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Investigating Cuauhtémoc's Bones

Politics, Truth, and Mestizo Nationalism in Mexico

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This chapter examines a very public controversy in which people of Native ancestry from a rural village in Mexico engaged the human and natural sciences and Mexican nationalism. On February 2, 1949, in the village of Ixcateopan (also rendered as Ichcateopan), in the state of Guerrero, a villager named Salvador Rodríguez Juárez found some papers hidden behind a shrine to the Virgin of Asunción in his home. Among the papers were an eighteenth-century book with some marginalia and an eight-page booklet in a leather cover. Both were signed by the colonial-era Franciscan friar Toribio de Benavente, known as Motolinía. They appeared to indicate that the last Mexica emperor, Cuauhtémoc, was a Native of Ixcateopan and had been buried in the village church.[1] Rodríguez Juárez consulted the village priest about what to do with the papers, and the priest disclosed the astounding discovery at a Sunday mass.[2] An official from a nearby town who attended the mass told a landowner from his village who worked as a stringer for the major Mexican daily *El Universal*.[3] The news spread quickly.

The politically imperiled governor of Guerrero, General Baltasar Leyva Mancilla, immediately set up a commission of local experts to investigate. But the committee members had limited expertise, and the governor soon sought help from the Instituto Nacional de Historia e Antropología (INAH, National Institute of History and Anthropology), headquartered in Mexico

[1] The story is well-documented, most recently in Paul Gillingham's compelling and deeply researched book, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones: Forging National Identity in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011). See also Lyman L. Johnson, "Digging up Cuauhtémoc," in *Death, Dismemberment, and Memory: Body Politics in Latin America*, ed. Lyman L. Johnson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); Salvador Rueda, "De conspiradores y mitógrafos: Entre el mito, la historia y el hecho estético," *Historias* 39 (October 1997–March 1998): 17–26.

[2] My account here follows Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, chapter 2, unless otherwise noted. A different version of how the story reached Mexico City is found in Ángel Torres y González, *La tumba de Cuauhtémoc: Un reportaje histórico* (Mexico City: Nacionalidad, 1950).

[3] Alejandra Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos de Ichcateopan, 1949–1951* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1980), 11.

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City. The INAH commissioned Eulalia Guzmán, who had spent several years in Europe locating and transcribing Mexican codices and had written a manuscript on Hernán Cortés's *Relaciones*.[4] Guzmán knew colonial-era documentation well.[5]

Once in Ixcateopan, Guzmán would have realized at once that something was amiss with the documents. Motolinía could not have penned marginalia in a book published more than two hundred years after his death. Guzmán nonetheless went ahead with her investigations, returning to the village several times between February and September, and accumulating additional evidence in support of the authenticity of the burial. Still unsure about the truth of the matter, she believed that archaeological explorations in the church could provide definitive confirmation or refutation,[6] and she asked the INAH to appoint an archaeologist. When the commissioned archaeologist was waylaid, the governor decided the excavation should begin anyway. After a few days of digging under the church altar and past three sets of floors, on September 26 villagers uncovered a pile of stones reminiscent of a pre-Columbian ritual mound. Below, there was a stone slab. Finding a gap in the stone, the diggers hit softer mud. A pick went through it, releasing a foul cuprous odor. Lifting some stone, the crew found a dagger and a copper plaque. The plaque was engraved with the numbers 1,525 and 1,529 separated by a cross and, below, "Rey, é, S, Coatemo." Lifting the plaque, the assembled villagers saw a cranium with some beads in it. They unearthed more bones. Cuauhtémoc's remains had been found!

The church bells rang. Guzmán brought the copper items out of the church, displayed them to the assembled public, and delivered an impromptu speech praising Cuauhtémoc. The discovery set off national celebrations. Schoolchildren from around the country placed handfuls of soil from their villages at the feet of the statue of Cuauhtémoc in Mexico City. Over seven

[4] Eulalia Guzmán, comp., *Relaciones de Hernán Cortés a Carlos V sobre la invasión de Anáhuac* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México, 2019), originally published in 1958.

[5] According to Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 51, the governor requested Guzmán as "the scholar most likely to come up with the right result." Gillingham adduces that because Guzmán was from a provincial town, she was well-suited for fieldwork in a place like Ixcateopan. (In reality, Guzmán had left her Zacatecas village at the age of eight.) On Guzmán's early life, see Beatriz Barba de Piña Chan, "Eulalia Guzmán Barrón," in *La antropología en México,* v. 10, *Panorama histórico: Los protagonistas*, eds. Carlos García Mora and Lina Odena Güemes (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1988), 255.

[6] Eulalia Guzmán to the director of *El Universal*, August 15, 1949, exp. 23 serie proyecto Ichcateopan, subserie correspondencia, Eulalia Guzmán Archive, Museo Nacional de Antropología (hereafter AEG). Unless otherwise noted, all archival citations are from the caja 1, subserie correspondencia of AEG.

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thousand people traveled to Ixcateopan on Columbus Day 1949. Members of Congress speechified. Ixcateopenses rallied.[7]

The Professional and Political Stakes

But did the remains belong to Cuauhtémoc? In the ensuing months and years, experts examined the documents, the church, the burial site, and the village's oral traditions, using the tools of physical anthropology and history as well as architecture, chemistry, and archaeology. One group of scientists, led by Guzmán, concluded that it was at least possible, perhaps probable, that Cuauhtémoc was buried in Ixcateopan. Two other government-sponsored commissions came to the opposite conclusion.

This chapter, like the chapters by Rosanna Dent and Eve Buckley in this book, shows how the views, methods, and moral stances evinced by the experts in both camps emerged through interactions taking place across local, regional, national, and transnational scales – in villages, state agencies, and the transnational scientific community. The experts who investigated the Ixcateopan discovery dialogued with each other but also with Ixcateopense commoners and village officials, public opinion, US experts, national leaders, and regional elites like Governor Leyva Mancilla. The noted muralist Diego Rivera weighed in on the Ixcateopan controversy, as did President Miguel Alemán (1946–1952). Because the controversy took place during the years immediately following World War II, it became entangled in discussions regarding Mexico's place in a Cold War world order that placed a premium on science. Intellectuals on both sides of the dispute deployed a science they deemed cosmopolitan, but they viewed the relation of science to Indigeneity and nationalism in different – and very gendered and racialized – ways.

For all the participants in the debate, the nature of Indigenous contributions to the Mexican nation was at stake, as was the role of science in authorizing narratives regarding Indigenous and Mexican history. Villagers did not reject science or expertise; they deployed it strategically and in combination with local views. The members of the two official commissions repeatedly voiced their adherence to scientific protocols as well, while characterizing Guzmán and her allies as irrational and branding them ideologically motivated *indófilos* (Indophiles). Members of the official commissions dismissed Ixcateopenses as likewise guided by fervor rather than evidence. Situating themselves as proponents of a cosmopolitan and detached science, these experts eschewed inevitably affect-laden relationships with the Ixcateopenses and propounded a Mestizo identity that embraced, they said, Indigeneity and Spanishness

[7] Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 60–63; Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos*, 11–13; "Tierra de todas las zonas indígenas en el monumento a Cuauhtémoc," *Excélsior*, October 15, 1949, in ibid., 108–109.

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equally.[8] Guzmán and her collaborators responded by saying that the official investigations were incomplete and superficial. The authenticity of the burial and the documents, they affirmed, were too easily dismissed by experts who diminished the importance of Indigenous ancestry to the mixed, *Mestizo* Mexican nation. Guzmán's opponents denied these accusations, proclaiming their respect for Cuauhtémoc and the Mexica Empire. Members of the first INAH commission laid a wreath at the statue of Cuauhtémoc in Mexico City before beginning their work.[9]

Gender played an important role in the controversy. Because the main investigator was a woman working within an otherwise almost exclusively male scientific community, and because the virility of Cuauhtémoc was so often invoked in the debate, the episode laid bare the ways in which participants related gender differences to both scientific authority and Indigeneity – and of both science and Indigeneity to nationalism. As we shall see, Guzmán was caricatured as embodying a feminine, quasi-religious hysteria and at the same time portrayed as both unnaturally masculine and unnatural in her claim to scientific authority. Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, secretary of the second official investigation – dubbed the Gran Comisión because it included Mexico's most well-respected scholars – wrote that the pro-Guzmán investigative commission was "more robust, intransigent, aggressive, and dangerous than its counterpart." And villagers' hostility toward the committee was, he said, due to their cultish adherence to Guzmán: "The discoverer's harangues animated them, creating a tendency opposed to any kind of serene attitude, and they called any hint of skepticism a sacrilege."[10] By contrast, the secretary of the Gran Comisión, Arturo Arnáiz y Freg, praised Mexico's "anthropological and historical disciplines" for their "maturity" and lauded commission members for not "letting themselves be lulled [*dejarse alucinar*] by deficient testimonies, documents plagued with anachronisms, or the mystical inclinations of enthusiastic but misguided groups."[11] For the official scientific establishment, then, neither Indigenous villagers nor Guzmán – a woman – could speak authoritatively for the nation. Nor could they fruitfully deploy science and rationality.

Subsequent scholarship by Salvador Rueda, Lyman Johnson, Paul Gillingham, and others has echoed these characterizations. Gillingham calls the reports of the indófilos "partisan," and "resting on unsupported assertion."

[8] Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos de Ichcateopan," *Historia Mexicana* 12, no. 2 (October–December 1962): 161–181; México, Comisión Investigadora de los Descubrimientos de Ichcateopan, *Los hallazgos de Ichcateopan: Actas y dictámenes de la Comisión Investigadora* (Mexico City, 1962), xii–xiii.

[9] Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos*, xv; Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 170.

[10] Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 163, 175–176.

[11] Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos*, xiii.

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"Discussion," he says, "was largely replaced with shrill assertion." He further characterizes villagers' attitudes as "defensive hostility" laced with "aggression and resentment," and he repeats without critique the contemporary opinion that "to have taken Ixcateopan seriously was 'another of Doña Eulalia's insanities'."[12]

In sum, as this chapter shows, those who rejected the authenticity of the burial – in the 1950s and since – have subtly deployed notions of femininity to discredit the burial, Guzmán, and the Ixcateopan villagers. Guzmán and her allies countered by deploying science and casting doubt on the impartiality of scientists who did not denounce the Spanish conquest. Indeed, Guzmán was not as unscientific as her opponents claimed, and her opponents, despite their claims of neutrality, often offered poorly substantiated arguments. Unsurprisingly, Guzmán's opponents also held biases that shaped their investigations, including a bias against women in science.

My goal in showing Guzmán's allegiance to science and her opponents' biases is not to claim that Guzmán was correct. Recent scholarship has shown convincingly that she was not.[13] But by highlighting Guzmán's unacknowledged rigor and her opponents' scientific missteps, this chapter unveils how a mix of ideology and proof colored *all* the experts' opinions, along with their views of Indigenous Mexico and its history. Scholars' relationships to Ixcateopenses mattered too, as did the gendered relationships they forged among themselves.

Guzmán herself had an ambivalent position. Her ambitions no doubt drove her too, and at times she evinced deep suspicion of Salvador Rodríguez Juárez and other villagers. Yet she also probed their oral traditions and rituals with care. At times, her political proclivities along with her suspicion of her academic opponents blinded her to contrary evidence. Yet she showed greater understanding of ideological biases than her opponents.

The Ixcateopenses had ambitions and plans as well. Like the Terra Indígena Pimentel Barbosa villagers examined by Rosanna Dent in this book, they engaged science and scientists to pursue their aspirations and reduce harm. For Ixcateopenses, that meant deploying a pro-Indigenous nationalism and forging alliances with scientific allies who deployed a similar national narrative. For everyone involved nationalism was a guiding and limiting framework, a terrain of struggle.

The Historiographical and Theoretical Stakes

This chapter historicizes experts' moral stances, while stressing the competing contemporary moralities *within* the scientific community, born of distinct

[12] Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 67, 68, 71, 76–78.
[13] Ibid., chapter 7.

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alliances.[14] The mores of investigators were conditioned in part by the material rewards and forms of recognition available to intellectual elites. Yet scientists' views of, and experiences in, Ixcateopan mattered as well. The allegiance to scientific proof that Guzmán and her allies demonstrated was tempered by their knowledge of how it could be manipulated. Perhaps more than their opponents, the so-called indófilos were attuned as well to what was *not* proven or *not* known, a fact missed by subsequent scholarship that has deployed hindsight (and the findings of a new scientific investigation in 1976).[15]

This essay also builds on Latin Americanist studies of the *testimonio* and Indigenous historical narratives. Those studies have probed how we make judgments regarding historical truths and historical narratives and how those may change over time. For instance, explorations of the collaboration between Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos Debray have suggested that readers of a testimony will inevitably view, and judge, Menchú's testimonio differently now than when it was first published during a brutal civil war. If distortions in Menchú's narrative were meant to save lives, how should that affect how we view those distortions? Does the relationship of narrative truth figure differently for Menchú because she is Maya? What level of cynicism, credulity, or contextual knowledge do we expect of distinct audiences?[16] Our own moral judgments may rest on accessing multiple, current and past, points of view.

Discussions of Menchú's testimonio have also raised questions about how narratives are authored. Menchú's account, like the accounts regarding Cuauhtémoc, involved conflictual and power-laden collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. And both invoked political projects that were at once local, national, and transnational. In the Cuauhtémoc episode, villagers of Native ancestry came to work, somewhat reluctantly, with the group of outsiders led by Guzmán. In that regard, the controversy – like the testimonio genre – qualifies notions of Indigenous refusal.[17] Villagers

[14] In stressing the distinct moralities that exist in the past, I complicate Jan E. Goldstein, "Toward an Empirical History of Moral Thinking: The Case of Racial Theory in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France," *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 1 (February 1, 2015): 1–27.

[15] José Gómez Robleda, "Anexo al acta anterior: Carta del Dr. Gómez Robleda," in Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos*, 381–383. I draw here on Robert Proctor and Londa L. Schiebinger, eds., *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). On the later investigation, Alicia Olivera de Bonfil, "Los restos de Cuauhtémoc y la política de los años setenta," in *Los archivos de la memoria* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1999), 181–190.

[16] Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (London: Verso, 1993); Arturo Arias, ed., *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Greg Grandin, *Who Is Rigoberta Menchú?* (London: Verso, 2011).

[17] Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* no. 9 (2007): 67–80.

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embraced Guzmán while refusing, as we shall see, to give *gringo* archaeologists access to their secrets.

In addition, the episode prompted what we might view as an affect-laden *scientific* refusal by Guzmán and her intellectual allies. Guzmán visited Ixcateopan repeatedly, and her opponents did not. This mattered. Power and affect shifted as words and objects circulated and as people traveled from the field to the city and back – or stayed put. Florencia Mallon has likewise noted that while the subjects of testimonios may have significant power at the moment they tell their stories, they inevitably lose control as their stories move outward.[18] If Cuauhtémoc's bones, like the kuru examined by Warwick Anderson, are good to think with, in the Ixcateopan controversy, specific actors' control over narratives varied as stories moved outward from the village and into regional, national, and international political debate. Yet neither the local histories nor the objects were lost. Today, what used to be the village church houses a shrine to Cuauhtémoc and a display of the remains. Ixcateopan's yearly mardi gras festivities celebrate Cuauhtémoc.[19]

The existence of these local histories suggests that the nation-state's use of symbols like Cuauhtémoc might be thought of, at least in certain circumstances, not just as appropriation but as something else, perhaps a form of imperfect recognition but also signs of active persistence, resurgence, or political savvy on the part of Native people.[20] Following Helen Verran, might we acknowledge that peoples can act together without necessarily thinking or being in the same ways?[21]

In what follows, I first provide additional details regarding the development of the scientific investigation and the surrounding public controversy. I underscore the relations between villagers and the experts, while remaining attuned to disparate opinions within each of these groups. I then discuss the scientific and political context in which these debates developed. A fictional dialogue I discovered in the archive of a member of the Gran Comisión provides a window onto questions of gender as it relates to science and Mexican nationalism.

[18] Florencia Mallon, "Editor's Introduction," in Rosa Isolde Reuque Paillalef, *When a Flower Is Reborn: The Life and Times of a Mapuche Feminist* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 1–34.

[19] Anne W. Johnson, "El poder de los huesos: Peregrinaje e identidad en Ixcateopan de Cuauhtémoc, Guerrero," *Anales de Antropología* 48, no. 2 (June 2014): 119–149.

[20] A nod here to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "R-Words: Refusing Research," in *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*, eds. Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 223–248.

[21] Helen Verran, "A Postcolonial Moment in Science Studies: Alternative Firing Regimes of Environmental Scientists and Aboriginal Landowners," *Social Studies of Science* 32, no. 5–6 (2002): 729–762. See also Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

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Eulalia Guzmán and the Ixcateopenses

Guzmán was skeptical when she first arrived in Ixcateopan, but this changed over the coming days and months. Shortly after her arrival, Guzmán visited the village *momoxtli*, a ritual mound that seemed to be the ruins of a castle. There, she found pottery that she identified as Aztec. She also heard of a ritual during Carnival in which villagers danced and pantomimed carrying a body that they took down from a tree. She learned of oral traditions that supported the account in the documents. Although Guzmán did not immediately reveal this detail to her superiors in the INAH, Rodríguez Juárez had in confidence shared with her additional documents, including an "Instruction" written by Rodríguez Juárez's grandfather, Florencio Juárez. According to this new document, the book with the marginalia and the papers bound in leather had been copied from an older set of documents when the latter were in poor condition.[22]

If Guzmán was suspicious, so too were villagers. Initially, only three village residents agreed to share with Guzmán versions of an oral tradition regarding Cuauhtémoc's burial. Most villagers blamed village leaders for revealing their long-held secret and for the unwanted attention the village was receiving. Village officials, however, recognized that the publicity might help the village gain access to resources. On the day Guzmán was leaving the town, they asked her to address a town meeting to see if she could convince more villagers to come forward with their stories. It worked. Eleven elders subsequently shared their own versions of oral traditions they had heard from their parents and grandparents.[23]

In 1949, as today, the details of Cuauhtémoc's life and death were sketchy, and the evidence Guzmán collected in Ixcateopan filled in gaps in prevailing accounts. At the time of the Spanish conquest, Ixcateopan was a largely Chontal-speaking village in an area conquered by the Triple Alliance of Mexico Tenochtitlan–Texcoco–Tlacopan. According to the Ixcateopan documents, local rituals, and oral histories, Cuauhtémoc's grandmother was a member of the Ixcateopan nobility who married a Texcocoan man sent to rule over the region around Ixcateopan. Cuauhtémoc's mother, a figure about which existing accounts said almost nothing, was imprisoned by the Mexica, along with her father, as a result of disputes over taxation, and they were taken together to Tenochtitlan, the seat of Mexica power. There, Cuauhtémoc's mother met his father, who was the son of the Mexica *tlatoani,* or ruler.

[22] Eulalia Guzmán a Humberto Colín, March 2, 1949, exp. 5. Parts of Guzmán's *informe* to the INAH are attached to this letter; Eulalia Guzmán a Salvador Rodríguez Juárez, March 14, 1949, exp. 8; César Lizardi Ramos, "Eulalia Guzmán revisa las actas de Ichcateopan," *Excelsior*, February 20, 1949 in Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos*, 77.

[23] Eulalia Guzmán to Humberto Colín, March 2, 1949, exp. 5.

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Their son, Cuauhtémoc, returned to his mother's homeland, departing for Mexico's central valley when called to defend the Mexica capital from the arriving Spaniards.[24]

According to Bernal Díaz del Castillo's well-known chronicle, in the aftermath of the Spanish defeat of the Mexica, Cortés imprisoned Cuauhtémoc and took him on a trip to subdue rebellious Spaniards at Hibueras. On that trip, Cortés learned that the young man was planning to kill Spanish members of the expedition, and Cortés had the Mexica leader assassinated, leaving Cuauhtémoc's corpse hanging from a tree. Díaz del Castillo, who followed Cortés as he continued his trip, could not say anything about what happened to Cuauhtémoc's body afterwards. Here, the local Ixcateopan accounts filled in. Indigenous members of Cortés's expedition escaped and returned to the site of Cuauhtémoc's assassination, wrapped his body in cloth, transported him hundreds of miles to his hometown, and buried him at the site of his family's castle. Motolinía, who later visited the village, had him reburied at the site where the church was subsequently built. Because Motolinía was afraid the villagers might be persecuted by the Inquisition, he told them to keep quiet about the burial.[25]

Returning to Mexico City, Guzmán looked in archives for information regarding the Ixcateopan region. Denizens of Ixcateopan and the surrounding region began to write her with tips, local lore, and even rumors of an unknown codex held in a nearby village. She learned that long before Rodríguez Juárez proffered his documents there had been stories in the region connecting Ixcateopan and Cuauhtémoc. The Ixcateopan oral tradition, it seemed, abounded in neighboring villages.[26] Guzmán also visited Ixcateopan at least twice more between February and August. On one of these trips, Rodríguez Juárez, under pressure from village authorities, produced additional documents named in the Instruction, including, most intriguingly, two pieces of paper sewn shut with writing in invisible ink.[27] In August, Guzmán opened the document with invisible ink before assembled villagers and applied gentle heat, revealing some hard-to-read words. Initial examinations of the paper and

[24] See Rueda, "De conspiradores"; José Gómez Robleda, *Dictamen acerca de la autenticidad del descubrimiento de la tumba de Cuauhtémoc en Ixcateopan* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1952), 17–18.

[25] Gómez Robleda, *Dictamen*, 17–18. The original documents are published in translation in Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 227–235.

[26] Rodríguez Juárez to Guzmán, June 13, 1949, exp. 14; Alicia Olivera de Bonfil, *La tradición oral sobre Cuauhtémoc* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas UNAM, 1980), 94 on prior documentation of an oral tradition.

[27] Rodríguez Juárez to Guzmán, March 25, 1949, exp. 9. Two sheets are mentioned in Héctor Pérez Martínez et al., *La supervivencia de Cuauhtémoc: Hallazgo de los restos del héroe* (Mexico City: Ediciones "Criminalia," 1951), 27.

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ink indicated that they were produced during the early colonial era, but Guzmán determined that further chemical analysis was needed.[28]

At this point, Guzmán was still unsure about the veracity of the story, but felt that physical evidence would help confirm or refute it. She began thinking about digging in the church after the rains had passed, in November or December. But villagers were keen on digging, and the governor of Guerrero was in a rush to unearth Cuauhtémoc before the hundredth anniversary of the state of Guerrero in October. Guzmán asked the INAH to send an archaeologist, but when the archaeologist was delayed, villagers and the governor decided to begin the excavation. Despite some efforts on the part of Guzmán, archaeological procedures regarding visual and written documentation of the excavation process were not followed. There were no drawings, and few photographs or notes.[29]

Gillingham adduces that villagers were excited about the stature they might gain. But village leaders had another reason for wanting to begin the excavation: a fear of looting. In letters to Guzmán, members of the village council told her that they had received letters from anthropologists wanting to excavate. Villagers were aware that if things did not move forward quickly, local riches might end up in the hands of US collectors. Guzmán was clearly attuned to villagers' suspicions. She reassured the village that INAH experts would respect the rights of the village. "We take extreme precautions," she wrote Rodríguez Juárez, "so as not to stir people up too soon, or awaken their ambition of finding valuable or historical material for personal gain." Guzmán also cited concerns about the villagers' sensibilities when INAH director Ignacio Marquina offered to commission archaeologist Pedro Armillas, who was a Spanish emigré. Guzmán told Marquina not to send Armillas because the Ixcateopenses would not trust a foreigner. If the town was to reveal its secrets, it wanted to ensure that collaborators would be on their side. Guzmán offered those assurances.[30]

To be sure, village residents were not always in agreement. The village appears to have retained divisions between descendants of earlier Chontal inhabitants and those descended from the Indigenous conquering forces of the Triple Alliance. Many of the village leaders, including Rodríguez Juárez, descended from those conquerors, and village commoners mistrusted their motivations. Rodríguez Juárez's grandfather Florentino was literate, a mason who enriched himself by wresting lands from other villagers.[31] Another division – which perhaps built

[28] Guzmán to INAH, August 15, 1949, exp. 21.
[29] Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 58.
[30] On the United States, see Rodríguez Juárez to Guzmán, February 25, 1949, exp. 9; Rodríguez Juárez to Guzmán, June 14, 1949, exp. 14. On Guzmán's assurances, see Guzmán to Salvador Rodríguez Juárez, July 8, 1949, exp. 14.
[31] Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 136–140; Olivera de Bonfil, *Tradición oral*, underscores the fact that both Rodríguez Juárez and his grandfather were part of a village elite.

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from the former rift – arose during the dig itself when the excavation team found that the church altar did not have a foundation and would need to be dismantled to avoid it from falling. A group of villagers opposed the removal of the altar and protested loudly outside the sanctuary. They desisted only when the governor offered to rebuild the altar and fix the church.[32]

A team of village residents did the excavating. After six days, on September 26, they unearthed the tomb. Two days later, INAH archeologist Jorge Acosta finally arrived, and the following day, the noted archeologist Alfonso Caso and INAH director Ignacio Marquina reached Ixcateopan.[33] Caso had excavated the fabulous Zapotec ruins at Monte Albán, assisted by Guzmán and others. One of his first questions was to ask where the jewels were. It seemed improbable that a noble like Cuauhtémoc would have such a poor gravesite.[34] Marquina was even more dubious. Though he had commissioned Guzmán, he had not expected her investigations to yield results. In September, he told Guzmán he did not think they would find anything in the church, and he made public declarations to that effect the day before the discovery. Once in the town, he made inquiries about whether anyone had entered the church on the night before the burial was unearthed. He presumably suspected that someone had planted the bones there that evening. Later, he and Caso visited Rodríguez Juárez, and, as Rodríguez Juárez later told Guzmán, warned Rodríguez Juárez not to trust Guzmán.[35]

For her part, Guzmán was still not fully convinced that the burial site belonged to Cuauhtémoc. She trusted the oral testimonies she had collected but thought that Cuauhtémoc might be buried elsewhere in the village. Perhaps, she thought, the townspeople had intentionally pointed to the wrong site so as to keep outsiders from finding it. Or they might have moved the body in the intervening 420 years. Guzmán continued to look for a second, more majestic, burial. She made some preliminary excavations at the momoxtli and at another chapel in the town. Like Caso and Marquina, she kept silent about her doubts. The crowd celebrating around the church would not have appreciated their suspicions. Caso publicly validated the find, and he refused to badmouth Guzmán publicly, calling her a friend.[36]

[32] Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 59–60.

[33] Armando Rivas Torres, "Caso y Marquina confirmaron todo. Sí pertenecieron a Cuauhtémoc los restos encontrados en Ichcateopan," *Excélsior*, October 1, 1949, in Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos,* 98.

[34] Evidence of Caso's concerns can be found in Moisés Mendoza, *Rey y señor Cuauhtémoc: El hallazgo de Ixcateopan* (Mexico City: Compañía Importadora y Distribuidora de Ediciones, 1951), chapter 34; Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 69.

[35] Guzmán, Relación de la visita de Jorge Acosta, Alfonso Caso y Ignacio Marquina, September 26, 1949, exp. 46; Guzmán to Alfonso Caso, October 6, 1949, exp. 83.

[36] Guzmán, Relación de la visita; Guzmán to Alfonso Caso, October 6, 1949, exp. 83. See also Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 262 n62. On Caso and Marquina, Rivas Torres,

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Soon after, Marquina appointed the first INAH commission. Its investigation was brief. The villagers were distrustful and possessive. When military leaders tried to transport the bones to Mexico City for safekeeping, village leaders told them no.[37] When the physical anthropologists Eusebio Dávalos and Javier Romero visited Ixcateopan on October 6, villagers prohibited them from taking the bones outside the church to examine them in the sunlight. The INAH investigators spent no more than eight hours in the town. Nonetheless, even this cursory examination convinced them the bones did not belong to the nobleman. For one thing, they quickly determined the bones belonged to at least five different individuals, one of them a child. There were two left femurs. The cranium apparently belonged to a woman.[38] Less than three weeks after the initial discovery of the bones, on October 14, the INAH commission delivered its verdict to the Minister of Education. Only the archaeologist who investigated the building of the church abstained from signing, citing a lack of sufficient evidence. The Minister of Education, aware that the verdict would not meet with the approval of a good part of the Mexican populace, consulted with President Alemán before releasing the results five days later.[39]

Meanwhile, Guzmán had begun assembling her own set of experts to examine the evidence. When she had opened the document with the invisible ink – she was still working on behalf of INAH – she had requested the help of a chemist from the Banco de México. Then, just days before the bones were uncovered, the criminologist Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón, who headed the Bank's investigations department, wrote to offer his assistance.[40] Quiroz Cuarón and his investigations team presumably knew how to spot fakes, including forged signatures. Together, Quiroz Cuarón and Guzmán found additional experts. Historian Luis Chávez Orozco agreed to weigh in on the history and the historical documentation. Chemists examined the oxidation on the copper plaque to determine its age, and they looked at its chemical composition to see where it might have been mined. A paleographer dated the handwriting on the various documents. Architect and art historian Alejandro von Wuthenau

"Caso y Marquina confirmaron todo," *Excélsior*, October 1, 1949 in Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos*, 98.

[37] Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos*, 11–12.

[38] "Dictamen de los antropólogos físicos: Eusebio Dávalos y Javier Romero," in "El hallazgo de Ichcateopan: Dictamen que rinde la comisión designada por acuerdo del c. Secretario de Educación Pública, en relación con las investigaciones y exploración realizadas en Ichcateopan, Guerrero," *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 11 (1950): 205–217; Rueda, "De conspiradores"; Mendoza, *Rey y señor*, chapter 37.

[39] "El hallazgo de Ichcateopan: Dictamen que rinde la comisión designada por acuerdo del c. Secretario de Educación Pública," 197–295. Archaeologist Carlos Margaín did not sign the report, alleging there was not enough evidence on which to base conclusions. Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 170.

[40] Quiroz Cuarón to Guzmán, September 22, 1949, exp. 41.

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worked to understand when the church had been built and when the altar had been erected so as to pinpoint when a burial in that location might have occurred. This group would eventually produce a series of reports.[41]

Faced with Guzmán and Quiroz Cuarón's efforts and public repudiation of the INAH verdict, the Minister of Education determined to set up a new commission. Guzmán asked Minister Gual Vidal to delay this new review until her experts had rendered their verdicts, but after consulting President Alemán, the Minister forged ahead. The Gran Comisión met for the first time on January 6, 1950.[42] Members of the Gran Comisión were assigned to report on distinct issues, depending on their areas of expertise. There were many technical issues to resolve, but the minutes of their deliberations suggest that commission members were convinced from the start that the find was fraudulent, and that they saw their mission as easy: proving that fraud. They were also under extraordinary political pressures from national government officials who wanted them to confirm that the bones belonged to Cuauhtémoc, and some members were called before high government officials. This political maneuvering simply convinced them of the need to assert their scientific neutrality and independence.[43]

The Banco de México and Gran Comisión teams had many questions to address: Regarding the documents: Did the handwriting and spelling correspond to the sixteenth century? The forms of expression? The paper and ink? Regarding the plaque: Did the spelling of Cuauhtémoc as Coatemo correspond to the sixteenth century? Would people back then have rendered the date with a comma between the thousands and the hundreds columns? Would they have referred to Cuauhtémoc as "Rey"? Would they have written the conjunction "é" with an accent? Or would they have used the letter "e" as a conjunction at all? Was the copper from the region? How old was it? What did the oxidation reveal? What about the handwriting? Regarding the human remains: How old were they? (An effort was made to send them to the United States for carbon dating.[44]) Could they belong to a young man of Cuauhtémoc's supposed age? Regarding the burial in the church: When would it have been possible to

[41] Eulalia Guzmán, *Ichcateopan, la tumba de Cuauhtémoc: Héroe supremo de la historia de México. Tradición oral, documentos, los dictámenes negativos, los concluyentes estudios químicos, antropológicos, históricos, matemáticos, anatómicos, paleográficos* (Mexico City: Aconcagua, 1973); Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos*.

[42] Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos*, xii.

[43] Acta de la sesión celebrada el 22 de septiembre, caja 25, Fondos Documentales Alfonso Caso, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, UNAM, published in Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos*, 110–119.

[44] Gómez Robleda, *Dictamen*; Rafael Molina to Dr. F.W. Libby of the University of Chicago, to Dr. Kalewo Rankama, October 20, 1949, exp. 112; Alfonso Quiroz, José Gómez Robleda and Liborio Martínez, Investigación y estudio de los restos óseos de Cuauhtémoc (borrador definitivo), February 28, 1950, exp. 39, caja 3 subserie investigaciones, AEG.

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undertake such a burial? Specifically, when was the church built and when was the altar installed? And what of the Ixcateopan story? Was it possible that Cuauhtémoc was of Tlatelocan heritage? Who was his mother? Could he have been raised in Ixcateopan? Could he have been transported from the presumed site of his death, about one thousand miles away? Could Motolinía have been in Ixcateopan around the time of Cuauhtémoc's death?[45]

Both the INAH commission and the Gran Comisión focused on the human remains, which both official commissions readily determined to have been arranged in the form of a human skeleton by someone with little anatomical expertise. For the experts, and for the broader public, the physical evidence was paramount. The original documentary discovery had made headlines, but it received substantially less attention than the excavation.[46] Guzmán and her allies focused on physical evidence too, but for them the physical evidence included the plaque and the paper as well as the human remains. They also paid considerable attention to the historical narratives provided by the documents and oral histories. In so doing, they manifested an interest in the local histories that made up Mexico's larger national history and in the timeworn papers held in Ixcateopan, as in so many Mexican villages.

Mestizo Nationalism in the Cold War

Both the rival groups of experts used science, and foreign scientific expertise, in their efforts to establish the truth regarding the burial, but both groups were partial – influenced by the broader political contexts in which they worked; by existing narratives regarding Mexico's past; by ideas about the relation of science to affect; and by group members' relationships to Indigeneity in general and Ixcateopan in particular. The group assembled by Guzmán and Quiroz Cuarón argued that their opponents' investigations were superficial. With the exception of Caso, Gómez Robleda, and the chemist Rafael Illescas Frisbee, none of the commission members ever visited Ixcateopan. Their science would, in contrast to Guzmán's, not be swayed by their relation to Ixcateopenses. In subtle and not so subtle ways, members of the Gran Comisión dismissed local histories.[47]

For instance, the Gran Comisión used the 1946 book of US historian Gilbert Joseph Carraghan to discredit the oral evidence Guzmán had collected.

[45] Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos*; Gómez Robleda, *Dictamen*; Eulalia Guzmán et al., *Pruebas y dictámenes sobre la autenticidad de los restos de Cuauhtémoc*, rev. 1962 ed. (Mexico City, 1962).

[46] Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos*, 10.

[47] On whether the Gran Comisión should visit Ixcateopan, see ibid., 97–98, 356; Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 175–176. See also Eulalia Guzmán, "Nuevas pruebas científicas," in Pérez Martínez et al., *Supervivencia*, 202–203.

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According to Carraghan, oral traditions were valid only if historians could document uninterrupted transmission and two unrelated, independent series of transmittals. He also required that the tradition refer to an important event, and be widely accepted across time. The Gran Comisión then added multiple additional criteria, which, its members recognized, most traditions could not meet. Members of the Banco group countered that in fact the Ixcateopan traditions met many if not all of these conditions.[48]

Here, as in other instances, members of Guzmán's group did not reject science but instead tried to make it compatible with local viewpoints. And, they were likely less convinced than their opponents made them out to be. A close reading of their reports shows that a number of them viewed the authenticity of the burial as *plausible or probable* rather than fully proven. Given their plausibility, and the Guzmán group's desire to affirm Mexico's Indigenous heritage and local histories, its members went along with a version of events that satisfied populist politicians and the broader Mexican public. As Gómez Robleda argued, "Insurance companies have very lucrative businesses based exclusively on probable truths."[49]

As the debate regarding Cuauhtémoc was taking place, discussion of Spanish colonial and US imperial power was at a high point, with each growing out of and reinforcing the other. The Cuauhtémoc controversy should therefore be understood, as past scholarship has noted, in the context of proximate events that touched on Mexico's relationship to its Indigenous past, its Spanish heritage, and its place in a Cold War world that placed a premium on science. Guzmán, Gómez Robleda, Chávez Orozco, and Diego Rivera were all part of the left-wing opposition to the ruling party that rallied around Vicente Lombardo Toledano's Partido Popular, founded in 1948.[50] For this group, Cuauhtémoc symbolized the fight against colonial oppression, a fight that had been continued by the Mexican patriots of the wars of independence, in the 1846–1848 war against the United States, and in the war against the French invasion. Ironically, this view jibed with that of a ruling party that deployed a populism that elevated the nation's glorious Indigenous past.

One important event that framed the controversy took place in 1946, when Cortés's corpse was exhumed – for the eighth time. The conquistador's body had been hidden from the public since the independence era on the theory that Mexicans so despised Cortés that they might destroy his remains. In 1945, two foreign historians, the Cuban Manuel Moreno Fraginals and the Spanish exile Fernando Baeza Martos, produced a document that signaled the spot where

[48] Gómez Robleda, *Dictamen*, 27–31; Gilbert Joseph Carraghan and Jean Delanglez, *A Guide to Historical Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1957), cited in ibid., 27–28.
[49] Gómez Robleda, *Dictamen*, 29.
[50] Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 164–165.

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conservative politician Lucas Alamán had reburied Cortés in 1836. Moreno Fraginals and Baeza Martos showed the document to the Mexican historian Francisco de la Maza, and de la Maza looked for a set of impartial arbiters to judge its veracity. After deciding the document was likely real, de la Maza and his collaborators decided to avoid bureaucratic hurdles by eschewing official sponsorship and searching for the body themselves. The found it almost immediately in the spot indicated.[51]

The burial was then examined by experts. Historian Silvio Zavala, acting on behalf of the INAH, confirmed the documentary evidence by comparing de la Maza's document with a copy that Alamán had deposited with Spanish authorities. Physical anthropologist Eusebio Dávalos examined the human remains and judged them to be authentic. Cortés was 1.58 meters, Dávalos noted, and diminished in size by his advanced age. His bones were diseased, and he had rickets, but his deformities had not been caused by an infection.[52] Based on photographs of the remains, Quiroz Cuáron rebutted Dávalos's claim that infection was not the cause of the bone anomalies. To the consternation of Hispanophiles, Quiroz Cuarón claimed that Cortés was syphilitic.[53] Diego Rivera, who had already decided he would paint an elderly, stooped Cortés in his Palacio Nacional mural, latched on to Quiroz Cuarón's conclusions.[54]

Guzmán shared with Quiroz Cuarón and Rivera a desire to demystify the conquistador. Before undertaking the Cuauhtémoc investigation, she had been working on a book based on the conquistador's letters to the king of Spain. The book argued that Cortés's letters were politically motivated exaggerations with little relation to what actually happened. The INAH had refused to publish her book, and prominent anthropologists appear to have sabotaged her efforts to get it published elsewhere.[55]

[51] Francisco de la Maza, "Los restos de Hernán Cortés," *Cuadernos Americanos* no. 2 (April 1947): 165; Salvador Rueda, "El descuido de los héroes. Apuntes sobre historiografía marginal," *Historias*, no. 75 (2010): 63–80.

[52] Rueda, "El descuido"; de la Maza, "Los restos"; Salvador Rueda Smithers, "Don Silvio Zavala y la piel del historiador. Apuntes sobre historiografía marginal," *Historia Mexicana* 65, no. 2 (October 1, 2015): 819.

[53] Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón, "Estudio de los restos de Hernán Cortés descubiertos en la iglesia de Jesús Nazareno, anexa al hospital de la Convención de México, en noviembre de 1946," in Guzmán, comp., *Relaciones de Hernán Cortés,* 967–995. Quiroz Cuarón's study is dated January 5, 1949; it was published in Guzmán's book in 1958. Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 52 implies that Guzmán affirmed Quiroz Cuarón's statements about Cortés's physical condition but his sources refer to her 1958 book. Statements she made on this topic in 1949–1950 seem to have been relatively cautious. See, for instance, her interview in Torres y González, *La tumba de Cuauhtémoc*, 58–61.

[54] Rueda Smithers, "Don Silvio Zavala," 828–829.

[55] Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones*, 52; Torres y González, *La tumba de Cuauhtémoc*, 39, 58–59.

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In the ensuing public debate over Cortés, many Mexicans, Guzmán included, openly objected to the reverence shown the conquistador, and the Cortés discovery reignited discussion about the respective contributions of Spaniards and Native Americans to Mexico, with conservative Hispanists arrayed against progressive indigenistas.[56] In this context, members of the anti-Guzmán group portrayed themselves as level-headed, middle-of-the-road thinkers, who recognized the quintessentially Mestizo nature of their nation. Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, who served as secretary of the Gran Comisión, wrote in 1960:

> Cortés y Cuauhtémoc, as symbols that personify those two cultural traditions that seemed irreconcilable, were imbued with a terrible affective charge capable of clouding for those with less serene minds the concept of a Mexican nation that – seen from biological, psychological, cultural and social angles – had emerged, basically, from Mestizaje and transculturation. Those of us who preached the necessity of accepting the indissoluble Hispanoindian fusion and recognizing the positive value of both patrimonies, saw ourselves being repudiated by an exalted Indophile, Hispanophobe current . . .[57]

Again and again, Jiménez Moreno and other commission members stated that regardless of their determinations regarding the remains, they recognized Cuauhtémoc as a brave national precursor, but their science was separate from their affect. Zavala wrote that it was "necessary to separate clearly the admiration and respect we Mexicans feel for the figure of Cuauhtémoc from the purely scientific problem that entails establishing the authenticity of the discovery of the Ixcateopan remains."[58]

Jiménez Moreno's characterization of the indófilos was not necessarily accurate. According to the story circulating in Ixcateopan, the Spaniard Motolinía had presumably ordered the village to keep silent about Cuauhtémoc's burial in order to protect them. The Ixcateopenses thus underscored reconciliation between Spaniards and indígenas, not Hispanophobia. A fictionalized dialogue that I attribute to Zavala made a similar point, while suggesting that Guzmán's allies refused to recognize the positive Spanish role. In the dialogue, one friend says to another:

> The Western world surrounds the presumed discovery of the indigenous hero . . . It is a Spanish and Christian friar who collects the remains and buries them lovingly. That is why the Discovery makes the indophiles so happy, because it seems to give them their supreme hero but it also

[56] Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos*, 12.
[57] Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 163.
[58] Rueda, "De conspiradores," 24–25, quotes Zavala. See also Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 171; Rueda Smithers, "Don Silvio Zavala," 828–829.

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> dignifies the hispanists because it concedes that one of their friars carried out that generous act . . . And I do not want to be a pain but I have to mention the burial of that great defender of the pagan world in a Catholic Church . . . and what about the praises and insults exchanged in Spanish . . .
>
> The health of our historic conscience depends of the assimilation of that indigenismo and that hispanicismo. We must move beyond that duality and toward a broader synthesis . . . Curiously, the life of Mexico marches forward and moves beyond the harshness of the encounter while [our] historical consciousness, which is the arena of controversy, opinion, and sentiment – lags behind reality.[59]

To be modern and fully Mestizo required Mexicans to reject popular historical memory and instead adhere to a science associated with the industrialized West.

In the late 1940s, the approaching centennial of the US–Mexico war made Mexicans particularly sensitive to their country's position relative to the United States. In fact, shortly after Cortés's remains had been found, nationalism flared when, in March 1947, Harry Truman visited Mexico on the first official visit by a US president to the country. On his visit, Truman stressed the need to continue good neighborly relations, and on March 4, he paid tribute to the "*niños héroes*" (child heroes) who had perished while defending Mexico City during the US invasion in 1847. By the end of that month, the remains of the niños had been dug up in Chapultepec Park. A quick investigation confirmed their authenticity. INAH scientists subsequently examined them and declared that the age of the deceased corresponded to that of the martyred child-cadets. As icing on the cake, the Mexican Congress declared the remains to be authentic. The message was clear. Even the US president valued Mexican bravery and nationalism.[60]

In this context, experts on both sides of the Cuauhtémoc conflict sought to buttress their science by showing that it stood up to US scrutiny. For instance, Guzmán's team had good chemical evidence that the copper in the plaque was not of recent vintage. To confirm this finding, it sought out US experts who could date the metal. Caso, a member of the Gran Comisión, also wrote to US experts regarding the plaque, but his goal was to undermine the Banco group's dating. During one of the Gran Comisión's sessions, physician José Gómez Robleda (its only member aligned with Guzmán's team) and Caso engaged in

[59] "Diálogo sobre Cuauhtémoc," caja 25, Fondos Documentales Alfonso Caso, Biblioteca Juan Comas, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. I attribute authorship to Zavala because of similar wording found in "Dictamen del Doctor Silvio Zavala sobre los manuscritos e inscripción del hallazgo de Ichcateopan," *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 11 (1950): 290–295.

[60] Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 165–166.

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a long and testy debate regarding whether water could have dripped into the burial site. If the plaque had been in contact with water, as Caso argued, it would have rusted more quickly and was therefore newer than the Banco group claimed. Gómez Robleda denied that the gravesite could have been infiltrated by water.

But even as they argued about the conditions at the burial site, all participants recognized that ultimately a solid conclusion regarding the plaque's age could never be drawn from the evidence of oxidation. There were simply too many variables.[61] Yet both groups persisted in this debate and continued to invoke foreign experts. In so doing, they showed they could dialogue with US and European colleagues and that their cosmopolitan science could dignify the Mexican nation. In another case, physical anthropologists Dávalos and Romero touted their use of internationally recognized scientific methods to examine the human remains. Whether these foreign formulas actually shed light on the controversy was, for them, secondary: "To determine the height," they wrote, "we have used Manouvrier's table or Pearson's ten formulas although the results have to be considered relative given that we are talking about indigenous remains."[62]

The connections between Spanish and US imperialism – and their relation to both nationalism and science – were made clear in Zavala's fictionalized dialogue, in which two friends, one an immigrant to Mexico from Spain, the other a Mexican, talked during a visit to Cuernavaca. In the dialogue's opening paragraph, we learn that the friends were bored of visits to Cortés's Cuernavaca palace, a landmark that ironically housed a Diego Rivera mural commissioned by US ambassador Dwight Morrow. Yet they were at home among the many tourists, "perhaps because of habit, or since they know that it is because of the love of their dollars that comfortable hotels have been built. And we must not forget that the 'girls' [in English in original] are soft on the eyes . . ." The friends asserted their masculine superiority over the wealthy 'girls,' and their affinity for US-style consumption just as they manifested their indifference to the symbols of US power, Spanish colonialism, and of the left-wing Mexican nationalism that overwrote that colonialism, all instantiated in the palace.[63]

The fictional friends debated the merits of myth and science. "Mario," the author told readers, was "cosmopolitan." The Spaniard roamed the world not for fun but to "understand mankind" (*comprender los hombres*). The Mexican "Aníbal," was also a world traveler, but over the years had once again turned his gaze to Mexico, which he now saw more clearly and in greater detail.

[61] Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos,* 17–43.
[62] "Dictamen de los antropólogos físicos," 221.
[63] "Diálogo sobre Cuauhtémoc." The quotations that follow on pp. 229–232 are all from this document, unless otherwise noted.

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By explaining the controversy to Mario, Aníbal displayed Mexican science to the world. As Mario noted, "A Mexican has written that we must defend Mexico's scientific prestige since the verdict [of the commission] will be known in circles frequented by foreign experts." Referencing perhaps a Cold War distinction between the superior democratic West and the totalitarian Soviet bloc, the dialogue ended with Aníbal asserting that the broad-ranging media coverage of the controversy was made possible by Mexico's freedom of the press. He urged his friend to write something about Cuauhtémoc to "repay the hospitality we have shown you." The word of the foreigner would validate that of the Mexican.

Like the expert reports emitted by all the investigating commissions, which went to great lengths to establish their scientific nature, Zavala's dialogue contrasted the friends' contemplative "tranquil spirits" to the "burning debates" in the press. At the core of Zavala's argument, and that of others who questioned the authenticity of the burial, was the notion that masculine rationality and science should triumph over feminine emotion. Jiménez Moreno made similar arguments, denouncing the "thunderous . . . shrieking press" and the excesses of a public that labeled them "traitors" who should be shot. (Rivera had famously claimed that those who denied the authenticity of the discovery should be shot in the back.) The members of the Gran Comisión, Jiménez Moreno noted, worked without any remuneration and on top it had to endure insults for "upholding the jurisdiction of scientific investigations without twisting the truth to suit patriotic motives." Jiménez Moreno further castigated indófilos "who – inspired at times by a racist attitude that negated the positive contributions of Mestizaje and Hispanic-Indigenous transculturation and that therefore destroyed the roots that created and nourish our nationality – have in the end abandoned legitimate and well-grounded patriotic sentiment."[64] Guzmán and her allies were thus unscientific pro-Indigenous "racists" who refused to recognize Mexico's mixed heritage or adhere to cosmopolitan scientific standards.

The fervor of Guzman's camp was often equated with a religious fervor that, given the anticlericalism of the postrevolutionary state, was un-Mexican. Jiménez Moreno claimed that the "popular work" of author and former governor of Campeche Héctor Pérez Martínez, who favored the Guzmán camp, presented the Mexican past to the public with "*dramatismo*," providing what was "perhaps a Bible for those who with great passion agitated [*militaron*] in favor of the authenticity of the Ichcateopan discovery."[65] In Zavala's dialogue, Mario compared the Cuauhtémoc "myth" to that of the Virgin of

[64] Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 177; Moreno Toscano, *Los hallazgos*, 15; Rueda Smithers, "Don Silvio Zavala," 829; Johnson, "Digging Up Cuauhtémoc," 221.
[65] Jimenez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 165.

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Guadalupe, affirming that the Cuauhtémoc "cult" had "priests like Miss Guzmán and Diego Rivera, surrounded by their acolytes."

Since the allegiance of Guzmán and her allies to a revolution that advocated rationality against religion was unquestionable, their detractors had to labor to prove that the alleged indófilos were irrational. As Aníbal noted in Zavala's dialogue, the quasi-religious zeal with which Guzmán and her allies defended Cuauhtémoc was ironic given that they were also supporters of Mexico's official "socialist" education, which advocated "rationalism" and even banned religion from the schools.[66] Aníbal explained away this support of science by reminding Mario that Mexicans liked to "*razonar el mito guadalupano*" (reason out the Guadalupan myth). "Our myth makers," Aníbal explained, "do not openly display themselves as such. Instead, they look for the support of scientific veneer. And, so, they imitate the testimonial tradition of the Church, for which miracles must be 'proven' before they are officially accepted."

Guzmán and her allies tried to do what for their opponents was unimaginable: uphold local history, nationalism, and feminine belief along with cosmopolitan masculine science. As a single woman and intellectual, and a feminist moreover, Guzmán personified this unnatural mixing. In contradistinction, her opponents claimed to propound a harmonious Mestizaje. Yet they deployed a language of gender that relied on hierarchy and distinction rather than mixing or equalizing. Their vision of Mestizaje was, in its adherence to science, Westernized or whitened, and masculine. Caso, Jiménez Moreno, and Zavala peppered their assessments of Guzmán with praise. Zavala, for instance, characterized Guzmán as having an "indisputable persistence and unquestionable integrity."[67] But this praise was overshadowed by less favorable assessments. Guzmán's aggressive harangues (buttressed with scientific posturing) did not seem fitting for a woman.

At the same time, the Mestizaje promoted by these mainstream scientists depended on the masculine Indigenous presence of the "Aztec warrior" who embodied and engendered a virile Mestizo Mexico. For that reason, members of the Gran Comisión repeatedly pointed to a second unacceptable gender discrepancy: the cranium found in Ixcateopan, they said, belonged to a

[66] Shortly before the Cuauhtémoc episode erupted, in 1946, Article Three of the Mexican Constitution had been reformed, doing away with dramatic restrictions on instruction imparted by religious institutions. The revised article nonetheless still backed instruction "based on the results of scientific progress [and that] will do battle against ignorance and its effects: servitude, fanaticism, and prejudice . . ." It stipulated that education should stimulate in the student "love of Patria and a sense of international solidarity, arrived at with independence and justice." Hernán Cortés Medina and Manuel Ortiz C., *Instituciones jurídico-políticas de México* (Mexico City: Ediciones Cicerón, 1950), 5. See Jiménez Moreno, "Los hallazgos," 162.

[67] "Dictamen del Doctor Silvio Zavala," cited in Rueda Smithers, "Don Silvio Zavala," 25.

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woman. As Aníbal admitted: "I am bothered that the defenders of the remains may crown the most virile hero of our history with the cranium of a woman. In regards to this aspect, I am indeed interested in rigorous anthropological judgment." Elsewhere, too, this fact was mentioned as the definitive proof of the inauthenticity of the discovery. Physical anthropologists Dávalos and Romero wrote, "The cranium, which is the key piece [*pieza capital*] is a woman's. It is inconceivable that anyone would want to represent a hero that has figured as a symbol of the virility of the Indigenous Aztec with a cranium of the female sex."[68] Here was one more reason to reject the conclusions of their opponents. The nationalism of Guzmán and her supporters was based on an Indigenous heritage that was judged, scientifically, to be in fact feminine. The remains from the village of Ixcateopan could not be the fount of Mexico's Mestizo national identity. If Mexico had an Indigenous heritage, it would need to be linked to something grander and more manly – more imperial and Aztec, less conquered and Chontal.

In their report for the first INAH commission, Dávalos and Romero cautioned that in examining the cranium and other bones "to the point possible we have abstained from crossing the limits that science imposes in this particular case."[69] "We recognize," they later added, "that any physical feature varies and that masculine characteristics are not always clearly displayed in specimens of this sex, and we can say the same of feminine characteristics." Yet this did not stop them from suggesting that it was "inconceivable" that the virile Cuauhtémoc should have a woman's cranium and that the masculine and feminine crania from the Aztec period were "totally different."[70] The anti-Guzmán camp portrayed themselves as careful scientists. But their assessments were not always sober and neutral.

Affect, Evidence, and Truth

As I have suggested, recent historical accounts have repeated the contrast between an exalted Guzmán and her rational opponents. To cite one example, Lyman Johnson writes that when pressed by regional authorities to begin the dig against her will, Guzmán's "political ambitions . . . made successful resistance to these pressures unlikely." Once the dig began, "Guzmán was unable to exercise full control at the site, with military and civilian officials and even members of the Rodríguez Juárez family directing workers at times." Johnson further refers to her "lack of professional discipline." After the first commission report, "a frontal assault on her achievement," Guzmán – who, Johnson reminds us, originally trained as a schoolteacher rather than as a historian or

[68] "Dictamen de los antropólogos físicos," 209–210.
[69] Ibid., 225.
[70] Ibid., 217.

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archeologist – "signaled clearly both her independence from INAH superiors and her political sophistication." Those INAH superiors did not, it should be noted, have more anthropological training, since they were part of a generation that came of age before anthropology was established as a professional activity.[71] One problem with this argument is that, as contemporary observers had to admit, Guzmán and her followers sought to be as scientific in their proofs as their foes. In at least some ways, they were equally if not more rigorous.

That did not ensure they came up with the right result. The findings of the pro- and anti-commissions are voluminous and complex. Without deep expertise in paleography, physical anthropology, history, chemistry, and other disciplines, it is difficult to understand the arguments of each camp, much less evaluate them. But even with those caveats, it is obvious that spurious arguments could be found in both groups, along with more robust proofs. And often truth was impossible to determine. Just a few of the easier to understand examples: The Gran Comisión claimed that the handwriting on the copper plaque was from the nineteenth century and that it was similar to that of the documents. The Guzmán group countered that chiseling into copper was different from writing on a sheet of paper. The Comisión argued that writing the date with a comma was not common in the colonial era. The Guzmán group offered copious examples of periods and other signs used between words and minimized the difference between a chiseled comma and a period. The Guzmán group affirmed that the paper on which the documents were written was from the colonial era. Their opponents countered that it was easy to tear colonial-era paper from old books or folios. The Guzmán group argued that the remains had to have been buried before the altar was constructed; that the flooring over the burial was intact, evidence that the grave had not been tampered with; that the oxide on the plaque and its positioning were not consistent with a later burial.

The most convincing argument offered by the official investigators was the forensic evidence. The skeleton made up by Liborio Martínez of the Banco de México group was put together incorrectly, they said, an assertion to which even Gómez Robleda, a member of the opposing group, had to assent. The human remains belonged to different people, and it looked as if someone inexperienced – someone who could not tell a left from a right femur – had tried to reconstruct a complete skeleton. There was clearly an old burial ground in the church which could have provided ample materiel for a forger. The most convincing evidence offered by Guzmán's group – what had likely convinced Guzmán herself – was the oral evidence and folklore. It pointed clearly to a burial and was able to signal the place where the remains had been

[71] Johnson, "Digging Up Cuauhtémoc," 210, 220.

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found. Cuauhtémoc himself might be buried somewhere else in the village, as Guzmán suggested. Or the remains might belong to another colonial-era personage. But the oral evidence and the widespread rituals were hard to dismiss. The anti-Guzmán camp was able to do so only through superficial procedures and appeals to foreign expertise. To do so, they cited a book by a foreigner in order to claim that the oral evidence was unreliable because it had not been confirmed by a written source.[72]

Careful sleuthing has revealed that the village schoolteacher found a sealed room in the back of the home that had belonged to Florentino Juárez and that Salvador later sold to the municipality. It was full of charred bones and old books. It was in essence a factory for making heroes. Gillingham and Mexican scholars offer a convincing account that says that Florentino planted the bones while the church steeple was being rebuilt. His goal was to earn favor in Mexico City in order to buttress Ixcateopan's position in a land dispute with a neighboring village. He then spread rumors throughout the area, planting the roots of the oral tradition. Most of the bearers of the oral traditions had been peons working for Juárez and his close associates.[73] The oral tradition, or at least aspects of it, was a real tradition, but it was a nineteenth-century tradition.

However, the truth of the matter is not the only issue of import. Rather, my argument is that the portrayal of Guzmán as shrill, opportunist, politically motivated, and unscientific was in itself politically motivated as well as affect-laden. And it was politically motivated by a particular vision of Mexico, one that favored a whitened, cosmopolitan, masculine identity and was unconcerned with the needs or histories of villages like Ixcateopan.

Guzmán was a highly trained specialist, whose work was criticized in ways that others' was not. Her investigations and those of her collaborators were not engaged with as seriously as they might have been. As Guzmán herself pointed out, the bones of the niños heroes were declared real with only minor questions raised. Uneasiness with Guzmán's gender, her feminism, and her self-assurance colored her opponents' assessments of her, as did suspicions of both Indigenous peoples and the left-wing pro-Indigenous nationalism promoted by Guzmán. A nation that was both virile and Mestizo – and that would be accepted in a world order that valued scientific proof and technological advances – could not be represented by the Indigenous woman buried in the Ixcateopan church or by a left-wing nationalist, and feminist, like Eulalia Guzmán. Nor could that nation take villagers' opinions as proof. The members of the Gran Comisión did not have the time to do further research regarding Ixcateopan. They were not interested in doing so.

[72] Pérez Martínez et al., *Supervivencia*; Comisión Investigadora, *Los hallazgos.*
[73] Olivera de Bonfil, *Tradición oral.*

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If we reject how Guzmán's opponents characterized her, how do we reflect critically on her actions and historicize the morality of the scientists involved? Can we think of Guzmán's work as active scientific refusal? Or an unconscious refusal? On one level, Guzmán does seem to have had an awareness that the bones did not belong to Cuauhtémoc. Perhaps then, her investigations sought to give a scientific veneer to the villagers' beliefs. On the other hand, the Banco group seems to have been sincere in its efforts to prove that the discovery was authentic. It is perhaps most likely that Guzmán and her followers were unsure about the veracity of the find. Pleading with members of the Gran Comisión, Gómez Robleda argued not so much that the burial was authentic but that, if there was any uncertainty, the commission should refrain from passing judgment. Was this humility? An attempt to save face? Perhaps a bit of both? Given what Guzmán and her allies saw as the political motivations of their opponents, they felt justified in insisting that the burial was real.

Standards of scientific proof could, and did, vary, and the volume of evidence made it more difficult to reach a clear result. In many ways, what we know today to be the real story is more fantastic than the assertions of Guzmán and her crew. Even more important, Guzmán and her supporters rejected the characterizations thrust on them and refused to counterpose truth and politics. The members of the Gran Comisión refused to see themselves as defying the imperatives of a nationalism that embraced its Indigenous peoples and local histories.[74]

We should also ask to what extent Guzmán's insistence was a response to a scientific feud, an attempt to buttress her own ambitions. Certainly, that was how her opponents portrayed her, and more recent scholarship persists in denouncing her desire for recognition. One might think of the dueling visions of Mestizaje at play as part of an elite dispute that silenced popular voices. I have instead suggested that Guzmán's experiences in Ixcateopan may have *affected* her. And, at least in some ways, she was responding to her village allies. The question about the nature of Mexican Mestizaje that shaped the dispute between scientists was one Ixcateopenses, at least some of them, cared about. Their position within the Mexican polity and their ability to extract resources depended on the presumed value of Indigeneity to the nation. And hegemonic views regarding Indigeneity no doubt helped shape their views about who they were and about their past. Some of them at least sought to claim a glorious imperial Indigenous past.

In Ixcateopan, the Cuauhtémoc myth persists today. In 1976, Guerrerenses asked that the case be reopened and a new set of investigations was conducted, leading to a good many publications. The burial and the oral traditions were

[74] José Gómez Robleda to Comisión Investigadora, February 7, 1951, Anexo a Acta 38, in Comisión Investigadora, *Actas y dictámenes*, 382.

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judged by these experts, again, to be fraudulent. In the process the history of the village and the region were further documented. Still, Ixcateopan's reputation as Cuauhtémoc's hometown remains. Indeed, the village now celebrates his birthday with dancing and singing. The alternative view, so satisfying to truth-seeking historians, also persists. Along with the new investigation, a new series of archeological excavations began in 1976. They are ongoing.

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