in the production of Techialoyan documents. García Castro and Arzate Becerril have continued the investigations of Pedro Villafranca producing titles for various Otomí towns situated to the west of Mexico City.<sup>11</sup> Castañeda de la Paz, on the other hand, shows the use and re-use of original sixteenth-century grants by people from the present states of Mexico and Hidalgo in order to claim privileges. All cases concern the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when the indigenous communities in New Spain needed documents to confirm, or reconfirm, their territories before the colonial authorities, or to reaffirm the identity of the community itself. Where such manuscripts did not exist, new ones were produced, sometimes on the request of the very same authorities. In this process the line between plain registration, invention and falsification proved to be a thin one and was not limited to community documents.

Considering the Ruíz and Hernández documents within this context it has to be noted that while several of the titles in Nahuatl come from the Valley of Toluca, the large majority of the Techialoyan documents are from this region, suggesting a preference for pictographic documents over alphabetic ones. The falsifications discussed here are from this very same region. It is thus not strange to encounter two documents from San Felipe Ixtlahuaca and Atlacomulco that show similar characteristics as those of the titles, but in this case it seems the line towards falsification was

definitely crossed. These documents often became part of the local historical memory in which it was no longer clear what piece of information was authentic or false, so creating a new history.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusions

Two sets of eighteenth-century historical documents were explored. While one set could be identified as a forgery, the second seemed more authentic, but in the end had to be recognized as a forgery too. The production of fake documents in order to obtain certain rights and privileges is as old as man has produced documents. In this particular case, these documents can be contextualized as dating from a time when Mexican indigenous towns and people had to present documentation in order to protect their lands and status against a growing population. While many of these new documents are amalgamations of earlier documents and local oral traditions, rendering important if not the only historical information about certain communities or peoples, in some cases straightforward forgeries were produced. The Ruíz and Hernández papers presented here are in this second category, even though the latter are a bit more sophisticated. Such a conclusion does not invalidate the documents. On the contrary, it makes them more interesting as new issues arise. For example, it has to be investigated how these people in the eighteenth century had access to historical information about the sixteenth century; the “invented” names in these documents may actually represent certain local historical personages who were knitted into these accounts; the mere construction of this documentation may have had consequences for the local historical memory as the persons and events attributed to them may have become “real” as is the case in other places in Mexico.<sup>13</sup> What started as a forgery may, therefore, have become history.

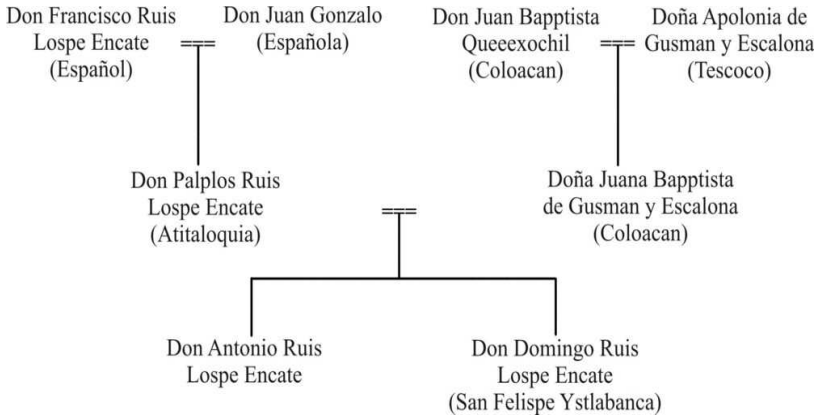


Fig. 15.1. Genealogical tree of Don Domingo Ruis Lospe Encate.

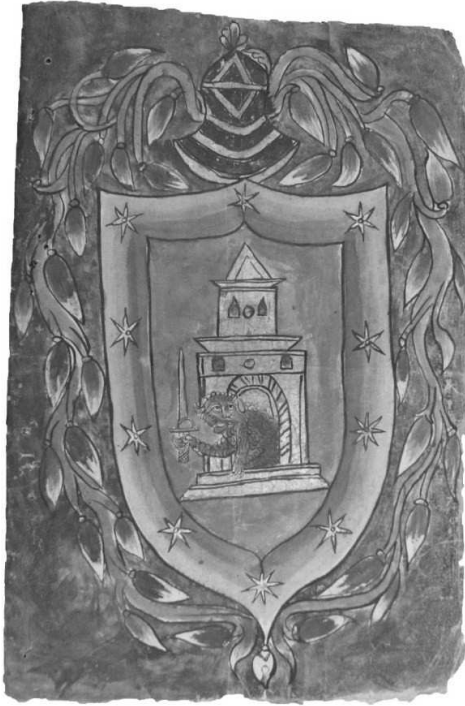


Fig. 15.2a. Coat of arms of Francisco Ruis de Córdoba (National Library of Anthropology and History, Mexico City, Colección Antigua, No. 757, Exp. 3).



Fig. 15.2b. Coat of arms of Francisco Ruis de Córdoba (National Library of Anthropology and History, Mexico City, Colección Antigua, No. 757, Exp. 3).



Fig. 15.3. Coat of arms showing towers on an island.



Fig. 15.4a. Coat of arms of Don Juan Queeexochil (National Library of Anthropology and History, Mexico City, Colección Antigua, No. 757, Exp. 3).



Fig. 15.4b. Coat of arms of Don Juan Queeexochil (National Library of Anthropology and History, Mexico City, Colección Antigua, No. 757, Exp. 3).



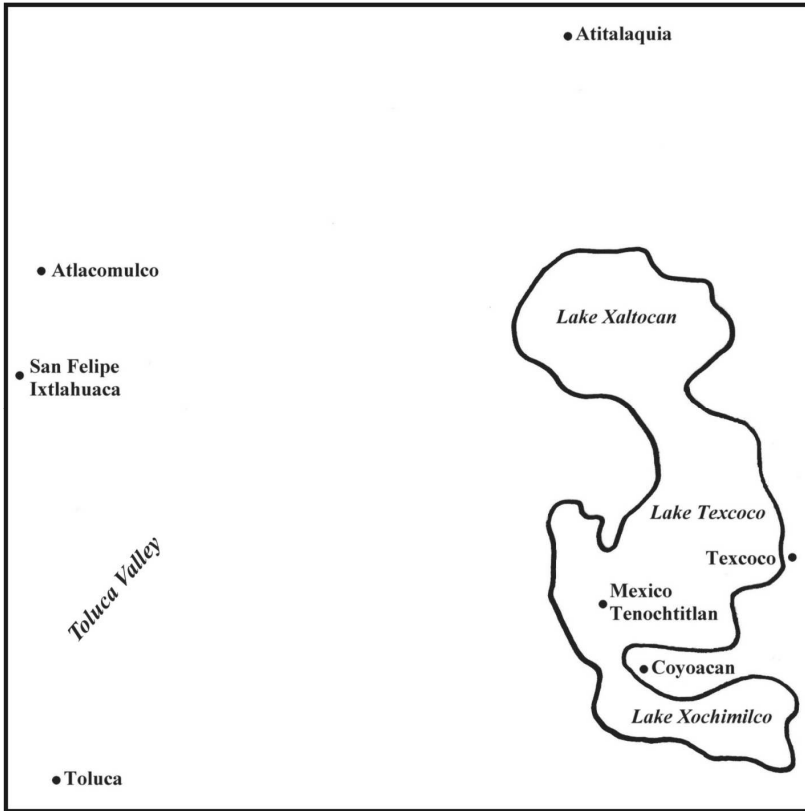


Fig. 15.5. Map of Atlatomulco and San Felipe Ixtlahuaca region.

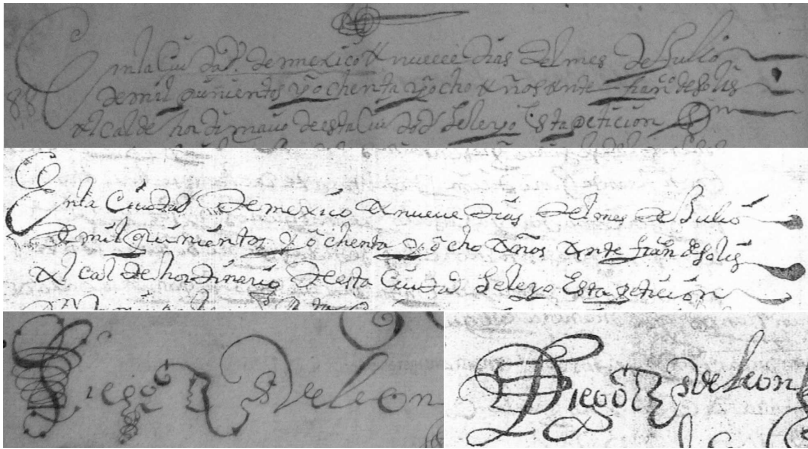


Fig. 15.6. Comparison of the handwriting and signatures of Diego de León. (National Library of Anthropology and History, Mexico City, Colección Antigua, No. 757, Exp. 3 and General Archive of the Nation, Ramo Vínculos 272, Tomo 2).

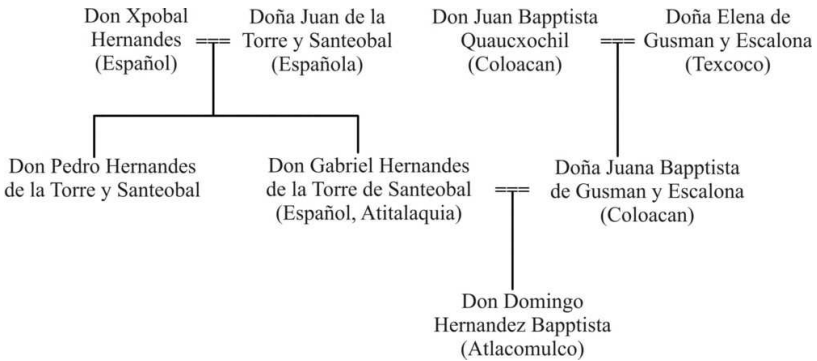


Fig. 15.7. Genealogical tree of Don Domingo Hernandez Bapptista (Atlacomulco).

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Díaz del Castillo 1992, Chapters 2-4; Thomas 1994, Chapter 7.

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew and Oudijk 2008.

<sup>3</sup> These conventions are explored in Luque-Talaván and Castañeda de la Paz 2006; and Castañeda de la Paz 2009.

<sup>4</sup> See Castañeda de la Paz 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The translations are by the author. I have tidied up oddities of orthography to aid clarity.

<sup>7</sup> See Díaz del Castillo 1992, 155, 362-363.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 158, 380, 160, 390.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Wood 1998a; and Wood 1988b.

<sup>10</sup> Wood 1987; Wood 1989; Castañeda de la Paz 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Castro and Becerril 2003.

<sup>12</sup> See Oudijk 2000; and Oudijk 2003.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*