



One More Account of the Conquest of Mexico: Ethnohistorical and Anthropological Analysis of the *Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*

Anastasia V. Kalyuta¹

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Abstract. This essay focuses on ethnohistorical and anthropological analysis of the *Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*, a set of related documents from the Archivo General de Indias. This record was composed in Mexico in June 8-15, 1536, as *probanza de meritos* (proof of merits) of don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui, the colonial cacique of Coyoacán in the Basin of Mexico, his elder brother and predecessor don Hernando, and their father, Cuauhpopoca, the pre-Hispanic ruler of the town. Although made in full accordance with Castilian legal procedure of that time, the *Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui* is completely based on the earliest indigenous testimonies about the first stage of Conquest ever known.

Keywords: The Conquest of Mexico, indigenous nobility.

[es] Una versión más de la Conquista de México: análisis etnohistórico y antropológico de la *Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*

Resumen. Este ensayo se centra en el análisis etnohistórico y antropológico de la *Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*, un grupo de documentos relacionados entre sí del Archivo General de Indias. Esta documentación se redactó en la Ciudad de México en 8-15 de junio de 1536 como *probanza de méritos* a favor de Don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui, el cacique colonial del *altepetl* de Coyoacán en el suroeste de la Cuenca de México, su hermano mayor y predecesor Don Hernando y su padre Cuauhpopoca, que gobernaba Coyoacán en vísperas de la Conquista. A pesar de ser realizada de acuerdo con el procedimiento jurídico castellano de aquel tiempo, la *Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui* se basa completamente en los testimonios indígenas sobre la primera etapa de la Conquista más tempranos que conocemos hasta la fecha.

Palabras clave: Conquista de México, nobleza indígena.

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¹ The Russian Museum of Ethnography. anastasiakalyuta@mail.ru

1. Introduction

Composed in June 8-10, 1536 the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*» from the *altepetl* of Coyoacán in the southwestern portion of the Basin of Mexico is unique in many aspects (Figure 1). First of all, we have very few accounts of the Conquest that incorporate the active participation of indigenous informants in the 1530's. This document is one of these few records. Second, to our knowledge this document is probably the earliest written record in which the theme of prophecy related to the arrival of the Spaniards appears in quite explicit form. Third, this source presents its own version of Cortés's march to Tenochtitlan and the events of the *Noche Triste*, one that in some points curiously contradicts other well-known accounts of conquistadors, Spanish friars, and their native informants. Finally this document has received surprisingly little attention from scholars. It was published in its complete form only once, in a book by Emma Pérez Rocha and Rafael Tena entitled *La nobleza indígena del Centro de México después de la Conquista* (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 103-122). Before this book, only Francisco Paso y Troncoso published the letter written by Don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui to Charles V with the questionnaire in the *Anales del Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía* in 1926 (Paso y Troncoso 1926, 5: 354-359).



Figure 1: City-states of the Basin of Mexico. The *altepetl* of Coyoacán is marked with star (Gutiérrez 2015: map 24.1).

Today the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztolinqui*» is kept in the General Archive of the Indies in Seville, in the section Real Patronato 55. Unfortunately its current state of conservation is very poor, and many words are completely illegible (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 111). It is a rather short record composed of just 20 folios. From a formalist point of view the document in question is a typical *probanza de méritos* (proof of merits). It was written at the request of the cacique of Coyoacán, Don Juan de Guzmán Itztolinqui, the younger son of the Prehispanic ruler, Cuauhpopoca, in full accordance with the Castilian legal procedure of inquiry established for such cases. However, all the witnesses were selected from indigenous elites of Coyoacán among the servants of Don Juan and his deceased father. The main purpose of this record was to convince the Royal Audiencia of Mexico, the viceroy of New Spain Antonio de Mendoza, and the emperor Charles V himself through the presented evidence of the necessity to take Coyoacán away from Hernando Cortés and put it under the Crown.

The relations between Cortés and Coyoacán were particularly close. Coyoacán was his headquarters during the siege of Tenochtitlan and in the first years after the Conquest, when Cortés was the *capitán general* of the newly founded colony of New Spain. In that period Coyoacán was the administrative center of the new Spanish domain. Later in 1529 Coyoacán was included in Cortés's land grant (Gibson 1964: 416). However, the native residents of Coyoacán and their *cacique*, Don Juan de Guzmán, were not very happy with their master, although it was Cortés who put Don Juan in his office. The ambitious enterprises of the Marqués del Valle regularly resulted in grave financial problems and a consequent increase in the tax burden levied on his Indian vassals. It looks as if the situation became especially critical in 1536, for in that year, in the very beginning of summer, Cortés was returning from his California expedition, which turned out to be a complete failure. To pay for this California adventure the Marqués borrowed large sums of money. For example, one of his friends— and possibly his son-in-law, the former *regidor* of Mexico, Juan de Salcedo— loaned Cortés 10500 golden *pesos* for the construction of a small fleet to explore the Pacific Coast of Mexico and the present Gulf of California (Martínez 1994, 2: 381). As two of the three ships that formed the fleet were lost at sea, this investment ended up at the bottom of the Gulf of California, also known today as the Sea of Cortés, and Cortés was more indebted than before. Also at this time, the judicial process against Cortés that began in 1529 continued on, and his creditor, Juan de Salcedo, was among the witnesses for the defense, who, nevertheless, could change his side, being disappointed by so ineffective use of his funds (Martínez 1994, 2: 380). Under these circumstances the only way to repay his debts, at least in part, was to squeeze more from his indigenous vassals. Coyoacán, located just 1.5 leagues (about 6.27 kilometer) from the city of Mexico, was an easy target, and we suspect that the Marqués del Valle's impending return did not please its native inhabitants (see Figure 1). In his letter to Charles V, Don Juan de Guzmán bitterly complained of Cortés: «nos trata como a esclavos él y todos sus mayordomos ... y son tributos tan excesivos que los más de mis vasallos ...se me van por los montes por los cuales mueren» (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 104). There was some hope for Don Juan de Guzmán and his afflicted subjects, for at that moment the position of Cortés was rather vulnerable, due to continuing legal prosecution. Thus, Don Juan might have decided that the time for action had come. In the beginning of June 1536 he presented a petition to viceroy Antonio de Mendoza to start an investigation into the

services rendered to the conquistadors by his father Cuauhpopoca, his older brother don Hernando (also deceased), and himself. Antonio de Mendoza, who was no friend of Cortés, received the petition favorably, and ordered Alonso de Contreras, the *alcalde ordinario* of Mexico, to start an inquiry, using the questionnaire prepared by Don Juan, on June 8, 1536. However, Alonso Contreras did not consider the case to deserve his personal attention, so he handed the inquiry to his notary (*escribano*), Juan Fernández del Castillo, who carried out the whole procedure.

Thus, the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*» includes the following documents:

- The aforementioned petition of Don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui to Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza.
- The order of Antonio de Mendoza to Alonso de Contreras to begin the investigation on June 8, 1536.
- The *auto de cabeza*: presentation of the viceroy's letter to the *alcalde ordinario* Alonso de Contreras on June 8, 1536.
- The order of the *alcalde ordinario*, Alonso de Contreras, to Don Juan de Guzmán to present his witnesses and his questionnaire dated on the same day.
- The questionnaire, consisting of 8 questions, stressing the services of Don Juan, his older brother don Hernando, and their father Cuauhpopoca to Cortés and the Spanish Crown, presented on the same day, June 8, 1536.
- The presentation of witnesses and their declarations dating June 8 to June 10, 1536. The first witness, Pedro Tlillantzin, declared on June 8; the second one, Pedro Atempanecatli (Atempanecatli in manuscript), and the third, Diego Hueitecutli (Guytecutla in original), on June 9; the fourth, Andrés Mecatecatli, and the final witnesses, Martin Huycotzin, gave their testimonies on June 10 (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 106-107, 110, 112-113, 115, 117, 119). Pedro Tlillantzin and Andrés Mecatecatli were residents of Coyoacán, and the three other witnesses resided in subject settlements, named in the document as Aticpac, Tequemecan, and Tacuba (possibly Tacubaya) (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 110, 113, 115, 117). As for their social position, four witnesses are referred to in the document as *principales* —the Castilian term used for *pipiltin*, the Nahuatl hereditary nobility and as either *vasallos* (subjects) or *criados* (servants) of Cuauhpopoca and Don Juan (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 106-107, 110, 112-113, 115, 117, 119). The youngest witness, Pedro Tlillantzin, testified that he was born around 1506; therefore, he was an adolescent of 13-14 at the time of the Spanish arrival (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 110). The oldest was Diego Hueitecutli, born around 1481, who thus met the conquistadors as a mature man of 38-39 (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 117). The remaining three: Pedro Atempanecatli, Andrés Mecatecatli, and Martin Huycotzin — were born between 1495 and 1501 and encountered the Spaniards as youths of 19 to 23 years (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 112-113, 115). All of them spoke through an interpreter, the Spaniard Pedro de Vergara, and none of them was well enough acquainted with alphabetical writing to sign his testimony. Therefore, from this evidence one can suspect that the witnesses were guided mainly by their personal experience and partly by native oral tradition concerning the conquest events. For comparison it's worthy to remind that the first version of Book XII of the *General History of the Things of New Spain*, now lost, was

finished about 1565-69, and the surviving version is much later, dated to 1585 (D'Olwer y Cline 1973: 191-192).

- The seventh document was a certification of the validity of the evidence presented by Alonso de Contreras.
- The final record was the *Petition of don Juan de Guzmán Itztolinqui* to Charles V asking him to take Coyoacán away from Cortes and put it under the authority of the Crown. This document is the latest of the eight, dating to June 15, 1536 (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 103-105).

2. Don Juan's Version of the Conquest

The key arguments provided by the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztolinqui*» were the indispensable services given by the Coyoacán *tlahtoani* Cuauhpopoca to Cortés and the Spanish Crown. The record boldly affirms that Cortés and his men were indebted to the *tlahtoani* of Coyoacán not only for the conquest of Tenochtitlan, but also for their rescue from the besieged palace of Axayacatl during the *Noche Triste* in June 1520. Questions 3 and 4 of the questionnaire deal directly with the subject. Question 3 states that:

«... al tiempo que vino el Marqués del Valle y los cristianos a conquistar e ganar esta Nueva España el dicho Quavpupuca fue a la Veracruz por mandado de Monteçuma, como capitan que era suyo a traer al dicho Marqués y a los cristianos que con él venyan el qual los truxo e guyo e amparó por todos los camynos por do benyeron, hasta llegar en esta çibdad de México con muchas astuçias e maneras para que no los mataran los pueblos que estaban por los camynos, los cuales estaban alborotados con la venida de los dichos cristianos, con mucho amor y boluntad como si el dicho Quavpupuca fuera cristiano como cada uno dellos» (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 108).

Even more remarkable is how question 4 relates the dramatic events of the *Noche Triste*, on June 30, 1520, when the conquistadors escaped from Tenochtitlan:

«... al tiempo que los cristianos salyeron huyendo desta çiudad de México quando los naturales de México les diesen guerra y los echaron della, el dicho Quavpupuca les dixo e aconsejó con gran amor que les tenya a los dichos cristianos: «Sabed que os tienen alçadas las puentes e no podeys dexar de morir, syno salen por (la) calçada de Tacuba. Porque más presta tomeys la tierra firme, e para saltar las açequias de agua que hay en el camino yo os haré dos puentes, para lo qual no quyero más de dos cristianos ballesteros que bayan conmigo para que me anparen a mí e a los myos al tiempo que ponga las dichas puentes. E que las puso e después al pasar que pasaban los cristianos, el dicho Quavpupuca les ayudó e faboreció a todos con sus basallos amigos e paryentes peleando como valiente capitán, e por los faboresçer le mataron a él e a los más de los suyos, la gente del dicho Monteçuma porque lo tnenyan por henemigo por que faboresçia a los dichos cristianos por la qual cavsa, si el dicho Quavpupuca no hisiera las dichas puentes e diera a los dichos cristianos el dicho consejo y los faboresçiera él y los suyos hasta la muerte, todos los dichos cristianos murieron y la dicha çibdad de México no se ganara» (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 108-109).

This version strongly contradicts both Spanish and indigenous accounts about crucial events of 1519-1520. However, there are also interesting points of coincidence between the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztolinqui*» and records written by conquistadors who participated in Cortes's expedition. These coincidences make

the whole account appear authentic, although the significance of Cuauhopopoca's aid to Cortés must have been strongly exaggerated, due to the aforementioned purpose of the document and the traditional Nahuatl view of history as centered on a certain distinct *altepeltl*; in the given case, on Coyoacán. Notably there are fewer common points between the version of the *Información* concerning Cortés's arrival into Tenochtitlan on the one hand, and on the other, the accounts composed with the active participation of Nahuatl informants in the second half of the XVIth century, including the aforementioned Book 12 of the *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España*. There are also curious discrepancies among the testimonies of the witnesses of the *Información* itself, which in my opinion provide some hints as to the actual course of events.

3. The Declarations of Witnesses

The first and youngest witness of the *Información*, Pedro Tlillantzin, was the only one who completely confirmed the version presented in the questionnaire of Don Juan Ixtlolinqui. He passionately stated that Cuauhopopoca was sent to Veracruz by Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin, who knew in advance that strangers would come and that Tenochtitlan would be theirs (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 110). To our knowledge this is the first documented allusion to the prophecies of impending Spanish arrival, unanimously repeated by the other 4 witnesses of the *«Información»*. Pedro Tlillantzin pointed out that it was only thanks to Cuauhopopoca's guidance that Cortés and his men could safely reach Tenochtitlan (Figure 2). He also stated that soon after his arrival in Tenochtitlan, Cortés seized both Motecuhzoma and Cuauhopopoca to secure the obedience of their subjects, and that he, Pedro Tlillantzin, heard this explication from Cortés's interpreters, who translated for Cortés during his interviews with Motecuhzoma (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 111). This could imply that the witness wanted to assure the notary, Juan Fernández del Castillo, that he had accurately presented the capture of Motecuhzoma and of his own master, Cuauhopopoca, as well. More interesting is that Pedro Tlillantzin attributes the initiative for saving the conquistadors not to Cuauhopopoca, but to Motecuhzoma. According to his testimony, one day after irruption of open conflict between Mexica and conquistadors Motecuhzoma

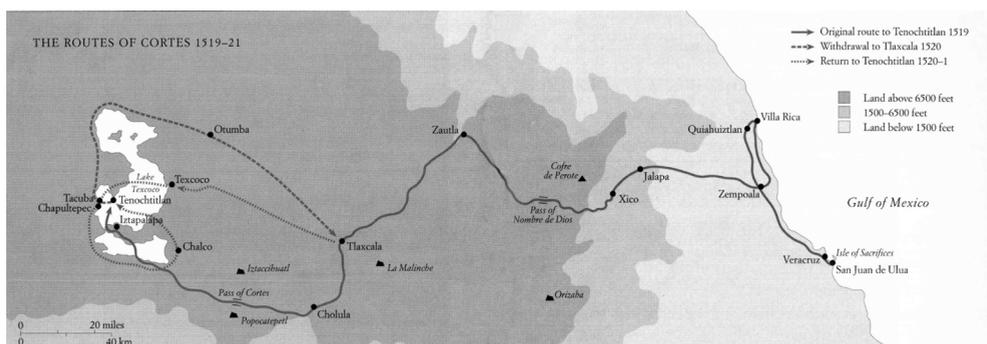


Figure 2: Cortés original route to Tenochtitlan in 1519, withdrawal to Tlaxcala in 1520 and return to Tenochtitlan in 1520-1521 (Wood 2002: 36-37).

ordered Cuauhopoca to inform Cortés that the only possible way to escape from Tenochtitlan was via the Tlacopan (Tacuba) causeway (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 111). Cuauhopoca obeyed willingly, and again offered Cortés his service as guide. Pedro Tlillantzin also confirmed that the Coyoacán *tlahtoani* asked Cortés to give him two crossbowmen for protection against Mexica spears and arrows. He also summoned his servants, including the witness, to cover the retreat. When Cuauhopoca, his servants, and the Spanish crossbowmen reached the Tlacopan causeway, they found it partly broken. And it was while Cuauhopoca was repairing the missing planks in the bridge that he was killed (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 111).

The other 4 witnesses gave somewhat different accounts, which in some ways undermine the version presented in the questionnaire. Their declarations can be resumed as following:

- When Motecuhzoma learned that Cortés and his men were staying in the city of Amaquemecan in Chalco, just 12 leagues (about 50, 16 kilometers) from Tenochtitlan, he sent for Cuauhopoca, who immediately arrived with his servants, among whom were the aforementioned witnesses.
- Motecuhzoma told Cuauhopoca that the Spanish arrival was predestined long ago, and ordered him to go to Amaquemecan to welcome the conquistadors, to give them food and presents, and to lead them to Tenochtitlan. Cuauhopoca obeyed and led the conquistadors from Amaquemecan by the safest paths.
- When the Mexica attacked the Spaniards in the palace of Axayacatl in June 1520, Motecuhzoma came to an *azotea* and tried to calm them, but he was immediately killed by a stone (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 113-114, 118). The witnesses disagreed about what happened later. Pedro Atempanecatli stated that Cuauhopoca, by his own initiative, told Cortés about the Tlacopan causeway as the only mode to escape alive. Diego Hueitecuhtli, Andrés Mecatecatli, and Martín Huycotzin mention a new personage in this narrative, the *tlahtoani* of Tlacopan, Totoquihuatzli, who in this source is referred to simply by his military title *tlacatecatli*. According to Diego Hueitecuhtli, it was Totoquihuatzli who advised Cortés to take Tlacopan causeway and to seek refuge in Tlacopan (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 116). Andrés Mecatecatli and Martín Huycotzin added a further modification to the version of the questionnaire, stating that Cortés by his own initiative went one night to his captives, Totoquihuatzli and Cuauhopoca, and asked them about a way to escape (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 118). However, all the witnesses agreed that Cuauhopoca showed the way to the conquistadors and was killed by the Mexica for this service at the Tlacopan causeway. Before his demise he predicted that the Spaniards would govern Mexico and demanded revenge for his death (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 118).

4. Conquistadores, friars and *pipiltin*: The Historical Backdrop of the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*»

Thus, in spite of its superficial simplicity, the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*» is an extremely complex document, which deserves to be examined from both ethnohistorical and anthropological perspectives and can yield very in-

teresting evidence. If one takes an ethnohistorical or even the traditional historical approach, intending to ascertain whether the reported events actually took place or not, it should be stressed that there is nothing improbable in the narrative of the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán*». Moreover, we can offer the following reconstruction of events, based on the text itself and its comparison with other colonial accounts:

1. The mission of Cuauhpopoca not to Veracruz but to Amaquemecan— could actually have taken place, although its importance and implications were extremely exaggerated due to the aforementioned Don Juan's interest in ridding his people of Cortés's oppressive power.

2. Equally the *tlahtoani* of Coyoacán with his remaining retinue could also have accompanied the conquistadors in their retreat, as did many other indigenous allies from the Valley of Mexico and the Tlaxcala-Puebla region. Like most of them, he could have become a target of Mexica revenge during the *Noche Triste*.

There are three main arguments in favor of these hypotheses. First of all, there is the striking similarity in the evidence presented by 4 of the 5 witnesses. Pedro Tlillantzin, who in our opinion was suspiciously young to have taken part in the reported events, perhaps depended too much on his master's favor and could have been simply forced to confirm the questions of the *interrogatorio* prepared by Don Juan. Other witnesses, however, were older than Don Juan and might have been less dependent on his favors. Diego Hueitecuhtli, for example, remembered his birth and exercised considerable influence in Coyoacán's government before Don Juan's succession to power. Actually, another witness, Martín Huycotzin, was one of the noblemen who elected Don Juan Itztloliqui as the *tlahtoani* of Coyoacan after the premature death of his older brother, don Hernando, in 1526. So they might have felt free to report what they actually remembered, even if it contradicted Don Juan's version.

Second, the testimonies of these 4 witnesses include some minor but significant details, which hardly could have been invented because there was no reason to invent them. For example, Diego Hueitecuhtli remembered that before departing to Amaquemecan, Cuauhpopoca sent him back to Coyoacán to bring his cloaks (*tilmatli*) for the upcoming journey (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 115). Nahuatl rulers used to change their cloaks several times in a day, and Cuauhpopoca obviously wanted to appear before the strangers in his best garments. One more curious point of coincidence: the second and the fourth witnesses, who presented their declaration separately, agreed that Cuauhpopoca was killed by a spear taken from the Spaniards (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 114, 118).

Third, as we noticed before, there are interesting parallels between the evidence of these 4 witnesses and the conquistadors' accounts, including the famous *Segunda Carta de Relación* of Hernando Cortés, dated October 30, 1520. Describing his short stay in Amecamecan in the Chalco region, Cortés wrote:

«...me partí a un pueblo... que se dice Amequeruca (that is Amaquemecan— A.K) que es de la provincia de Chalco ...muchas personas que parecían principales me vinieron allí a hablar diciéndome que Mutezuma su señor los había enviado para que me esperasen allí y me hiciesen proveer de todas las cosas necesarias» (Cortés 1852: 23)

The same episode is repeated in very similar way by the conquistadors Andrés de Tapia and Bernal Díaz del Castillo (Díaz del Castillo 1975: 275; Tapia 1866: 578).

Figure 3: Meeting of conquistadors with the messengers of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin near Coyoacán (Durán 1967 [1581]: f.208v).



Cuauhpopoca could really have been among these *principales* mentioned by Cortés. The individual of this name does appear as the *tlahtoani* of Coyoacán in the list of the *tlahtoque*, who ruled in the Basin of Mexico by Cortés's arrival recorded in the late XVIth century *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* (Bierhorst 1992, 1: 129). According to Motolinia, in that time this *altepetl* was in fifth rank among the city-states of the Basin of Mexico, and its *tlahtoani* formerly enjoyed Motecuhzoma's favor and confidence (Motolinia 1858: 182; 1903: 155-56). So there is nothing unlikely in his being trusted with so important a mission as to give an official welcome to the strangers. It is no surprise as well that neither Cortés nor any other conquistador distinguished Cuauhpopoca and his retinue among the many Mexica nobles, being only one among many embassies they already had received (Figure 3). As a matter of fact, Cortés, Andres de Tapia, and Bernal Díaz made an exception in this regard only for Cacamatzin, Motecuhzoma's nephew and the *tlahtoani* of Texcoco, the second center of the Triple Alliance and among them only Bernal Díaz didn't fail to mention his name (Cortés 1852: 23; Díaz del Castillo 1975: 277; Tapia 1866: 579).

However, there is one significant distinction between the *Información*'s account of Cuauhpopoca acting as a faithful guide for the conquistadors and the latter's accounts concerning Motecuhzoma's emissaries. None of Cortés's men, nor Cortés himself, doubted that Mexica nobles were playing a double game, and that their real purpose was to prevent the conquistadors from reaching Tenochtitlan. The Spaniards attributed to the Mexica emissaries the secret functions of spies and stressed that in every stage of the route to Tenochtitlan, they tried to stop them using bribery and/or intimidation. Cortés, Andrés de Tapia, Bernardino Vázquez de Tapia, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and fray Francisco de Aguilar also emphasize the repeated efforts of Motecuhzoma's ambassadors to disorient them and literally guide them to their destruction (Aguilar 1977: 75, 78; Cortés 1852: 19-20, 22-23; Díaz del Castillo 1975: 254, 259, 273, 275; Tapia 1866: 566-567, 574; Vázquez de Tapia 2003: 123). For example, we find in the *Breve Relación de la Conquista de la Nueva España* by fray Francisco de Aguilar the following vivid description: After leaving Cholula, Cortés

«...encontró con embajadores del dicho Motecsuma que le dijeron que venían a guiarle y mostrarle el camino e irse con ellos. El capitán los recibió con buen talante y llevolos consigo, y caminando una jornada los señores de Taxcala le tornaron a avisar, porque los embajadores le llevaban y guiaban por un camino áspero, de una montaña

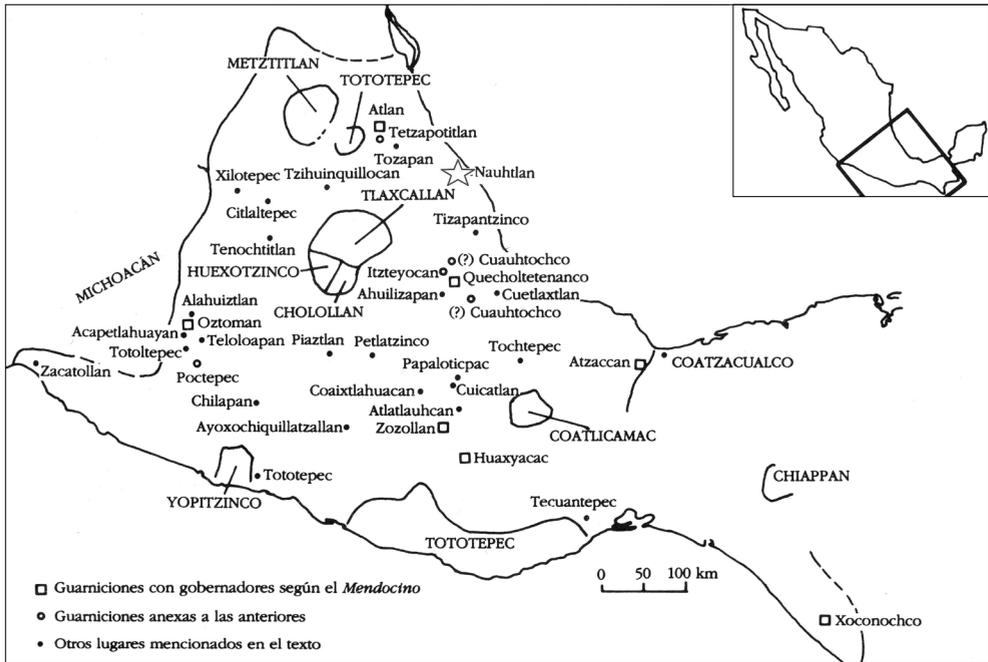


Figure 4: The Mexica Garrisons including Nauhtlan (with star) in 1519 (Carrasco 1969: fig. 30).

muy fragosa en cuyas concavidades y foso estaba encubierto el ejército para matarlos...» (Aguilar 1977: 78).

The failed attempts of Motecuhzoma's emissaries to stop, mislead, and destroy the conquistadors are described even more poignantly in some of the sources based on native accounts, in particular Book 12 of the *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* and Diego Durán's *Historia de las Indias de la Nueva España* (1581). Sahagún's Book XII speaks of the meeting of conquistadors with «varios principales» sent by Motecuhzoma near the foot of the volcano Popocatepetl, a meeting most probably in the Chalco region (León–Portilla 2008: 67). It mentions the presentation of gifts and more curiously the attempt of one nobleman called Tzihuacpopoca to pass for Motecuhzoma (León-Portilla 2008: 67). This account can be considered a variation of the same intention of misleading and disorienting the strangers.

The scheme was immediately discovered by Tlaxcallan and Totonac allies of Cortés, and the false Motecuhzoma was sent away with a direct threat to his lord (León-Portilla 2008: 108). The informants of Sahagún also relate how a group of sorcerers and magicians was sent by the *huey tlahtoani* to stop the strangers by using their magic powers. However, this «embassy» didn't even reach the Spanish camp after being notified by the god Tezcatlipoca about the impending fall of Tenochtitlan (León-Portilla 2008: 68-69).

Even more curious is the story related in chapter 82 of Diego Durán's chronicle, *Historia de las Indias de la Nueva España y Islas de Tierra Firme* (1581). Here we find, perhaps, the first example of fusing two distinct personages: Cuauhpopoca of Coyoacán with the much more famous governor of Nauhtlan, the Mexica garrison

son center on the northeastern coast of the Gulf of Mexico (Figure 4). The latter is described in the *Segunda Carta de Relación*, the *Relación hecha por señor Andrés de Tapia sobre la Conquista de México*, the «*Historia general de las Indias*» by Francisco López de Gómara, the *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* of Bernal Díaz, and the writings of later chroniclers Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, and Juan de Torquemada, as the leader of an attack on the Spanish garrison of Veracruz, the event which served as the official pretext used by Cortés to seize Motecuhzoma (Cervantes de Salazar 1975: 282; Cortés 1852: 26-27; López de Gómara 1852: 356; Tapia 1866: 584; Torquemada 1723, 1: 562). After this bold action, Cortés commanded that the governor of Nautlan be brought to Tenochtitlan, where he was prosecuted and eventually executed (Cortés 1852: 27; Díaz del Castillo 1975: 308-309; López de Gómara 1852: 356-57; Tapia 1866: 584). The name of this ill-fated governor is transcribed as Qualpopoca in the *Segunda Carta de Relación* of Cortés and the «*Historia general de las Indias*» by López de Gómara, Quetzalpopoca in the «*Historia Verdadera de las Cosas de la Nueva España*» of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and Coahuatpopoca Tlacochtli in the *Quinta Relación bis*» of Domingo Francisco Chimalpahin (Chimalpahin 2003, 1: 410; Cortés 1852: 26-27; Díaz del Castillo 1975: 309; López de Gómara 1852: 351, 353).

Durán's variant of the story is a truly amazing mixture of the version of the *Información de don Juan Ixtlolinqui* and the almost canonical version elaborated by Cortés and the authors, who wrote their accounts based on his letter. According to Durán, the governor of Nautlan, who in his *historia* is called Coatpopoca, invited Cortés to his town. Cortés asked Coatpopoca to show him the most direct way to Tenochtitlan (Durán 1994: 517). Coatpopoca agreed, but secretly he planned to destroy the Spaniards and led them to the rocks and cliffs, where two horsemen fell off. When his perfidious plan was discovered and Cortés wanted to arrest him, Coatpopoca fled (Durán 1994: 517). Cortés then accused Motecuhzoma of commanding the treason against him and demanded Coatpopoca's capture. When Cortés arrived in Tenochtitlan, Motecuhzoma arrested Coatpopoca and had him torn to pieces as a traitor (Durán 1994: 518). Finally, in the XVIIth century *Historia chichimeca* of Fernando Alva Ixtlilxochitl, two personages are completely fused into one. Based generally on Francisco López de Gómara's report, Ixtlilxochitl added his own suggestions, stating:

«Quauhpopocatzin señor de Coyoacan uno de los grandes del imperio que asistía en Nautlan y estaba a su cargo el gobierno de las costas del Mar del Norte, había mandado matar a cuatro españoles que iban en compañía del capitán Pedro Dirsio, camino de Veracruz, según sus cartas que Cortés tenía consigo...» (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1891-92, 2: 378).

However, Ixtlilxochitl's contemporary, Domingo Francisco Chimalpahin, in his «*Séptima Relación*» and «*Quinta Relación bis*» still speaks clearly about two different persons. In the first *relación* he states:

«The Year 8 Rabbit: Then don Juan de Guzman Yztlolinqui was made the ruler of Coyoacán... that one was the son of Cuauhpopocatzin, who was the ruler of Coyoacán» (Chimalpahin 2003, 2: 170).

In the «*Quinta Relación bis*» Chimalpahin briefly remarks:

«Then don Fernando Cortés arrived... and they burnt the ruler of Nautlan Coahuatpopoca Tlacochtli» (Chimalpahin 2003, 2: 410).

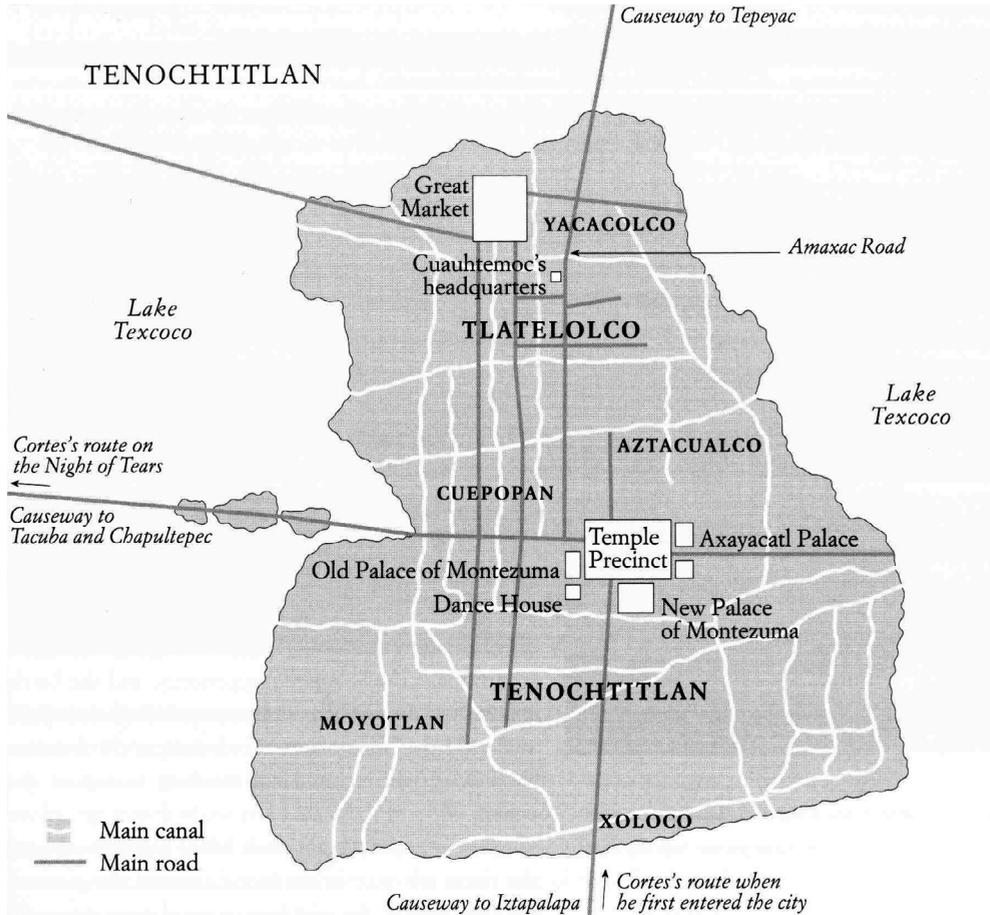


Figure 5: The Map of Tenochtitlan (Wood 2002: 89).

Turning to the «*Información*» version of the *Noche Triste* and preceding events, it should be stressed again that there is nothing improbable in this story, although for the conquistadors it could not have had the importance it held for the Coyoacán elite. The Tlacopan causeway was indeed the shortest way to the mainland, being only half a league in length, that is, about 2.09 km (Motolinia 1903: 131). Meanwhile the northern causeway to Azcapotzalco was one league long, and the southern causeway to Iztlapalapan was 2 leagues, or approximately 8.36 km (Figure 5) (Cortés 1852: 25, 31; Motolinia 1903: 131; López de Gómara 1852: 347). On its eastern side Tenochtitlan was surrounded by water, such that the passage of Cortés's troops with their artillery, horses, hostages and booty in that direction was absolutely impossible. Suspicion is raised only because the account presumes that Cortés, usually so attentive to the specific details of his environment, didn't notice the differences in the causeways during his 7-month stay in Tenochtitlan. As for corroborating the other evidence provided by the *Información*'s witnesses, the imprisonment of the Coyoacán *tlahtoani* together with Motecuhzoma is vaguely

mentioned by Toribio de Motolinia in his *Memoriales* (Motolinia 1903: 156). As for Cuauhpopoca's fate during the *Noche Triste*, no conquistador reported the aid of any captured indigenous leader in their escape from Tenochtitlan, for quite obvious reasons. Even before the end of Conquest this truly catastrophic retreat was reinterpreted by Cortés as an outstanding example of Spanish courage and indomitable spirit in the face of the most desperate circumstances. Later, this episode got the aura of a miracle, irrefutable proof of the intervention of Divine Providence in Cortés's enterprise. «Y milagrosamente Nuestro Señor nos libró y llevó en salvo a Tlaxcala, a donde, si los halláramos de guerra, según íbamos cansados y heridos, no se escapara ninguno de nosotros», wrote Bernardino Vázquez de Tapia (2003: 133). In such a context the aid of an Indian, however noble and loyal, would look out of place as it diminished the roles of both Providence and Spanish bravery. Moreover, fray Francisco de Aguilar went so far as to affirm that after Motecuhzoma's demise, all the other high-ranking hostages were killed with the consent of Cortés (Aguilar 1977: 89-90). Nevertheless, the chronicler clearly contradicted himself just one line below, when stating that the corpses of hostages were carried off by certain Indians, 'who remained (alive) and who weren't killed' (*ciertos indios que habían quedado que no mataron*) (Aguilar 1977: 90). Theoretically Cuauhpopoca and his servants could have been among these survivors, especially if he had agreed to guide the conquistadors through the most dangerous places. Actually in the Florentine Codex we find a certain Tialtecatzin, a Tepaneca nobleman, described as «one who guided, one who directed, one who went showing and pointing the ways for Spaniards,» who was killed for this service by the Mexica near Tlacopan (León-Portilla 2008: 103). Taking into account that before the creation of the Triple Alliance, Coyoacán was a part of the Tepanecan empire headed by Azcapotzalco, and even later, in the *Memorial de los pueblos de Tlacopan* (2000) it is still listed as one of the city-states which formed the Tepanec domain within the «Aztec empire,» the Tepanec origins of the Coyoacan *tlahtoani* are very probable, and in this case a reference to him as the conquistador's guide as a Tepaneca is quite natural (Pérez Rocha y Tena 2000: 249). The name of this personage in Book XII looks more like an honorific than a personal name, and as it well known that the titles of Nahuatl rulers were often used as substitutes for their names (Alvarado Tezozomoc 1944: 57; Durán 1967, 2: 97; Sahagún 1997: 81-2; Schroeder 1991: 170-73, 183-84).

Having reconstructed the historical and ethnohistorical background of the «*Información de don Juan de Guzmán Itztlolinqui*,» it's necessary to say a few words about its more profound hermeneutic content reflected in the declarations of the witnesses more explicitly than in the questionnaire with its pragmatic purpose. The witness testimony evidences the emergence of the mental processes which finally led to the eschatological views in Book XII and the «Cronica X» tradition. Even from a few statements in the *Información* we can deduce that the witnesses were in many respects still the men of Preconquest times, having received their traditional education before the Conquest and being but slightly acculturated in the first decade after it. That is why we stressed so much their total lack of acquaintance with alphabetical writing and their ignorance of Castilian. These means of interethnic communication and respective influences were in greater part closed to them. Thus, it is likely that we have to begin with the first stage of rethinking the Conquest experience among the native elite of the Basin of Mexico, for in this stage we find the motives that were to be further developed in the second half of the XVI century. The main theme is,

of course, the impending arrival of a new race destined to replace the Mexica and their allies as the overlords in Mexico. This theme is typical among Mesoamerican peoples with their cyclic view of history, in which each succeeding era is characterized by the domination of a certain group of human beings who, by the end of that cycle, cede power to newcomers. So it's not surprising that this motif is repeated again and again in the declarations of witnesses. Guiding the Spaniards, Cuauhopoca doesn't just fulfill the immediate order of Motecuhzoma. From the moment he knew from the latter that the Spanish arrival was predestined long ago, he acted as an instrument in the unending process of changing historical cycles with respective shifts of power. Even badly wounded at Tlacopan, he predicted Spanish victory and the Mexica downfall, requiring of their subjects to serve the new race of people, who are destined to be the lords of Mexico. Tragically he was also doomed to perish with his lord Motecuhzoma, and it is highly symbolic that in this version he, like Motecuhzoma, is killed by the Mexica but with a Spanish spear. Finally, his postmortem fusion with the governor of Nautlan in the works of Duran and Ixtlilxochitl, another victim of the Conquest, shows all the ambivalence of Nahuatl attitudes toward the Spanish arrival, as the impending conclusion of an era and the deepest tragedy, ending an entire way of life and traditions inherited from ancestors.

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