

PRESENTATION

Herón Pérez Martínez

The topic of the Thematic Section of issue 122 of *Relaciones* is the legitimization of lands by indigenous peoples in colonial Mexico. The articles approach this theme by examining *Títulos Primordiales* (Primordial Land Titles), the name given to documents that have constituted the legal foundation of agrarian communities from the 16th century to the present through struggles over land tenure that have been played out in the courts. These are invaluable historical documents rooted in the universes and aesthetic imaginaries that gave birth to Mesoamerica's myths and magical world. Several kinds of records are involved, some written by indigenous peoples themselves to narrate such acts as the founding of their nations, the establishment of their authorities and the demarcation of their territories. Many were written originally in indigenous languages and are rather difficult to understand because of their derivation from the Mesoamerican tradition; but reading, deciphering and interpreting this treasured material is precisely the task that the authors of the articles in the Thematic Section have decided to shoulder. Thus, the topic examined in this issue of our journal is the struggle over land tenure.

Land is the fundamental reality of mankind because of the key role it plays in creating and interpreting human existence. Indeed, mythologies conceive of land as a Mother because the gods and all things cultural derive from her, and because she is the primary food-giver. During the Neolithic in cultures such as those of the Ancient Near East, agriculture and animal husbandry were discovered, developments that soon led to a sedentary lifestyle. The *Homeric Hymns* sing to the land as the Mother of all beings, "to those who nourish all that exists. As she feeds

all the creatures in the world, those that walk on the firm earth, those that float on the sea's currents, and those that fly."¹

In truth, the most important and ancient mythologies begin by recounting the origin of the land, which is often taken to be the Mother of all that exists, while the rain, according to other mythological traditions, is engendered by the heavens to fertilize the earth and so produce the vegetation that allows humans to be born and inhabit it. The mythology P of Genesis describes the creator's command to the earliest human beings that they not only populate the earth, but also conquer and appropriate it for their use. Elohim said: "remember that I have granted you all manner of vegetation that germinates through seeds and is found over all the face of the earth [and] all species of trees with fruits produced from seeds so that they serve you as food". Indeed, human history has revolved to a great degree around the issue of land and the heated battles that have raged as men strive to possess pieces of it. It was the possession of land that allowed Egypt to develop geometry and Greece to give birth to rhetoric: land tenure is essential for humans to feel that they have a home and a place where they can develop. For these reasons, this issue of *Relaciones* deals with the question of landholding and the struggles it has generated.

The first article, "The *Título* of San Mateo Capulalpan, Oaxaca. Actuality and Authenticity of a Primordial Title" by María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi, focuses on analyzing the *Título* of San Mateo Capulalpan (in the modern state of Oaxaca) based on two time periods. The first takes the reader to the moment when the title was presented before the Agrarian Tribunals together with a request for an expert analysis (*peritaje*) that would confirm its authenticity (1996). The second goes back to the mid-18th century, when the original document was drafted. After a reflection on the use of *Títulos Primordiales* in contemporary agrarian litigation, the article attempts to show the contradictions that have arisen between the decisions handed down by agrarian courts and the problems inherent in the genre of the *Títulos Primordiales* itself.

The essay begins by clarifying the different meanings of the term *Título Primordial* that are now in circulation. According to the author, the name probably came into use during Mexico's agrarian reform process,

¹In Mircea Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas*.

when towns were asked to present their ancient titles as a means of securing recognition, confirmation and title to their lands. The agrarian reform program was designed to benefit localities that had been divested of territories and others that suffered the same fate with the enactment of the Reform Laws of 1856 and later depredations by haciendas. However, the law soon began to be used also by communities involved in disputes over landholdings. The article thus explores the meanings and values of the expression *título primordial*; documents that have constituted the legal basis of people's struggles for territory in the courts. These records were written in indigenous languages to narrate the origins of the people, the establishment of their authorities and the demarcation of their lands. In the case of San Mateo Capulalpan, the term *Título Primordial* used to refer to an ancient document that preserves tradition coincides with the main record that the community has used to claim rights over certain lands, and it is in this latter sense that the text employs the term *Título Primordial*. The author ends with several more general reflections, a reproduction of the title of San Mateo Capulalpan and details of a map of Capulalpan dated in 1599.

In the second article, "Settlement and Transition in the *Lienzo* of San Jerónimo Otlá, Coixtlahuaca", Sebastián van Doesburg presents a thorough philological and hermeneutic study of a pictographic *lienzo* (canvas). Only recently did the existence of this pictographic canvas come to light in the community of San Jerónimo Otlá, a dependency of Coixtlahuaca. It is thus the thirteenth text of the so-called "Coixtlahuaca Group". The essay describes the *lienzo* and seeks to contextualize it with the help of archival documentation and comparisons to other records from the collection. Several themes regarding the dramatic transformation of the community set off by the reorganizations and redefinitions that occurred in the 16th century are analyzed. The earliest information recalls relations between the nobles of Otlá and one of Capulalpan's founders in the 13th century, and thus may reflect the support that those nobles provided during the conquest of the southern part of that basin. The most recent data concern the creation of the present town that occurred in 1591 upon the separation of a congregation that had existed before 1556.

This essay concludes its orthodox exegesis that clings to the postulate "describe so as to interpret" by pointing out that the Nativitas and Otlá

lienzos do not always help to clarify the situation. Indeed, as the author states, we may question whether or not these authoritative records reflect an “original” or “primordial” situation of absolute value. Rather, he suggests, it would seem that such documents were elaborated at a particular juncture in the history of the communities involved; namely, just after the conquest when they suffered a series of profound changes that obliged them to define their boundaries. Thus, we are not dealing with a time of stability or consensus among localities but, rather, a period of struggles and discussions in which the governors of the *Yuhuitayu* strove to reach agreement as to the characteristics of their communities in relation to their populations and territory.

At the end of his text, van Doesburg speculates that the *lienzo* was part of an effort by the group of nobles it represents (or their descendants) to define a particular territory at the precise moment in which they confronted the congregation at Pocotla. Perhaps the document was part of a negotiation at the indigenous court of Coixtlahuaca by nobles from Otlá to secure a strip of land. However, in the absence of more specific records, the details of this negotiation remain up in the air. Whatever the case, in general terms both the *Lienzo de Nativitas* and the *Lienzo de Otlá* can be seen as documents in which two colonial indigenous communities attempted to redefine themselves as territorial units.

The Thematic Section ends with an article by Amos Megged, “The ‘Memory Tale’ of the Axoxpanecas (Late Postclassic to 1610 A.D.)”, which examines one of the shortest yet also most interesting exemplars of the *Títulos Primordiales* of Nahuatl origin; in this case one that comes to us from the town of Santo Tomás Ajusco (Tlalpan), a place known in ancient times as Axoxpan. Here the author, in contrast to earlier studies of the Ajusco title, proposes the goal of attaining an understanding of this unique title and its intimate relationship with a Nahuatl cultural patrimony. Concretely, Megged concentrates on the essential meaning of the Nahuatl conceptualization of time and space. The copy held at the Lafragua Library in Puebla, with its complete transcription of the original, probably made in 1768, was recently uncovered by Lidia E. Gómez García. While translating the Chimalpococa (at the BAH) and Lafragua versions, it became quite useful to emphasize the variations between the two.

The stated objective of this article is to improve our current understanding of both this unique historical *título* and its close links to the broader cultural heritage of Nahuatl culture. Concretely, the essay delves into the meaning of Nahuatl concepts of time and space as they are conceived in this text, and the characteristically Nahuatl way of “transcending” into other epochs, an aspect that has been largely overlooked up to now. Thus, Megged’s essay on the *Título Primordial* of Santo Tomás Ajusco is concerned much more with understanding its authors’ conceptualization of time and the form of projection-procuration they used to bring themes that were recurring in remote epochs, relocate them within the time frame of the first decade of the 17th century, and then insert them into a pre-foundational phase, than with determining the exact date when the title was drawn up. The author ends by suggesting a hypothesis as to the candidates who most likely had a hand in drafting this particular *Título*. He believes it was the product of a close collaboration between local nobles in the Ajusco and Friar Luis Lozano, the guardian of the Franciscan convent at Xochimilco, to which the Santo Tomás Ajusco congregation pertained.

Turning now to the Documents Section, we present Miguel Ángel Ruiz Barrio’s complete transcription of the “Dispute between Totomihuacan and the Principles of Cholula”, a document dated in the mid-16th century that forms part of the so-called *Legajo* (collection) *Chimaltecuhtli-Casco*. This *Legajo* is an unpublished corpus currently held in a private collection. It contains several documents from the 16th and 17th centuries, most of which concern the family we call Chimaltecuhtli-Casco, a form that contains the original colonial surname –Chimaltecuhtli– which was later changed to Casco. All the records involved share a common element: the city of Cholula and, more specifically, the lands located along the banks of the Atoyac River in the region known as Quauhtepec. For all these reasons, this documentation provides not only novel information on the Cholula region, but also allows us to follow the Chimaltecuhtli-Casco family and the Quauhtepec Ranch that belonged to them until 1661. The document presented here explores one of the two disputes that are documented in the historical record; one we shall call the “Dispute between Totomihuacan and the Principles of Cholula”, dated *ca.* 1561.

The General Section includes an article by Carlos Alcalá Ferráez entitled "The City of Campeche through the Eyes of Foreign Travelers, 1834-1849". Here, the author explores travel literature, as he is convinced that such writings are related to the expansionist policies of Old World nations and the United States. The contribution of such pennings consists in the fact that many features of the local flora and fauna and several characteristics of the inhabitants of the region with their respective customs and social structures are all described in some detail. For the case of the city of Campeche, earlier studies done in the area of the evolution of urbanism have concentrated on analyzing the central square (*plaza principal*) and the walled compound (*recinto amurallado*), while the objective of this research is to reconstruct the city of Campeche by analyzing the impressions that foreign visitors gained between 1834 and 1849.

The article tells us that travelers' tales were one result of European interests in such areas as botanical, zoological, historical and archaeological research. European visitors who ventured out into those lands wrote, above all, for a European public and thus became intermediaries between a world that was still new and rather exotic and a readership that considered itself different and civilized. It was in the 19th century that European civilization increasingly grew to think of itself as the very incarnation of human destiny, one that was sure to extend out from the industrialized, capitalist countries towards the savage periphery. In this sense, travelers accompanied the process of accumulating scientific knowledge and seeking new natural realities, and gained a new vision on the exploitation of new natural resources, of the civilizing process, and of evangelization among such backward peoples. The descriptions that those visitors wrote up during their travels on the American continent embrace two distinct realities: first, that of the place observed; and, second, the mentality of each locality. For the case of Campeche, using travel books as primary sources complements the information that has been gathered on the topic of the urban history of the city and has made it possible, from another perspective, to attain a more detailed approach to aspects related to daily life, as this literature presents a view distinct from that of other writings, like newspapers, gazettes, printings and official records. It is in this way, then, that these tales conjoin opinion, taste, ideology and the objective for which they were written.

This issue of *Relaciones* closes with the essay, "Migratory Networks or Relative Deprivation: The Etiology of Tamaulipecan Migration through the H-2A Program", by Simón Pedro Izcara Palacios. This text suggests that the theories of migratory networks and relative deprivation emphasize the factors found on the supply side of labor availability because they focus on migrants' communities of origin. Both theories share the view that the new conditions that migration generates increase the likelihood of additional migratory movements. Network theory explains migration as a result of social capital. The relative deprivation model, in contrast, focuses on migratory phenomena as a consequence of social inequality. Though the concept of migratory networks has been described as one of the key factors for explaining migration, in the case of rural workers from the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas who work in U.S. agriculture with H-2A visas, the theory of relative deprivation offers a more adequate explanation. Tamaulipecan workers enrolled in the H-2A program see it as a means of improving their lot in relative terms, compared to their reference group.

This essay concludes by suggesting that the most effective recruiting mechanism that U.S. employers have found is to depend on recommendations by workers who have already migrated with H-2A visas. Hence, whenever a worker from Tamaulipas emigrates by means of the H-2A program, his act often sets off new migratory processes in his home community, as new migrants opt to participate in the H-2A program also, not because they have suffered a reduction in their wellbeing, but because goods that they had never before been able to own now generate feelings of deprivation simply because one's friends and neighbors who have gone to work in the U.S. have acquired such articles.

Traducción de Paul C. Kersey Johnson