Bridging the Gaps

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Integrating Archaeology and History in Оанаса, Менісо

A Volume in Memory of Bruce E. Byland

EDITED BY

Danny Zborover and Peter C. Kroefges

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Cover photographs. The genealogy of the rulers of Ihualtepec, photograph by Vittorio D'Onofri (top); Carved human mandible from the Museo Rufino Tamayo, Oaxaca City, photograph by Danny Zborover (bottom).

DZ: To my parents, Anca and Yona Zborover, and to my Verónica.

PK: To my grandmother, Elisabeth A. Carlson, and in memory of my grandfather, Conrad W. Carlson

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Multidisciplinary Fieldwork in Oaxaca

Viola König

BRUCE BYLAND AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY FIELDWORK IN OAXACA

On May 17, 2008, our colleague Bruce Byland, an archaeologist and specialist in the Mixtec culture of Oaxaca, passed away. I am grateful that the editors promptly accepted my suggestion to dedicate this volume to Bruce. He had been an active representative in the "second generation" of the "Mixtec Codex Group" or "Mixtec Gang," as they called themselves, centered initially around the art historians Nancy Troike, Mary Elizabeth Smith, and Emily Rabin, and the journalist Ross Parmenter. Being strongly influenced by Alfonso Caso's work, the founding group concentrated on the decipherment and interpretation of the codices. At the same time, scholars such as ethnohistorian and archaeologist Ronald Spores and archaeologist Michael Lind conducted complementary research in their respective fields. All of them followed Ignacio Bernal, Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, John Paddock, and Cecil Welte, whose objectives were to reconstruct not only the Mixtec culture but all of ancient Oaxaca and its diverse cultures, from its beginning in the prehispanic era up to the Colonial period (Paddock 1966).

In Oaxaca, interdisciplinary field research has a long tradition. Since the arrival of the Spaniards, such different groups as Christian missionaries, local teachers, and doctors, as well as collectors and antiquarians, conducted "fieldwork" in some way or another, as did the early 'idol hunters' sent out by Carl Uhde in the 1820s. But the term "fieldwork" involves different modes of research in the field; ever since the very first archaeological surveys and excavations in the late nineteenth

century, investigators in Oaxaca depended strongly on the active support of the locals. Systematic fieldwork that brought linguistics into focus, for example, started in the twentieth century, resulting in Schultze-Jena's (1938) linguistic records of the Nahua, Tlapanec, and Mixtec languages, whereas Schmieder (1930a, 1930b) recorded geographical knowledge in the Zapotec and Mixe languages.

One member of the "first generation" studying the Mixtec codices, Mary Elizabeth Smith, practiced a rather new method for her time: she combined linguistic and geographic research in order to identify place signs and to contextualize individuals, particularly the members of the Mixtec noble families shown in the pictorial manuscripts (Smith 1973). Smith conducted ethnohistorical and geohistorical fieldwork in coastal Mixteca, recording local knowledge of landscape toponyms for such features as mountains and rivers. She interviewed Mixtec-speakers, studied written and pictorial documents in local archives, and shared her knowledge with the people in the coastal communities. Supported by their feedback and assistance, she was able to locate places shown in the codices and to analyze them in their historical context. She compared different Mixtec variants kept in the records—such as the codices, *lienzos*, and other historical sources—with Mixtec dialects spoken at the present.

Since the mid-1970s, a second generation of scholars followed Smith and others in the field by applying an interdisciplinary approach from the onset, which integrated ethnohistory, ethnography, linguistics, archaeology, and epigraphy. Maarten Jansen spent a long time in the Mixteca Alta, repeatedly visiting selected communities. Jansen's (1982) work on the Mixtec codices certainly represents one of the most intensive applications of ethnohistorical analysis followed by fieldwork, through which he constantly emphasized the need to seriously consider local commentaries in the interpretation of native sources. Bruce Byland and John Pohl surveyed archaeological settlement patterns in the Tilantongo and Jaltepec valleys of the Mixteca Alta; they interviewed Mixtec people and compared the information to archaeological and ethnohistorical data (Byland and Pohl 1994). Among other aspects of his ethnographic and ethnohistorical work, John Monaghan's field trips added new information on the Mixtec society and, in particular, the local *caciques* during the Colonial period (Monaghan 1995).

Through my own research in the communities of the Mixteca Baja, I have focused on the geographical surveys that pioneers like Mühlenpfordt (1969) and Schmieder (1930a) initiated and Smith successfully continued, and localized previously unidentified place names in the codices (König 1979). Such place signs and glosses were the basic source for my questionnaires. Though my interviews focused on local geographical knowledge and toponymic terms in the native languages, data on ancient sites and sacred places, as well as local history, legends, and myths,

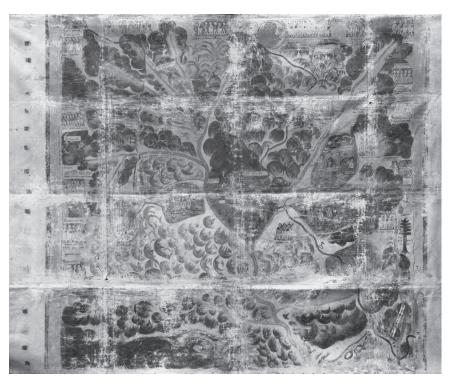


FIGURE 4.1. *Lienzo de San Juan Comaltepec*, Choapan (copy of 1819; found in the village on July 29, 1984). Photograph by Burkhard Brinker.

were recorded as by-products. I have extended my fieldwork to other ethnic groups of Oaxaca and to localized *lienzos* and *mapas* in Zapotec, Chinantec, and Mixe communities (König 1979, 1993) (figures 4.1 and 4.2). On my long hiking tours, some taking up to twelve hours, I experienced the old routes men and women once used to carry their local trade goods to the markets, bring a bride to her groom's hometown, or participate in festivities such as weddings, funerals, or a New Fire Ceremony in neighboring communities.

One platform for presenting and discussing the results of our multidisciplinary approach in Oaxaca was the so-called Mixtec Gateway, founded and chaired by Nancy Troike starting from the 1980s, and taking place every year in Las Vegas, Nevada. These Gateway events were also famous for their three-day workshops dedicated to the study of the Mixtec codices. During the last years the Gateway was co-chaired by Bruce Byland, who represented an attentive and inspiring critic to Troike's interpretations, and added innovative perspectives that advanced the



FIGURE 4.2. San Juan Comaltepec; the center around the church looks much the same as on the *Lienzo de Comaltepec*. Photograph by Burkhard Brinker.

interpretation of the codices. The Gateway was dissolved after Bruce got sick and a few months before he passed away.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY FIELDWORK AT SANTA MARÍA CUQUILA: A CASE STUDY

I first started thinking about the prehispanic importance of Santa María Cuquila (*ñuu cuiñi* or *ño cuy* in Mixtec), today a small village near the municipal town of Tlaxiaco in the western Mixteca Alta, when I realized that the place sign on page 5 of the Codex Egerton 2895 as "jaguar town," or more generally "feline town," most

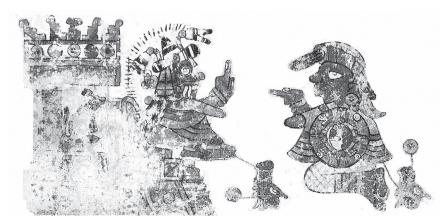


FIGURE 4.3. Codex Egerton 2895, page 5, showing "jaguar town," circa fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. Illustration by John M.D. Pohl.

likely refers to this place (König 1979:54–59, 2005). This place sign in the Codex Egerton is most important because it represents the place of origin of the principal genealogical line shown in the codex (figure 4.3). However, there are several "feline places" to be found in the Mixteca, and some scholars believe that the small *agencia* of Cuyotepeji in the Mixteca Baja is the one appearing on page 5, arguing that the reverse of the codex focuses on places in the Mixteca Baja such as Acatlán and Tequixtepec del Rey (Mary Elizabeth Smith, Maarten Jansen, and Sebastián van Doesburg, personal communication).

In her later work, Smith (1998) had demonstrated the importance of several Mixtec towns in the western Mixteca Alta in prehispanic and Early Colonial times and, in particular, the importance of Cuquila. Moreover, she has shown the relationship between the Tlaxiaco area and the Mixteca Baja. In her line of argument she included important documents such as the Codex Tulane, the *Lienzos de Ocotepec* and *Córdova-Castellanos*, the *Genealogy of Tlazultepec*, and two Colonial maps from the Cuquila region southwest of Tlaxiaco (AGN Tierras 876-I and 3556–6; Smith 1998:180). Moreover, she argued that the lost Codex López Ruiz most probably came from either Ocotepec or Cuquila. However, she was noncommittal on the question of whether Egerton's "jaguar town" was either Cuyotepeji in the Mixteca Baja or Santa María Cuquila in Tlaxiaco.

In a recent publication, Maarten Jansen further comments:

Codex Sanchez Solís or Egerton 2895 is now in the British Museum London, but originally belonged to the dynasty of Ňuu Ňaña (Cuyotepeji) in the Mixteca Baja. We therefore call it 'Codex Ňuu Ňaña'. The individuals on the last page (p. 31),

representing the last rulers, are scratched out. Only the town of the person allied by marriage to the successor of the throne is still visible: Mountain of War, glossed Ñuu Yecu. Another gloss next to it reads *tnoho gui biyo*, 'lineage of 4 Reed'. From other documents we know that Lord 4 Reed (*Nahui Acatl* in Nahuatl) was the ruler of Ñuu Ñaña (Cuyotepeji) at the time of the conquest and was baptized as Don Francisco de Mendoza. He married two different wives, one (Ozomatzin from Camotlan) according to the ancient native law and one (Doña Catalina Cuetzpalin) according to the newly introduced Christian ritual. As was often the case, this provoked a lawsuit between the descendants of these two marriages as to who was the legitimate successor. According to the different testimonies Lord 4 Reed belonged to the line of rulers of Ñuu Ñaña. (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2011:89)

This is indeed a bold conclusion to be drawn from the pictorial place-sign on page 5 that shows a feline and the evidently manipulative gloss on page 31 that pretends to describe scratched-out name glyphs of a noble couple. Thus, the person responsible for the Colonial-period modifications of the pictorial contents achieved exactly the result he intended, to make the potential reader (in this case, Jansen) believe that the Codex Egerton supposedly presents the line of 4 Reed, or Francisco de Mendoza, from Cuyotepeji, a small community in the Mixteca Baja not mentioned in any other Mixtec codices we know about. Although Jansen might be right to argue that the combative *caciques* from that place might have used this codex for their own interests (as is perfectly documented in the Ramo Civil 669), I find it precarious to rename the document as "Codex Ñuu Ñaña."

My alternative argument for identifying the Egerton Codex place glyph with Cuquila is based on a number of reasons: there is an almost completely faded gloss on page 5 that I read as *cuy*, meaning "jaguar" in the Mixtec language. On the *Lienzo de Ocotepec* and the AGN Map of Cuquila (Ramo de Tierras 3556, exp. 6) the town's Mixtec name *Ñucuiñe*, meaning "jaguar town," is represented by a mountain glyph represented with a "jaguar" or "wild cat," in just the same way as in the Codex Egerton (Smith 1998:153, 182; Smith and Parmenter 1991:22). Earlier, a jaguar glyph is shown on monument 1 from Ńucuiñe, a site close to Cuquila, belonging to the *ñuiñe* style from the Classic period (Rivera Guzmán 2004:7). The obverse of the Codex Egerton shows places in the western part of the Mixteca Alta and Baja in the present-day states of Oaxaca and Guerrero that are much nearer to Cuquila than to Cuyotepeji. Furthermore, intermarriage between the caciques of "jaguar town" and Tilantongo, the important center in the Mixteca Alta, are shown three times on the obverse. On the reverse of the codex, however, Tilantongo is replaced by Cholula in Puebla. Obviously, the focus of the Codex Egerton genealogy had

switched further north to the Mixteca Baja, where a strong relationship to the adjacent Puebla-Cholula area was established.

Quite unexpectedly, twenty-five years after the publication of my monograph on the Codex Egerton (König 1979), two studies from two different fields, archaeology and history, supported my thesis for Cuquila's being the first couple's home town. Iván Rivera Guzmán discussed several stone carvings from Santa María Cuquila/ Nucuiñe, which reflect the Nuiñe style (Rivera Guzmán 2004:1). He compared the iconography on these monuments with images from the Codex Egerton and associated the latter with carved stones from San Pedro/San Pablo Tequixtepec and Acatlán—both important places in the Mixteca Baja that appear several times in the Codex Egerton (Rivera Guzmán 2004:7-9, 11-13, 17). Rivera Guzmán also linked the stones from Tlaxiaco carved in the Mixteca-Puebla style of the Postclassic period with the iconography represented in the Mixtec codices. He concluded that the Nuiñe style expanded from northwest Oaxaca—that is, the Puebla part of the Mixteca Baja—to the central Mixteca Alta and western Oaxaca. With the appearance of the Mixteca-Puebla style, which is represented in the codices and in the Postclassic imagery, we can see another strong connection between the Mixteca Baja and western Oaxaca. As such, the iconography of the Codex Egerton and the San Pedro/San Pablo Tequixtepec and Acatlán carved stones bear striking similarities to the Ñucuiñe stones near Cuquila. At the same time, we do not have such iconographical evidence from Cuyotepeji in the Mixteca Baja (König 2005:114).

The other confirmation for the identification of Cuquila as the place shown on page 5 in the Codex Egerton came from historian Ethelia Ruiz Medrano, who has studied the historical importance of Cuquila in collaboration with the community for more than four years (Ruiz Medrano 2009). Her work is based on written expedientes from the Colonial period, which show a very long and close relationship between the caciques from Cuquila and other places in the Mixteca Baja shown in the Codex Egerton (such as Acatlán and San Pedro/San Pablo Tequixtepec), starting from the Early Colonial period and up to Late Colonial times. Much as the Codex Tulane transited between the Mixteca Baja and Tlaxiaco (Smith and Parmenter 1991), other pre-Columbian codices, Ruiz Medrano has argued, might also have traveled. The Codex Egerton, for example, might have been taken by the caciques and cacicas from Cuquila to the Mixteca Baja, where they intermarried or inherited territories, while the documents continued to serve as important evidence in legal lawsuits. The Codex Egerton was kept in a local community for centuries before being acquired by Felipe Sánchez Solís (Jansen 1994:145). Although we currently do not know the biography of the codex before the mid-nineteenth century, there is little doubt regarding the document's relationship to Cuquila and its possible origin from this town.



FIGURE 4.4. The Museo Comunitario at Santa María Cuquila, Tlaxiaco. Photograph by Iván Rivera Guzmán.

A VISIT TO SANTA MARÍA CUQUILA

I visited Cuquila in August 2008 with the intention to study the Codex Egerton together with the people of the village. The síndico municipal, Licenciado Germán Ortiz, had invited the authorities from all the agencias to participate in the lecture. Living in the shadows of the Classic-period site Ñucuiñe, the local people show a strong interest in their local history and founded a Museo Comunitario (figure 4.4). In front of the ayuntamiento, Ortiz and Rivera Guzmán started with a general introduction to the topic, followed by the display and a page-by-page study of the codex facsimile that Ethelia Ruiz had donated to the community (figure 4.5). The meeting was adjourned following a discussion concerning the Codex Egerton's contemporary custody in the British Museum in London. At the end of the debate, we concluded that the preservation and storage in the British Museum can be looked at from different standpoints, and that the museum should be informed of the present interpretation of the codex, publish it in their records, show the codex to the public and, last but not least, allow people from Cuquila to come and study the original any time. The audience postulated, however, that the payment of any such travel should be provided by the British Museum.

Because I also wanted to deepen our knowledge on the former role of Cuquila in the Mixteca, I was seeking for more arguments to support Cuquila's position as an important intersection between the Mixteca Alta, Baja, and Costa. Elsewhere I



FIGURE 4.5. Studying the Codex Egerton at Santa María Cuquila. Photograph by Iván Rivera Guzmán.

argued for a "western corridor" linking the Mixteca Baja and Costa via Cuquila in the Alta (König 2005), a thesis further confirmed by Ruiz Medrano's (2009) recent studies. Today, long and hard marches become less common as new paved roads link the most remote mountain communities. Geographical knowledge of landscape and familiarity with toponyms in the native languages will consequently get lost in the next generation. However, such information is fundamental for interpreting the pre-Columbian codices and Colonial *lienzos* and maps that feature numerous place signs, sometimes accompanied by their respective glosses. As I was looking for individuals with a specific knowledge of recent and ancient trails and routes, I was introduced to Don Camilo Coronel Sánchez, an expert who was able to specify all the names of intermediate stops on the way down to the Pacific coast. In addition, he drew a beautiful circular map with glosses describing the former territorial extensions of Cuquila, its old and new boundaries after this was reduced due to a "cholera" epidemic (more likely typhus), and the communities owning this land today (figure 4.6).

AN OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

Multidisciplinary fieldwork goes on. However, unlike archaeological fieldwork, which has a promising future in Oaxaca considering the multiple sites and artifacts above and below the surface, linguistic fieldwork might no longer be possible in the next few generations, depending as it does on the survival of Mixtec as a spoken language in the communities. The same goes for ethnohistorical and ethnographical fieldwork. As places in Oaxaca increasingly become connected by signposted roads and motorways, the geographical knowledge of ancient sites, markers, trails, routes, and boundaries is becoming lost because it is no longer as necessary for orientation and communication.

Other important aspects are the *transformation* of native knowledge into internationally acknowledged contemporary art and the *transference* of native knowledge with the Mixtec immigration to the United States. As an illustration of the former aspect, I have recently learned that a film that documented a contemporary Oaxacan artist's work also presented an excellent ethnographic source that can aid our understanding of a pre-Columbian codex. In his film *Mit den Füßen im Himmel (Pisando en el Cielo: Pintores de Oaxaca*, or *Treading in Heaven: Painters of Oaxaca*), the German filmmaker Boris Penth interviews artist Filemón Santiago in his Mixtec home community of *San José Sosola* (Penth 1996/97). The artist presents his deer mask and explains the instructions and procedures for hunting a deer that he learned from his father. The same oral tradition was recorded in Guerrero by Schultze-Jena (1938) in the early 1900s and is further visualized in the pre-Columbian Codex Copsi.



FIGURE 4.6. Don Camilo Coronel Sánchez drawing a round map in Santa María Cuquila. Photograph by Iván Rivera Guzmán.

Although contemporary native artists from all over Oaxaca step deep into their history and mythology in order to construct fresh ideas from old traditions, others leave behind their country. However, many Mixtecs who live in the diaspora often

feel more nostalgic about their *tierra* and the ancient customs and traditions they still remember from their parents and grandparents. In a Manhattan pizzeria I met two young Mixtec pizza makers from Guerrero. In addition to speaking Mixtec, they also knew Mixtec customs and traditions. Young Mixtecs from Guerrero who are living in California today participated at the last Mixtec Gateway in Las Vegas and contributed information that helped in the interpretation of the codices. Thus, fieldwork today is no longer limited to the Mixtec homeland. However, native knowledge is not based merely on oral tradition passed from parents to children but is also closely linked to the experience of life in a Mixtec village and its environment. If such a context is no longer available, native knowledge will fail to achieve its original function and meaning. It will consequently be lost.²

NOTES

- I. The trip was organized in advance by Ethelia Ruiz Medrano and I was accompanied by Iván Rivera Guzmán.
- 2. I am grateful to Burkhard Brinker for permission to publish figures 4.1 and 4.2 and to Iván Rivera Guzmán for permission to publish figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6.

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