

Tlacaelel's Descendants and the Authorship of the "Historia Mexicana" *

Fray Diego Durán (1537 ? - 1588 ?) escribió su "Historia" basada en un manuscrito escrito en Nahuatl al cual el crónista se refería como la "historia mexicana". La posición heroica que la "Historia" atribuye al Cihuacoatl, Tlacaelel, dentro del marco de la historia de los Tenochca claramente pertenece al carácter par-tisano de la "historia mexicana". Aunque la identidad del autor de la "historia mexicana" se queda desconocida, es probable que esta historia Nahuatl fuera escrito por uno de los numerosos descendientes de Tlacaelel.

Tlacaelel (1398 ? - 1487 ?), the Cihuacoatl (or principal advisor) of the Tenochca rulers from Motecuhzoma I to Ahuitzotl (1), emerges from the pages of Durán's "Historia" as clearly the greatest figure in Mexica history (2). Indeed, much of that chronicle assumes the nature of Tlacaelel's biography rather than a history of Tenochtitlan. Durán reveals the reason his "Historia" enumerated the feats of Tlacaelel so extensively: his major source (anonymously written and regrettably lost), which he refers to as the "historia mexicana", "made long mention" of the importance of Tlacaelel in Tenochca history (Durán 1967, II: 573). In fact, so highly does the "historia mexicana" praise Tlacaelel that he assumes the qualities of an idealized fig-

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ure, placing all individuals, including the Tenochca rulers, in the shadow of his omnipotence (3).

Although there is no concrete evidence which might explain the partisanship of the "historia mexicana", I concur with Nicholson (1964:1409) that the most probable explanation is that the author of this history was a descendant of Tlacaélel (4). Certainly, there is a well-known historical precedent of familial glorification in the mestizo Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's attempt to further his own position through the exaltation of his Tetzcocan ancestors.

Other than their genealogies, scarcely little more is known of Tlacaélel's descendants, the notable exception being his grandson, Tlacotzin. The "Crónica Mexicayotl" (CM), which has been variously attributed most recently to Tezozomoc by León (CM 1949:"Introducción") and to Tezozomoc and Chimalpahin by Kirchoff (1951:225-227), contains the most detailed genealogical account of Tlacaélel's descendants extending to three generations (counting from the first generation of mestizo descendants) following the Conquest (CM:122-130). A modicum of genealogical information is also found in Durán's "Historia" (II:369, 573). Yet, these sources by no means contain material pertaining to all the possible candidates for the putative descendant-author of the "historia mexicana". Of the eighty-three children reportedly fathered by Tlacaélel (CM:129), only seventeen are known by name (CM:122 and passim); additionally, genealogical data is found for only two (Cacamatzin and Tlilpotoncatzin, CM:122-127) and dates are sadly wanting for all known children and their known descendants.

While ascribing the authorship of the "historia mexicana" to a particular individual of Tlacaélel's lineage is futile in the face of available historical resources, Durán's "Historia" and the CM at least suggest several clues as to his possible relationship to Tlacaélel. Since the "historia mexicana" was "written" in Nahuatl (Durán, II:158, 175), the earliest probable terminus post quem of that document would be c. 1531, allowing time for an adolescent or adult Indian at the time of the Conquest to acquire a functional knowledge of the Roman alphabet, while the terminus ante quem fell no later than 1579-1581, the time during which the "Historia" was composed (5). This would suggest that the author of the "historia mexicana" could have been any one of Tlacaélel's descendants beginning with his grandchildren (the "generation" of Tlacotzin, the Cihuacoatl at the time of the Conquest), since one can assume that most - if not all - of his children, who were presumably born during the first half of the fifteenth century (considering Tlacaélel's birth date of c. 1398), had died before the arrival of the Spaniards.

Durán noted that the person who wrote the "historia mexicana" was "un indio"(II:546). There are two possibilities which can explain the chronicler's use of this word. Either Durán knew the author to be an Indian, which would then exclude Tlacaélel's mestizo descendants beginning with his great-great-grandchildren (CM:123-127), or he assumed the author to be an Indian since the text of the "historia mexicana" was written in Nahuatl. Judging from the

number of Tlacaelel's known mestizo descendants, it is certainly possible that the enigmatic author of the "historia mexicana" may well have been a mestizo who, like Alva Ixtlilxochitl, wrote a history in Nahuatl glorifying his Indian forbear.

The author of the "historia mexicana" may have stated his relationship to Tlacaelel in his manuscript, although such information was not recorded in the "Historia" by Durán. Perhaps the author did not include this data because his relationship to Tlacaelel may have been so widely known that further references to his filiation would not seem necessary.

All that can be presently said of the author of the "historia mexicana" must, of course, remain speculative, save that his identity is unknown. Only the fruits of future archival research will afford us the opportunity to shed light on the mystery surrounding this figure and specifically define his relationship to Tlacaelel.

NOTES

- (1) While Durán (1967, II: 369) and Tezozomoc (1878: 558) place Tlacaelel's death early in the reign of Ahuitzotl (1486-1502), Tovar (1878: 67) records his passing as immediately following the accession of Axayacatl (1469).
- (2) A brief biography of Tlacaelel was sketched by von Winning (1964) who, following León-Portilla (e.g., 1966), advances the Cihuacoatl's larger-than-life attributes.
- (3) The chronicles of Tovar, Acosta, Tezozomoc ("Crónica Mexicana") and Durán, all related ultimately to a common source which was partisan to Tlacaelel (Dyckerhoff 1970: 17, 19; Colston 1973: 65-72), are the only sources which ascribe to the Cihuacoatl this exalted role. That such descriptions of Tlacaelel's heroic status are found in no other prose or pictorial source (discounting the single reference in Chimalpahin's "Annales" to Tlacaelel as "the Conqueror of the World") suggests the exaggerated ascriptions of these four chronicles.
- (4) Dyckerhoff (1970: 29), following Barlow (1945: 73 and passim) and equating the hypothetical "Crónica X" with the "historia mexicana" (the validity of which I question in Colston, 1974), has proposed that the author of Durán's principal source may have been an individual who was not directly related to Tlacaelel but was a son of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin, Don Pedro de Motecuhzoma Tlakahuepantzin. Yet, had the author been Don Pedro or any member of the tlatoani line, one would expect greater emphasis to have been accorded to the deeds of the second Motecuhzoma (rather than Tlacaelel) than appears to have been presented - via Durán - in the "historia mexicana". For Durán's faithful rendering of the contents of the "historia mexicana", see Colston (1974).
- (5) A more detailed discussion of the dating of the "historia mexicana" appears in Colston (1973: 62-65).

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