

Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca in Cuauhquechollan (Valley of Atlixco, Mexico)

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RESUMEN Los dioses Quetzalcóatl y Tezcatlipoca fueron ampliamente reconocidos en toda Mesoamérica. Con base en el análisis de una selección de informes etnohistóricos, el artículo explora la importancia de la presencia estos dioses en Cuauhquechollan para las ciudades-estado de Tenochtitlan, Tlaxcallan y Tetzoco.

PALABRAS CLAVE Cuauhquechollan, dioses, Quetzalcóatl, Tezcatlipoca, dialéctica, legitimidad política, Triple Alianza, Tlaxcallan, Tetzoco, Tenochtitlan

ABSTRACT The gods Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca were widely worshiped throughout Mesoamerica. Based on an analysis of selected ethnohistorical accounts, this paper explores the significance of the gods' presence in Cuauhquechollan to the city-states of Tenochtitlan, Tlaxcallan and Tetzoco.

KEYWORDS Cuauhquechollan, gods, Quetzalcoatl, Tezcatlipoca, dialectics, political legitimacy, Triple Alliance, Tlaxcallan, Texcoco, Tenochtitlan.

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AVIS DARLENE MYSYK

The gods, Quetzalcoatl (Feathered Serpent) and Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror), were widely recognized throughout Mesoamerica. Based on an analysis of excerpts from three accounts from New Spain —Fray Andrés de Olmos's *Histoire du mechique*,¹ Diego Muñoz Camargo's *Relaciones geográficas de Tlaxcala*,² and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *Obras históricas*—³ this paper explores the significance of the gods' presence in Cuauhquechollan, a small city-state in the Valley of Atlixco, Mexico, to the city-states of Tenochtitlan, Tlaxcallan, and Tetzco.

Like other city-states, Cuauhquechollan left several historical records that were specifically its own,⁴ but none make reference to Quetzalcoatl or Tezca-

¹*Histoire du mechique* [1547], in *Teogonía e historia de los mexicanos*, p. 69-120.

²Diego Muñoz Camargo [1585], *Relaciones geográficas de Tlaxcala*, 1999.

³Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl [1608], *Obras históricas*, 1965.

⁴The records include the *Lienzo de Cuauhquechollan*, the *Codex Huaquechula*, the *Genealogía de Cuauhquechollan-Macuilxochitēpec*, and the *Mapa circular de Cuauhquechollan* (see Florine Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors*, 2004). The fact that none makes reference to any gods recalls the minimal references to gods in the history of the Nahuatl faction of Cuauhtinchan (*Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, 1989). To this end, Dana Liebsohn (*Script and Glyph*, 2009, p. 60, note 6) suggests that we are left with the impression that, from the time of its founding, Cuauhtinchan

tlipoca. However, Cuauhquechollan could boast of its sacred relationship to those gods in the historical records of other city-states. Besides the *Histoire du mechique* from the Basin of Mexico, the *Relaciones geográficas* from Tlaxcallan, and the *Obras históricas* from Tetzco, those records include the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* from Cuauhtinchan, Motolinía from the Valley of Puebla,⁵ and the *Codex Ríos*,⁶ also from the Valley of Puebla. Each account, of course, was told in a particular way, at a particular time, and for a particular reason. Nonetheless, the most enduring elements of Mesoamerican tradition—its “solid nucleus”—⁷would have allowed for wide recognition of the themes that many historical accounts had in common.

The scope of this paper is more modest than to engage the “return of Quetzalcoatl” debate.⁸ Instead, I focus on Quetzalcoatl’s departure from Tollan, the route that he followed, and his pursuit by Tezcatlipoca. I suggest that, in the post-conquest period, those who represented themselves as speaking for the indigenous nobility of Tenochtitlan, Tlaxcallan and Tetzco used particular versions of the departure of Quetzalcoatl to lay claim to their political boundaries and authority, if not legitimacy, over them, both past and present. Cuauhquechollan was implicated in those claims because, on the eve of the Spanish conquest, it was part of Tepeaca, one of the tributary provinces of the Triple Alliance (Tenochtitlan, Tetzco and Tlacopan) and an alleged enemy of the independent city-state of Tlaxcallan. That Tezcatlipoca had triumphed over Quetzalcoatl was “proof” that he had arbitrarily favored either one city-state or another.⁹

had “no sustained relationships” with the gods nor did it experience any “momentous catastrophes that required an appeal to the gods”.

⁵Motolinía [fray Toribio de Benevente], *Historia de los indios...*, 1995

⁶Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen y Luis Reyes García, *Religión, costumbres e historia...*, 1996.

⁷Alfredo López Austin and Leonardo López Luján, *Mexico’s Indigenous Past*, 2001, p. 151.

⁸For a summary of the debate, see David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 2000.

⁹The reader will note that various works cited in this paper use the concept of the dialectic, not in the sense of laws of nature and history, but in the looser sense “to describe the interactions of contradictory or opposite forces”. Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, 1983, p. 108. Of course, many scholars have moved on to more symbolic or interpretive approaches to the Mesoamerican past. However, this does not mean that the concept of the dialectic has become obsolete. Witness its continued use in Joanne Naiman, *How Societies Work*, 2008, p. 151. The

WHO WERE QUETZALCOATL AND TEZCATLIPOCA?

In Mesoamerica's pantheon of gods, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca were two of the most widely recognized. Quetzalcoatl was "the wind, the guide and road-sweeper of the rain gods, of the masters of the water, of those who brought rain."¹⁰ He was said to have created heaven and earth, time, and the calendar. He created humans and discovered maize so that they might eat. He was the patron of the *calmecacs* where children, mainly of noble birth, were educated and, thus, was the patron of royal lineages. When discussing Quetzalcoatl, one would be remiss in not discussing Tezcatlipoca. He was "a true god, whose abode was everywhere"; he was "invisible, like the darkness; [like] the wind".¹¹ On a whim, Tezcatlipoca could either cause anguish and affliction or bestow wealth, honor and —like Quetzalcoatl— "rulership [and] nobility".¹²

In the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*,¹³ Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca were brothers, two of the four sons of Ometeotl, "the cosmic principle by which all that exists is conceived and begotten".¹⁴ It was he who directed "the hidden dialectical process inherent in his sons' struggle for supremacy"¹⁵ as they alternated between collaborating and competing in the creation and destruction of the Four Suns before they created the Fifth Sun —the present age— which would end in earthquakes and famine. By this time, however, Ometeotl had established a "harmony of tensions" between his four sons by allotting to each "a specified period of time [...] for their domination and subordination".¹⁶

If Tezcatlipoca was "one aspect" of Ometeotl, Quetzalcoatl was his personification.¹⁷ Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl —the semi-divine son of the

dialectic "emphasizes the unity [and struggle] of opposites —that is, things can embody within them two opposing tendencies at the same time [...] [It] is the tensions, or irresolvable contradictions, that often become the basis for social change."

¹⁰ Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex*, 1950, book I, p. 3

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2; 1952, book III, p. 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, book I, p. 2.

¹³ *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas...*, 2005, p. 23-24.

¹⁴ Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 1990, p. 83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54, 60. "[They] were intended", as Mónica Minneci ("Antithesis and Complementarity..."), *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl*, v. 30, 1999, p. 163) suggests, "as part of a single plan".

¹⁷ León-Portilla, *op. cit.*, p. 92, 98.

Tlaxcaltecan god, Camaxtli, and his earthly representative, Mixcoatl— became priest-ruler and law-giver of the city of Tollan, the legendary attempt at empire after the fall of the Classic period (AD 200-900) city of Teotihuacan. Quetzalcoatl's place of worship consisted of four houses, the interior walls of which were inlaid with gold, turquoise, silver shells, and precious red stones.¹⁸ All skills and knowledge “started and proceeded from Quetzalcoatl.”¹⁹ And the Toltecs wanted for nothing. “[Ears] of maize were as large as hand grinding stones, [...] [Amaranth] plants [...] could be climbed [and] colored cotton prospered.”²⁰ But Tezcatlipoca was the god of discord, often portrayed as a powerful necromancer whose unrelenting persecution of Quetzalcoatl caused him to flee Tollan.

Brundage has suggested that the “cosmic confrontation” between Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca was not one of simple “opposites,” nor even of an “incipient dualism”.²¹ Rather, it involved a “conjoined deification, two in one”, a *unity* of opposites that was, “in a sense, inseparable” —in fact, a true dialectic—. Unless or until they or their brothers destroyed the Fifth Sun, the dialectic would not be resolved.

THE CONCEPTS OF AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY

Despite the fluidity that characterized Mesoamerica's pantheon of gods, by the Late Postclassic period (AD 1430-1519), Tezcatlipoca had come to symbolize “the epitome of sovereignty” that confronted Quetzalcoatl, “the patron of royal lineages”.²² If this was the case, it is worth distinguishing between the concepts of authority, on the one hand, and legitimacy, on the other. Authority is “the condition of an incumbent, agent, or structure of statuses recognized by a political community to make decisions on its behalf”.²³ Legitimacy is

¹⁸ Sahagún, 1961, book X, p. 166.

¹⁹ Sahagún, 1952, book III, p. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²¹ Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Phoenix of the Western World*, 1982, p. 237-238, 240, 241, 244.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²³ Donald V. Kurtz, *Political Anthropology*, 2001, p. 40-41.

the result of the dialectical process, *legitimation*, by which leaders try to resolve contradictions between more diffuse sources of authority at the local level and the more centralized and independent authority to which leaders aspire.²⁴

All political leaders —and, here, the focus is on office holders—²⁵ pursue five overlapping strategies to gain the direct and/or indirect support that underpins their legitimacy and leads to legitimation: the creation of a strong economy; the establishment of social distance between themselves and their followers; the validation of authority; the consolidation of authority; and the political socialization of followers to comply with leaders' wishes.

The creation of a strong economy serves two purposes. The first is to meet the “culturally perceived needs”²⁶ of the people. The second is to establish social distance, both material and symbolic, between leaders and their followers. The establishment of material distance depends upon the creation of a strong economy, but the latter, in and of itself, cannot guarantee political legitimacy. The establishment of symbolic distance, then, uses myth and legend to propagate the belief that rulers have access to supernatural powers exclusive to their office. But, because the establishment of too much social distance between rulers and commoners is as politically risky as the creation of too much material distance between them, rulers must validate their authority by participating in public ceremonies that demonstrate their claim to such powers. The whole of the legitimation process is sanctioned by a priesthood delegated to act on behalf of officeholders in the consolidation of state authority. Even then, “[authority] figures or structures may be more or less legitimate;”²⁷ if less so, then authority might be imposed by force.

In his case study of Tenochtitlan, Kurtz focuses on the potential for contesting the legitimacy of rulers within a single city-state.²⁸ Because the concept of a dialectic implies that change occurs as a result of contradictions both inher-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁵ Office holders are “leaders whose authority is the result of the political offices they occupy” in complex polities such as chiefdoms and states (*ibid.*, p. 53).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁸ Donald V. Kurtz, “Strategies of Legitimation and the Aztec State”, *Ethnology*, v. 23, n. 4, 1984.

ent in and external to any particular society, I suggest that the potential for contestation could be expanded to include that between city-states as well.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CITY-STATES ON THE EVE OF CONQUEST

After the Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan, Tetzcoco, and Tlacopan had been formed in AD 1428 and had consolidated its power in the Basin of Mexico, it began to incorporate much of central Mexico into trade and tribute relations. Tlacopan had always been the junior partner in the alliance and, by AD 1486, even Tetzcoco had lost much of its power to Tenochtitlan. Although boundaries between city-states tended to be permeable, unstable, and multi-dimensional,²⁹ a line—however shifting—in the sand had been drawn between the Triple Alliance, on the one hand, and independent city-states such as Tlaxcallan, Cholollan, and Huexotzinco in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, on the other on the eve of the Spanish conquest.³⁰

Within each city-state, material distance between nobles and commoners was established through trade and tribute in luxury goods, and symbolic distance was created by using myth and legend to trace a ruler's descent from the gods, especially from Quetzalcoatl. A ruler's authority was then validated through ceremonial displays sanctioned by the state priesthood. Mexica rulers, for example, validated their authority through the royal investiture ceremony. Of the ceremony's eleven discourses, only one made direct reference to Quetzalcoatl, but in such sweeping terms as to seemingly encompass all of the others.³¹ On behalf of the people, an elderly dignitary responded to a new ruler's exhortations to appropriate comportment. The dignitary's opening statements referred to Mexica rulers in general:

²⁹ Frances F. Berdan, "Borders in the Eastern Aztec Empire", in Michael E. Smith and Frances F. Berdan (eds.), *The Postclassic Mesoamerican World*, 2003, p. 75.

³⁰ Ursula Dyckerhoff, "La época prehispánica", in Hanns J. Prem, *Milpa y hacienda...*, 1988, p. 24.

³¹ H. B. Nicholson ("Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 1971, p. 428) suggests that, although most Mesoamerican gods can be categorized into one of various "cult themes" and "deity complexes", Quetzalcoatl resists this sort of categorization.

Here the sons, the noble sons, the precious ones, the precious green stones, the precious bracelets, the sons of our lords, and the descendants of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl—those under his spell—take it, receive it. At this time, they came to life, at this time they were born; their desert, their merit is the realm, the governed. So they came to life, so they were born, so they were created where in the beginning it was determined, ordained that they would be lords, that they would be rulers.³²

Of the remaining ten discourses, the four most given to chance were addressed directly to Tezcatlipoca—when priests prayed for the new ruler's success in office, when the principal priest prayed for a successor to a deceased ruler or for the death of an incompetent ruler, and when the ruler, himself, prayed that he might perform his office well. Quetzalcoatl may have been the patron of royal lineages, but Tezcatlipoca was the kingmaker and, that, on sheer whim.

One way in which Triple Alliance rulers consolidated their authority was to arrange strategic marriages with the ruling families of other city-states such as Culhuacan, which had been ruled by Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's father, Mixcoatl, and which remained an important political entity after the fall of Tollan in AD 1175. Once the Mexicas had settled in the Basin of Mexico, their second ruler, Acamapichtli, was the son of a Culhua princess. In a similar manner, the rulers of Tetzoco claimed that Nopaltzin, the son of their dynastic founder, Xolotl, had married Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's granddaughter. Not content to rely on intermarriage alone to consolidate their authority, the partners in the Triple Alliance also appropriated the titles Lord of the Culhua for Itzcoatl, the ruler of Tenochtitlan, Lord of the Acolhua for Nezahualcoyotl, the ruler of Tetzoco, and Lord of the Tepanecs for the ruler of Tlacopan.³³

Such strategies of legitimation were not unique to the Triple Alliance. The royal investiture ceremony, for example, was of great antiquity and was practiced throughout Mesoamerica.³⁴ However, if Mexica rulers attempted to claim descent from Quetzalcoatl, the Tlaxcaltecas had a more direct and even stron-

³² Sahagún, 1969, book VI, p. 83.

³³ Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs: A History*, 1973, p. 82.

³⁴ Johanna Broda, "Relaciones políticas ritualizadas...", 1978, p. 230, 231.

ger claim to legitimacy: “[They] say that Quetzalcoatl was born of the lineage of the Tlaxcaltecas, and that he passed with them through the strait which they hear they came from, or that, coming along the way, he and Camaxtli, god of the Tlaxcaltecas, were born.”³⁵ In other words, the Tlaxcaltecas’ god, Camaxtli—one and the same as their leader, Mixcoatl—was Quetzalcoatl’s father. Clearly, the Mexicas were not the only ones who could use a “lexicon”³⁶ based on descent from Quetzalcoatl to respond to challenges to their political legitimacy. In fact, neither the Triple Alliance nor Tlaxcallan had any reason to acknowledge or respect the other’s claims to political authority or legitimacy.

Having risen to prominence by AD 1519, Tlaxcallan was one of the few city-states to remain free of the yoke of tribute that the Triple Alliance had imposed on most of the other polities in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. It was ruled by four nobles on a rotating basis, but many towns located within its territory enjoyed a fair degree of political autonomy.³⁷ Initially, it had been successful in conquest and long-distance trade³⁸ but, as the Triple Alliance rose to power and sought to monopolize Tlaxcallan’s long-distance trade routes, the previously amicable relations between them evaporated. The turning point came in AD 1512 when Moctezuma II’s son, Tlacahuepantzin, was killed in a pitched battle between the Triple Alliance and Tlaxcallan. It was then that Moctezuma II

decided to completely destroy and lay waste to the province of Tlaxcalla... [Until] then, he had not wanted to destroy [the Tlaxcaltecas], but to have them caged like quails... [His] desire was to destroy Tlaxcalla and to lay it to waste, because it was not fitting that in the government of the world there be more than one will, one command, and one resolve; and that as long as Tlaxcalla remained unconquered, he could not consider himself supreme lord of the world and that therefore... it [should be] destroyed by fire and blood.³⁹

Claims to legitimacy based on descent from Quetzalcoatl now mattered less to both sides than the imposition of authority over their political

³⁵ Muñoz Camargo, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

³⁶ Carol J. Greenhouse, *A Moment’s Notice...*, p. 165.

³⁷ Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century*, 1952, p. 10, 11.

³⁸ Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 1998, §94, 96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, §165, 166.

boundaries through military force. Yet, for all of Moctezuma II's efforts to subdue Tlaxcallan, he simply was unable to.⁴⁰

For its part, Cholollan tended to vacillate between alliance and enmity with both the Triple Alliance and independent city-states in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, but its strength was never as much military as it was commercial and spiritual.⁴¹ Located at the crossroads of important trade routes since the Classic period, Cholollan had become an important marketplace, and Quetzalcoatl—in his manifestation as Yacateuctli (He Who Goes Ahead of Others)—was the patron of long-distance traders. Cholollan's historical roots as a holy city—the seat of Quetzalcoatl—also ran deep. By the Late Postclassic period, all incumbents to political office made the pilgrimage to Cholollan to request Quetzalcoatl's approval before they assumed power. "Once this sanction had been given, no other was needed. Full legitimacy had been promulgated"⁴² and, one could add, full authority had been validated.

For the Triple Alliance, Cuauquechollan was of strategic importance economically, militarily and commercially. Located on the fertile plains of the Valley of Altixco, it produced a surplus of staple crops such as corn and beans, provided Triple Alliance troops with easy access to enemy city-states in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley,⁴³ and was located on a long-distance trade route to the south. The authority of the rulers of the Mexicas and the Cuauquecholtecas had been consolidated by at least two marital alliances. The first was between the grandson of the ruler of the Tlatelolco Mexicas and the granddaughter of Yohuallatonac, the Chichimec ruler of Cuauquechollan, in AD 1397.⁴⁴ The second was between a woman from Moctezuma II's lineage and don Juan, "the most important after the lord [of Cuauquechollan]"⁴⁵ before the arrival of the Spaniards. By AD 1466, Cuauquechollan had become a tributary of the Triple Alliance and its somewhat grudging ally—by default, then, an enemy of Tlaxcallan, an enmity which may have been more apparent than real.

⁴⁰ Barry L. Isaac, "The Aztec 'Flowery War'...", 1983, p. 425.

⁴¹ Dyckerhoff, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴² Brundage, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁴³ Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, 1997, p. 98.

⁴⁴ Luis Reyes García, *Documentos sobre tierras...*, 1988, p. 97.

⁴⁵ Motolinía, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

THE FALL OF TOLLAN

The same relative stability of the Late Postclassic was not characteristic of the period after the fall of Tollan in AD 1175 and before the rise to power of the Triple Alliance in AD 1428. Instead, it was a time of population movements and political instability, carefully recorded in the histories of several city-states. Cuauhquechollan figured to a greater or lesser extent in several of those histories.

One relates how the Tolteca Chichimecas and the Nonoalca Chichimecas departed from Chicomoztoc (Seven Caves) together to arrive in Tollan⁴⁶ in AD 1116. Not long after, an initial group of Tolteca Chichimecas decided to leave Tollan. Before their departure, their priest, Couenan, went to perform religious service at the Great Temple of Cholollan. Praying to Ipalnemohuani —“He Through Whom One Lives,” another name for Ometeotl—⁴⁷ for a place to settle, Couenan was answered by the oracle of Quetzalcoatl, telling him to bring his people to Cholollan. At the time, the Great Temple was presided over by two priest-kings of the Olmeca Xicalancas who had come to occupy the whole of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley—including Cuauhquechollan—⁴⁸ after the fall of Teotihuacan.

Soon after their arrival in Cholollan, the Tolteca Chichimecas were forced into servitude by the Olmeca Xicalancas. No longer able to tolerate the cruelties to which they were subjected, the Tolteca Chichimecas prayed to their god, Tezcatlipoca, who ordered them to trick their masters into giving them their old weapons under the pretense of offering to entertain them with song and dance. After secretly repairing the weapons, the Tolteca Chichimecas fell upon the Olmeca Xicalancas during the festivities and drove them permanently from Cholollan. For five years, the Tolteca Chichimecas lived in peace with the allies of the defeated Olmeca Xicalancas. Resentful of the victory, however, the allies began to war against the Tolteca Chichimecas, trying to destroy them. In desperation, the Tolteca Chichimecas again prayed to Tezcatlipoca, who

⁴⁶*Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, §12. In the following sequence of the departure of the Tolteca Chichimecas and Nonoalca Chichimecas from Tollan, I follow Nigel Davies, *The Toltecs...*, 1977, p. 383-384, and *The Toltec Heritage: From the Fall of Tula to the Rise of Tenochtitlan*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1980, p. 161.

⁴⁷León-Portilla, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁴⁸*Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, p. 257, map 5.

ordered them to seek help from their Chichimec brethren in Chicomoztoc. Seven Chichimec tribes, including the Tlaxcaltecas, thus set out from Chicomoztoc to assist the Tolteca Chichimecas. Arriving in a central location, the tribes separated, most going to Cholollan where they defeated the allies of the Olmeca Xicalancas, after which they dispersed to settle in the Valley of Puebla-Tlaxcala. Some, led by Tloquetzalteuhtli and Yohuallatonac, went to settle in Cuauhquechollan.⁴⁹ “[As was custom]” even at this early date, the Tolteca Chichimecas and the seven tribes “again visited the house of the oracle of Quetzalcoatl in Cholollan, offering quail, serpents, deer, and rabbits”.⁵⁰

Rather than going to Cholollan, however, Mixcoatl—the leader of the Tlaxcaltecas—doubled back to the Valley of Mexico to conquer the city of Culhuacan⁵¹ where he ruled from AD 1122 to 1150. There, he married and had a son, Ce Acatl Topiltzin, sometimes referred to as Quetzalcoatl.

The sources are rich in myth and legend of the god, Quetzalcoatl, and his earthly representative, Ce Acatl Topiltzin. The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* tell of how Topiltzin was miraculously conceived after the death of his father, Totepeuh, when his mother swallowed an emerald.⁵² The *Histoire du mechique*⁵³ claims that his father was the god, Camaxtli, and his mother the goddess, Chimalma; the *Leyenda de los soles* names Mixcóhuatl as his father and Chimalman as his mother.⁵⁴ Both claim that his mother died after giving birth to him and that he was raised by his grandparents, unnamed in the first but identified as “Quillaxtli, Cihuacohuatl” in the second. As a young man, Topiltzin trained as a warrior, accompanying his father, Mixcoatl, in various conquests. After avenging the death of his father at the hands of his uncles or, alternatively, of his brothers, Topiltzin continued his conquests until he finally reached Tlapallan, where he fell ill and died. The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*,⁵⁵ however, claim that the Toltecs brought him to Tollan to rule as their king and priest from AD 1153 to 1175, a “religious breakthrough”⁵⁶ for Topiltzin who, born into a world of conflict, was

⁴⁹ Muñoz Camargo, *Historia...*, §63.

⁵⁰ *Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, §330.

⁵¹ Davies, *The Toltecs...*, p. 366.

⁵² *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, 1975, §28.

⁵³ *Histoire du mechique*, p. 112.

⁵⁴ *Leyenda de los soles*, 1975, p. 124.

⁵⁵ *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, §33.

⁵⁶ Carrasco, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

transformed from a warrior into an opponent of human sacrifice. Indeed, it is claimed that, in his house of prayer, Topiltzin sacrificed only “snakes, birds, and butterflies.”⁵⁷

Although the Mexicas would later describe Tollan as an earthly paradise, not all was well in that city. The internal conflicts that destabilized it were exacerbated by external threats.⁵⁸ Most accounts weave together the divine conflict between the gods, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, with the human conflict between Topiltzin and Huemac, who ruled Tollan at almost the same time (AD 1169 to 1178) as head of a second dynasty. Three accounts, in particular, attest to Quetzalcoatl’s and Tezcatlipoca’s presence in or association with Cuauhquechollan.

QUETZALCOATL AND TEZCATLIPOCA IN CUAUHQUECHOLLAN

In each of the following narratives, one sees the potential for the contestation of political boundaries and authority, if not legitimacy, between Tenochtitlan, Tlaxcallan and Tetzaco with reference to their relationships to Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca. Even before the arrival of the Spaniards, Mesoamerica was “a diverse and dynamic world, in which elites [...] could maintain their claims to legitimacy only by learning to navigate the swift cultural and political cross-currents of the region.”⁵⁹ The situation was little different in New Spain’s colonial period when, faced with Spanish narratives of discontinuity, those who claimed to speak for the indigenous nobility countered with narratives of continuity⁶⁰ as they “searched for (or created) possible ties between the history of their ancestors and that of the conqueror.”⁶¹ The dialogues themselves were dialectical in nature, resulting in “new syntheses that were[...] further modified as the colonial period progressed and changes continued to occur.”⁶²

⁵⁷ *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, §38.

⁵⁸ Davies, *The Toltecs...*, p. 370.

⁵⁹ Greenhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

⁶⁰ Jorge Klor de Alva, “Nahua Colonial Discourse and the Appropriation of the (European) Other,” *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, v. 77, 1992, p. 17.

⁶¹ Salvador Velazco, *Visiones de anáhuac*, 2003, p. 28.

⁶² Susan D. Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings...*, 1989, p. xxx.

Histoire du mechique

The first account, the *Histoire du mechique*, is thought to derive, at least in part, from an early sixteenth-century work by the Franciscan friar, Andrés de Olmos. The lost original first appeared in French in 1905, and only later was re-translated into Spanish. It is thought to be one of the earliest and most authentic accounts of the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl tale.⁶³

In this account, Tezcatlipoca, jealous that Quetzalcoatl was adored in Tollan, appeared there so that he, too, might be adored. Assuming diverse and horrific forms, Tezcatlipoca so terrified everyone, including Quetzalcoatl, that they fled for their lives. Quetzalcoatl went first to Tenayuca and then to Culhuacan. “From there he proceeded to the mountains and went to Cuauhquechollan and prepared a temple and an altar for himself and was worshiped as a god...and there he stayed for 290 years.”⁶⁴ From Cuauhquechollan, Quetzalcoatl went to Cholollan, where he stayed for 160 years, then to Cempoala, where he stayed for 260 years until, learning that Tezcatlipoca was pursuing him, he fled to a desert. There, he shot an arrow into a tree, entered the fissure, and died.

The fact that Olmos’s indigenous informants made mention of a temple and altar in Cuauhquechollan cannot be dismissed as mere myth. Archaeologists have noted the presence of six adobe and stucco structures northwest of the present-day city of Atlixco —Cuauhquechollan’s original location, suggesting a civil-religious function of what was probably a densely populated site from the Late Classic to the Postclassic period (AD 650-1521).⁶⁵ What Cuauhquechollan’s actual significance might have been is unknown but it was obvious that someone of import —perhaps Quetzalcoatl— had resided there for an inordinate length of time. The excerpt from Olmos’s *Histoire du mechique* reflected the indigenous understanding of history as the “balanced replacement of one thing [...] by another in regular rotation”, the product of taking turns at power,⁶⁶ in this case, with Spaniards. Despite the increasing influence of Christianity, this dialectic appears to have continued well into the colonial period.

⁶³H. B. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl...*, 2001, p. xxxi.

⁶⁴*Histoire du mechique*, p. 115.

⁶⁵Lucero Morales Cano, “Atlixco prehispánico”, 1991, p. 202.

⁶⁶Klor de Alva, p. 19, 22.

Relaciones geográficas de Tlaxcala

The second account is Diego Muñoz Camargo's *Relaciones geográficas de Tlaxcala*. The *mestizo* son of a secondary Spanish conqueror and a Tlaxcaltecan commoner, Muñoz Camargo chose to deny his indigenous heritage and represent himself as both a Spaniard and a Christian.⁶⁷ He had done well for himself but, because of the political and economic ties that he shared with the Tlaxcaltecan nobility, he might have felt pressured to defend its interests as allies of the Spaniards in the conquest of Tenochtitlan.⁶⁸ As for indigenous commoners, however, he insisted that they were "diabolical beings by nature" who needed to be Christianized.⁶⁹

Muñoz Camargo's account⁷⁰ begins with the arrival in Tollan of "certain nations of people" from the north who brought with them a "very important" person —Quetzalcoatl— as their leader. Finding Tollan densely populated, and angered by the adulterous behavior of "Tezcatlipoca Huemac" and his lords, Quetzalcoatl and his followers left Tollan for Cholollan. After much time, Quetzalcoatl learned that his enemy, Huemac, was pursuing him. Arriving in Cholollan and discovering that Quetzalcoatl had fled, Huemac became so angry that he carried out massacres throughout the whole region. Following Muñoz Camargo, Torquemada recounts that

[so] afraid were they of [Huemac] that he became adored as a god, trying in this way to destroy and obscure Quetzalcoatl's fame in [Cholollan] and to become lord not only of [that] city [...], but also of [...] Quauhquechulan, Itzyucan, Altixco, and [of] all the provinces of Tepeyacac, Tecamachalco, Quecholac and Tehuacan, over all of which he was king and lord and, even afterwards, worshiped as a god.⁷¹

Muñoz Camargo adds: "[It] was no less in the province of Tlaxcalla, where, of all the gods, they praised him as the first and most valiant: [...] no

⁶⁷ Velasco, p. 129-130.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133, 181.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁷⁰ Muñoz Camargo, *Relaciones geográficas*, p. 129-133.

⁷¹ Fray Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, 1975, v. I, p. 352.

other equaled him. And in this way, in most of this New Spain, he was very well-known and adored as a god”.⁷² At the same time,

[the] natives of Chullolan and of Quauhquecholla believe that this Quetzalcoatl was also their god, [and] that he did not die because he was a god, but that he entered the sea and was converted from a mortal man into a god [...] And in this way, they respected him and held him in great veneration in this city of Chullola, and in Tulla and in Quauhquechulla, and they held celebrations for him every year.⁷³

All of these, however, were “false gods”: Tezcatlipoca was no other than Luzbel [Lucifer] and Quetzalcoatl, as a “mortal man,” had simply died.

Obras históricas by Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl

A third and somewhat different account is the *Obras históricas* by Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl. Writing in defense of the waning privileges of his noble Tetzcoacan heritage within the context of New Spain, Ixtlilxochitl⁷⁴ conceived of an “historical continuum” from Quetzalcoatl, the missionary, to Nezahualcoyotl, the “reincarnation of Quetzalcoatl” who intuited the existence of the Christian God in the form of Ipalnemohuani, to Fernando Cortés Ixtlilxochitl, the “instrument of God” in assisting the Spaniards to defeat the idolatrous Mexicas. The enigmatic Topiltzin, however, seemed to be of interest to Ixtlilxochitl only as a secondary figure, the weak ruler of a decadent society.

The rather lengthy account⁷⁵ tells of the birth of Meconetzin —as an adult, renamed Topiltzin— the illegitimate son of the eighth ruler of Tollan and a young woman of his own lineage. When the time came to choose a successor to the throne, his father decided that Topiltzin would reign supreme, not alongside three lords from the Gulf Coast who were “very close heirs of his lineage”, but alongside two others. The account goes on to describe how, tempted by

⁷² Muñoz Camargo, *Relaciones geográficas*, p. 134.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁷⁴ Salvador Velazco, p. 44, 68, 74, 94.

⁷⁵ Ixtlilxóchitl, v. I, p. 43-55.

necromancers, one of whom was Tezcatlipoca, Topiltzin and, following his lead, the whole of Tollan began to commit “very grave sins”. As predicted in the distant past by the astrologer, Huemac, a number of signs foreshadowing the destruction of Tollan then began to appear and, although Topiltzin tried to placate the gods, a series of natural disasters befell the city. At around the same time, many cities and provinces subject to Tollan began to come under attack from the three lords from the Gulf Coast. Despite being offered treasures and agreeing to a ten-year truce, the three lords later attacked Tollan with a vengeance. Topiltzin and his troops fought valiantly but eventually were defeated. Topiltzin fled to the safety of a cave a Xico. One of his sons was killed by the enemy forces but the second, Pochotl, escaped, hiding along with others, including some from Cuauhquechollan, in lagoons and mountains. After the three lords had sacked Tollan and had looted the palaces and temples of other cities, they returned to the Gulf Coast. Echoing Ixtlilxochitl, Veytia states that “[the] cities that they reached, [in] which the destruction was not as great, were Mollanziuhcohuac, Mazatepec, Totzatepec, Totoltepec, Quauhquechollan, Cholollan, Tepexoma, Cotlazalan, Chapoltepec and Culhuacan.”⁷⁶ Emerging from Xico, Topiltzin left for Tlapallan, where he later died. Many Indians claimed that Topiltzin was still in Xico with his great Tetzcoacan descendants, Nezahualcoyotl and Nezahualpilli, but this was nothing more than a “falsehood and fable”.⁷⁷

Given the importance of Quetzalcoatl to both Tollan and Cholollan, the relationship between the two great centers seems fairly clear. But where did Cuauhquechollan fit in? For the answer, one must turn to other sources.

According to the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, those Chichimecas who had remained in Tollan came into a brief but bloody conflict, instigated by the ruler, Huemac, who had been adopted as a child by the Tolteca Chichimecas. Huemac had reduced the Nonoalca Chichimecas to the status of servants, angering them with his increasingly unreasonable demands. Upon learning that both groups had made amends and were conspiring to kill him, Huemac fled, only to meet a violent end at the hands of the Nonoalca Chichimecas. Fearful of repercussions, the Nonoalca Chichimecas decided to abandon Tollan. Not

⁷⁶Mariano Veytia, *Historia antigua de México*, México, Editorial Leyenda, v. I, p. 55.

⁷⁷Ixtlilxochitl, v. I, p. 56

unlike Couenan before him, their leader, Xelhua, left for the southeast to do penance. He, too, prayed for safe haven to Ipalnemohuani, who responded by telling him that there, between Itzucan and Tehuacan, he and his followers would find their homeland. Xelhua returned to Tollan to amass them. Carrying the ritual paraphernalia of their god, Quetzalcoatl, their route took them first to Cuernavaca, then northeast to Tepoztlán and Amecameca, around the volcano Popocatepetl, to Cuauhquechollan, on to Tehuacan and, finally, to the Gulf Coast.⁷⁸ One source claims that Xelhua died en route;⁷⁹ another claims that he was the eldest of six sons of Iztacmixcohuatl and Ilancuey, natives of Chicomoztoc, and that “he founded Guacachula, and Izocan [Izúcar de Matamoros], and Epatlan, Teopantlan, and then Teohacan [Tehuacan], Cozcatlan and Teutiltan [Teotitlan].”⁸⁰

Regardless of the fate of Cuauhquechollan’s man-god, Xelhua, a second source establishes his relationship to Cholollan. According to the *Codex Ríos*,⁸¹ seven giants escaped the destruction by flood of the first age in the world’s creation. One, named Xelhua, fled to Cholollan, where he had his followers build a tower so high that it seemed to rise to the heavens. There, they would find refuge if another flood were to occur. But a jade stone—shaped like a toad, some said—fell from the sky, knocking the tower to the ground. The message seemed clear: “[The gods] reprimanded [Xelhua and his followers], saying that why did they want to rise to the heavens, that it was enough to see what is there below, on the earth.”

THE SPANIARDS IN CUAUHQUECHOLLAN

Not unlike other independent city-states in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, Cuauhquechollan had been conquered, first by Tenochtitlan’s sister city, Tlatelolco, in AD 1398, then by Tenochtitlan itself in AD 1466, and incorporated as a tributary province and military ally of the Triple Alliance. By default, then, it was an enemy of Tlaxcallan. However, the enmity may have been more apparent

⁷⁸ Paul Kirchhoff, “Los pueblos de la *Historia tolteca-chichimeca...*”, 1940, p. 82-85.

⁷⁹ *Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, §45, 55.

⁸⁰ Motolinía, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁸¹ Anders, Jansen y Reyes García, p. 93.

than real. In AD 1519, Hernán Cortés and his small army arrived on the Gulf Coast. Before long, they had established an important alliance with the Tlaxcaltecs of whom, as one of the captains of Cortés had noted, the Cuauhquecholtecs were “friends and confederates”.⁸² After an unsuccessful attempt to take Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards found refuge in Tlaxcallan from which Cortés began to send expeditions to conquer surrounding towns occupied by Triple Alliance forces. Soon, Cortés was in Tepeaca, now conquered and renamed Segura de la Frontera. There, he recorded that messengers from Cuauhquechollan arrived to inform him that some 30 000 Chololtecs, allies of the Mexicas, were occupying the city and its garrison.⁸³ The messengers had been sent by their ruler to pledge allegiance to the Crown because their enemies were mistreating them, taking their women and their lands. Having listened to their pleas, Cortés sent them ahead with thirteen of his horsemen and 30 000 Indian allies. Instead of returning directly to Cuauhquechollan, however, the messengers led the troops first to Cholollan, then to Huexotzinco where the Spaniards began to suspect that an ambush had been laid for them in Cuauhquechollan. Their captain took both the Huexotzincas and the Cuauhquecholteca messengers prisoners and returned them to Cortés in Tepeaca. Concluding that his captain had misunderstood, Cortés again sent them ahead to Cuauhquechollan where he, too, decided to go. The Indian allies of the Spaniards lay siege to the city, forcing their enemies to flee to the garrison for assistance, but they were overtaken and killed, and their three encampments outside of Cuauhquechollan razed. After the battle, the Spaniards returned to Cuauhquechollan where, for three days, they were well-received by their new allies before they moved on.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

What, then, was the significance of the victory of Huemac/Tezcatlipoca over Topiltzin/Quetzalcoatl for Tenochtitlan, Tlaxcallan, and Tetzucoco? And why was Cuauhquechollan specifically mentioned in the *Histoire du mechique* from

⁸² Bernardino Vázquez de Tapia, *Relación de méritos y servicios...*, 1972, p. 36.

⁸³ Hernán Cortés, *Cartas de relación*, 1993, p. 89-92.

the Basin of Mexico, the *Relaciones geográficas* from Tlaxcallan, and the *Obras históricas* from Tetzcoco?

In New Spain's colonial period, those who claimed to speak for the indigenous nobility sought to make claims to the past and present political boundaries and authority, if not legitimacy, of their respective city-states. Cuauhquechollan was implicated in those claims in that it was of economic, commercial, and military importance to all three city-states and that its importance was enhanced by its sacred relationship to Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca as recorded in the histories of several city-states. First, Cuauhquechollan had formed part of the territory of the Olmeca Xicalancas who took over Cholollan in the Late Classic period and who are thought to have worshiped an early form of Quetzalcoatl. Second, although the Tolteca Chichimecas worshiped Tezcatlipoca, they were invited by the oracle of Quetzalcoatl to relocate to Cholollan. After the seven Chichimec tribes had gone to their assistance and later had settled in their respective locations—including in Cuauhquechollan—all of them recognized Cholollan as the seat of political legitimacy. The Cuauhquecholtecas are not mentioned as one of those, but they surely would have participated in such rituals. Then, of course, there are the three accounts—the *Histoire du mechique*, the *Relaciones geográficas de Tlaxcala*, and the *Obras históricas*—in which Huemac/Tezcatlipoca either played a part in Quetzalcoatl's downfall or else triumphed over him, apparently establishing his authority, if not his legitimacy, over the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. In fact, the archaeological evidence seems to support the claims made in the *Histoire du mechique* that Cuauhquechollan had been an important civil-religious center at that time. Lastly, after the fall of Tollan, the man-god, Xelhua, led the Nonoalca Chichimecas to their new homeland in Tehuacan, carrying with them the ritual paraphernalia of Quetzalcoatl, and founding Cuauhquechollan along the way. The *Codex Ríos* is the only source that places Xelhua in Cholollan, but it is the same Xelhua who founded Cuauhquechollan.

Tezcatlipoca was the god in whom was exhibited “both omnipotence and caprice, the most dangerous of all combinations”.⁸⁴ Although he was both feared and adored by all, a festival in his honor was celebrated regularly by the nobility, “for only the ruling classes could claim the rights of arbitrary and freakish

⁸⁴ Brundage, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

will, the god's earmark".⁸⁵ Tezcatlipoca, the god of discord, had, indeed, prevailed over Quetzalcoatl, and the accounts could be interpreted as a "subversive genealogy",⁸⁶ especially as it relates to the claim that a ruler's legitimacy could be contested within a city-state. But, because the contestation was between Tenochtitlan, Tlaxcallan, and Tetzaco, an equally plausible interpretation is that the defeat of Quetzalcoatl by Tezcatlipoca—kingmaker on a whim—was "proof" that he had arbitrarily favored either one city-state or the other. Upon the arrival of the Spaniards, the Fifth Sun had not been destroyed or, at least, not in the expected manner, and the contradiction between Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca had not been resolved. But, for all three city-states, Cuauhquechollan still figured prominently in the dialectic of legitimation of their political boundaries and authority, if not legitimacy, both past and present.

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⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Carrasco, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

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