

# Archaeological Mediations of the Conquest and Constructions of Mexican National Identity<sup>1</sup>

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In front of the church (at Tlatelolco plaza), a plaque carries these simple but moving words: "On August 13, 1521, heroically defended by Cuauhtémoc, Tlatelolco fell into the hands of Hernán Cortés. It was neither a triumph nor a defeat: it was the painful birth of the *mestizo* nation that is Mexico today."

Yet, the birth pains of the new *mestizo* (mixed) race are not over. More than 460 years after the Conquest, neither the triumph of Cortés nor the defeat of Cuauhtémoc has been properly assimilated, and the repercussions of that bloody afternoon in Tlatelolco continue to be felt. Today, in strictly ethnic terms, 90 percent of Mexicans are *mestizos*, but as individuals they remain trapped by the contradictions of their parentage. They are the sons of both Cortés and Cuauhtémoc, yet they are neither Spanish nor Indian. They are *mestizos* but they cannot accept their *mestizaje* [Riding 1984:3-4].

## Introduction

Such deep ambivalence over Indian and Iberian traditions in the national "psyche" or "character" of Mexico has long been recognized by historians and other observers (Paz 1985; Riding 1984). This ambivalence had its beginnings in 1520 with the kidnapping of the emperor Moctezuma and subsequent conquest of the *Mexica* (Aztec) Empire by Hernán Cortés; it was further heightened by the fact Cortés' success depended on the vital aid received from an Indian noblewoman, *La Malinche*, who served as his interpreter, became his mistress and who, after the conquest, bore him a son. To this day in Mexico, to call a person a *Malinchista* is to call that person the worst form of traitor.

The ideological reconciliation of this crisis of identity that crosscuts ethnicity, class and race has been the driving force, in the context of creating the nation-state, behind the modern conception of Mexican national identity. And, insofar as all constructions of national identity, in order to claim legitimacy, must be located as the end point of a narrative originating in the deep, mythic past (Errington, in press; Gellner 1983; Smith 1986; Trigger 1990), it is no surprise, then, that in Mexico archaeology was called upon to provide the "stratigraphy of nationalism" (Shelly Errington, personal communication), the *stuff* of myth. Anthony Smith observes that among all the sciences of the past archaeology is best "... able to translate the idealized images of the ethnic past into tactile realities, according to modern canons of knowledge. Through our archaeological rediscoveries and interpretations we locate 'ourselves'

and dignify 'our communities' by reference to an ancient pedigree and time-honoured environment"(1986:180-1).

For the foreign visitor, Mexican archaeology means mysterious lost cities and fantastic finds; for the foreign archaeologist, Mexico's archaeological record is a productive laboratory against which the latest hypotheses can be tested and where careers can be made; but what they often do not comprehend is that archaeology in Mexico is much more than simply spectacular monuments or neutral scientific discourse. Archaeology has played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in the construction and maintenance of a Mexican national identity. While previous works have recognized this wider role (Bernal 1980; Fowler 1987; Keen 1971; Lafaye 1976; Lorenzo 1981, 1984; Phelan 1960; Trigger 1990), none have specifically dealt with the relationship between archaeology and national identity, and, in particular, with changing conceptions of the Indian other. My intent in this paper is to trace the history of this other, simultaneous discourse. The history of the relationship between archaeology and identity in Mexico is largely the history of how perceptions of the Indian past and present were consciously altered as a part of Mexico's struggle for consolidation as a modern, progressive nation-state (itself largely the history of conflict with Mexico's giant neighbor to the north).

In order to analyze this history, I have identified three broad periods: the colonial and Independence period from the Conquest to 1910; the revolutionary period from 1910 to 1939; and the modern period from 1939 to the present. After tracing the early development of a Mexican national consciousness and the resulting implications for the development of archaeology during the first period, I explore in the latter two the impact of the Mexican Revolution and the institutionalized role of archaeology, in conjunction with public art, in the official nationalist, revolutionary program of *indigenismo* and the cult of the *mestizaje*. The final section concludes with an assessment of Mexico's experience with archaeology and identity - an increasingly relevant historical guide with which to address the role of archaeology in the emergent and newly contested national contexts of the present.

## Conquest to 1910

Although exact figures are difficult to come by and those available are suspect, it is clear that by the middle of the sixteenth century the *mestizo* character of New Spain was already well established (Cánovas 1972). Miscegenation between the original 2,329 conquistadores and Indian women, forced and otherwise, was commonplace in the new colony. The Church discouraged concubinage while the Crown encouraged Spaniards to marry Indian women as a means of quickly establishing the colony and transmitting Spanish culture to the Indians. While marriage to a Spanish woman was the ideal, their small number in the colony at this time meant that this was impossible for the majority of Spaniards. This, together with the fact that by Royal Decree *encomenderos* were required to marry within one year or face losing their lands and Indian labor, forced many Spaniards to marry Indian women. In some instances such marriages were seen as advantageous in that a Spaniard from humble origins could improve his social standing by marrying an Indian woman of noble birth (Meyer and Sherman 1983:209).

In general, there were five groups that formed colonial society in New Spain: Spaniards, *criollos*, *mestizos*, Indians and blacks (Meyer and Sherman 1983:203-220). The original conquistadores were quickly supplanted in positions of power by new Spanish-born arrivals, derisively called *peninsulares* and *gachupines* by the *criollos* (Meyer and Sherman

1983:206-207). They would hold almost every high-level position of power in the colonial government for the duration of the colony. The second level of colonial society was occupied by the *criollos*, those of pure Spanish ancestry born in Mexico who on account of their birth in the "enervating" climate of America were considered by the peninsular Spaniards to be physically, mentally and morally deficient. They filled lower positions in government and managed the colony's enterprises in commerce, mining, ranching and agriculture.

The *mestizos* occupied the third level. Within this large and varied group are included the descendents of both Spanish/Indian, Spanish/black and Indian/black mixture. Social status within this group was highly variable depending on lightness of skin color and family position (Meyer and Sherman 1983:210). While many *mestizos* achieved positions of power, for the most part *mestizos* were culturally Indian, and were treated accordingly. Some measure of the frustration on the part of the Spanish and *criollo* elite during the colonial period in reaction to the slippery legal problems presented by the hard-to-categorize *mestizos* is found in the hundreds of unenforceable and largely disregarded colonial laws defining no less than sixteen legally recognized racial categories, *las castas*, all with specific rights and privileges (Meyer and Sherman 1983:204). Paintings of the castas depicting father, mother and the child peculiar to that union became very popular during the eighteenth century (Saiz 1990:432). By the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, however, *caste* had in part given way to *class* as a form of social identification (Knight 1990:72).

At the bottom were, of course, Indians and blacks: the labor for the mines and plantations of the colony. Though always the largest ethnic group during the colonial period, little more than a century after the Conquest the number of Indians had been precipitously reduced from a contact population of perhaps twenty-five million to around a million through the decimation of disease and the horrific conditions of forced labor (Meyer and Sherman 1983:211). From that nadir around the middle of the seventeenth century the population slowly recovered. The perception of the Indian during the early colonial period can largely be characterized as one of total repudiation. The most benevolent view, championed by missionaries such as Las Casas and Sahuagún, held that the Indians were innocent children (legally they were wards of the Crown [Meyer and Sherman 1983:212]), neophytes to be instructed in the ways of the true God of the Christians; and by divine providence this burden, with its power and privilege, fell to the Spanish.

There were six blacks with the Spanish during the conquest, among them Cortés' pilot. Between 1590 and 1650 more than 120,000 black slaves were brought to New Spain to replace dwindling Indian labor in the mines and sugar plantations (Meyer and Sherman 1983:214). By the end of the colonial period these had almost completely become part of the *mestizo* population through the steady increase of mulattoes, the descendents of blacks and Spaniards, and *zambos*, the descendents of blacks and Indians (Meyer and Sherman 1983:217).

After the initial impressions of wonder and awe that the Indian civilizations inspired in conquistadores such as Bernal Díaz, and the anthropological interest, though always ultimately with missionary purpose, evident in the works of clerics like Sahuagun and Las Casas, by the seventeenth century the "memory of the Indian world and its conquest had long grown dim; the colony turned in upon itself and lost most of its previous interest in ancient Mexico" (Bernal 1980:48). Renewed curiosity would have to await the work of the *criollo* Jesuit scholar, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora in the late seventeenth century. Considering himself a "Mexican," Sigüenza devoted most of his energies to the study of Mexican history. Towards this effort, he was an assiduous collector of ancient manuscripts, both native and Spanish,

relating to ancient Mexico. He wrote several books on the subject and is reputed to have been the first to probe the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan (Bernal 1980:49-55; Keen 1971:189-193).

From Sigüenza's start, interest in the ancient history of Mexico accelerated rapidly during the eighteenth century. At a general level, this can be attributed to certain concerns of Enlightenment scholarship. This was the age of the *Encyclopedistes* with their obsession for collection and classification. While the writing of natural histories was their primary object, ancient history and antiquities had also come under scrutiny (though for most European scholars interested in America the distinction between natural history and ancient history simply did not exist - the Indians and their remains were clearly part of the world of Nature). Further interest in ancient America was spawned by the claims of Buffon and de Pauw regarding the relative inferiority of not only native Americans but the climate, plants, animals and even geology of the New World (Bernal 1980:67; Keen 1971:260). Far more important for developments in Mexico, however, was the way these pursuits became critical endeavors in the growing *criollo* resistance to Spain and the *peninsulares*.

While the beginnings of a Mexican *criollo* national identity can be discerned in the work of Sigüenza y Gongora in the late seventeenth century, it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that such a consciousness can be clearly recognized as a result of the *criollo* struggle for independence from Spain; itself part of a hemisphere-wide movement inspired by both the French and North American examples (Bernal 1980; Keen 1971; Lorenzo 1980). There were two positions, liberal and conservative, among the *criollos* regarding whether to incorporate the Indian in a conception of national identity. As a necessary aspect of the political and armed struggle for independence, liberal scholars, in order to situate their country's own break with Spain and in response to the denigrating writings of the European philosophes, participated in a widespread American defense of the natural qualities and cultural achievements of the New World (Bernal 1980:67-69; Keen 1971:311; Lorenzo 1980:195). Liberals, therefore, glorified the achievements of the Indian past while the conservatives regarded the pre-Hispanic epoch as a pagan aberration and in an ironic *volte-face* even joined the *philosophes* in their denigration of the achievements and capabilities of the ancient Mexican civilizations so as to belittle the Spanish conquest (Lorenzo 1980:197). Both liberals and conservatives, however, felt contempt for the contemporary Indian, whose only value was seen as a source of labor.

Several examples of this increased interest in Mexico's pre-Hispanic heritage are noteworthy. In 1780 the exiled Jesuit scholar Francisco Javier Clavijero published his monumental *Historia Antigua de Mexico* in which he wrote: "I pray my fellow countrymen to guard what little is left of the military architecture of the *Mexica*, so many fine antiquities having already been allowed to perish" (1945, II:263). His student, José Antonio de Alzate, published in 1785 first-hand descriptions of the sites of Zochicalco and El Tajin, the first works dealing solely with archaeological subjects in Mexico (Bernal 1980:77-78; Keen 1971:301). In 1792 Antonio de León y Gama published his book on the two most famous pieces of sculpture from ancient Mexico: the Aztec Sun Stone and the statue of the mother goddess, Coatlicue, both of which were accidentally discovered under the Plaza Mayor in Mexico City in 1790 (Bernal 1980:80-81; Keen 1971:302).

Theoretically, as early as 1575 there existed laws under the *Consejo de Indias* expressly stating that all pre-Hispanic ruins were *Real Propiedad*. It was only at the end of the eighteenth century, however, that the Crown showed much interest in such monuments. Both

Charles III and Charles IV, being men of their times, were keenly interested in natural history and antiquities and both gave the support of the Crown to such studies in New Spain. Charles III named Juan Bautista Muñoz *Cronista de Indias*, and it was through Muñoz that Charles III was persuaded in 1786 to order the exploration of the Maya site of Palenque (Bernal 1980:90; Keen 1971:312). Charles IV expanded the State's role by sending Guillermo Dupaix to survey the length and breadth of New Spain and duly record the ancient monuments found there (Bernal 1980:93; Keen 1971:313). It was upon Charles IV's accession to the throne in 1790 that Mexico's first museum, the short-lived *Museo de Historia Natural*, was inaugurated (Bernal 1980:133). In 1808, an official *Junta de Antigüedades* was formed (Bernal 1980:134). Finally, after independence in 1821, the success of the liberal viewpoint can be seen in the housing of the first official collection of archaeological materials in the *Museo de Antigüedades* at the national university in 1822 (Keen 1971:321). This museum was formally inaugurated as the *Museo Nacional* in 1825 (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:9). In 1866, the Museo was given its own building near the Zócalo and inaugurated by the Hapsburg emperor Maximilian as the *Museo Público de Historia Natural, Arqueología e Historia* (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:10-1). It remained in this location until the construction of the new museum in Chapultepec Park in 1964 (Bernal 1980:139).

Aside from the *Museo*, the activities of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía e Estadística*, founded in 1833, should be mentioned. In 1862, the *Sociedad* proposed legislation to protect antiquities but this was never acted on. Between 1868 and 1872 the *Sociedad* was actually in charge of protecting archaeological monuments (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:10) while the *Boletín* of the *Sociedad* sometimes addressed archaeological subjects (Bernal 1980:154).

By mid-century, the monuments of Mexico had begun to attract forays by foreign adventurers, antiquarians and a few scholars. Driven primarily by romantic yearnings for the exotic, the search for Old World connections, the chance for personal glory, and lucrative museum and publishing commissions, some also felt it their duty, in the previously noted Americanist vein, to prove that the splendor of the ancient civilizations of the Americas was equal to anything the Old World had to offer. Some of these, like the New York lawyer John Lloyd Stephens and his partner, the English illustrator Frederick Catherwood, the French explorers August Le Plongeon and Deséré Charnay, and the English biologist Alfred Maudslay are important for the worldwide interest that their work stimulated in Mesoamerican archaeology (Bernal 1980:120, 147).

After independence, two other crises of sovereignty during the nineteenth century would give increased impetus to the efforts directed towards consolidating Mexico into a modern nation-state and thus would further serve to promote and define a nationalist identity. First, there was the US policy of Manifest Destiny and the resulting Mexican-American War of 1846, in which Mexico suffered several humiliating defeats, including the surrender of the capital, and in settlement was forced to cede roughly half of its territory to the United States (Meyer and Sherman 1983:351). Second, there was the French intervention in 1862 (under which the Hapsburg prince, Maximilian, was installed as Emperor by Napoleon III of France) and its successful expulsion in 1867 by the liberal president Benito Juárez (Meyer and Sherman 1983:392).

The last half of the nineteenth century in Mexico witnessed short-lived political reform under Juárez, a Zapotec Indian from Oaxaca, and unprecedented economic expansion during the regime of the dictator Porfirio Díaz, known as the *Porfiriato*, 1876-1911. The policies of

Díaz, whose liberal state-building program depended heavily on unrestrained foreign investment, pushed Mexico into the industrial age and in the process sowed the seeds of political and social discontentment that would lead to the Revolution (Meyer and Sherman 1983:431).

The intelligentsia of the *Porfiriato* (oddly characterized by a pronounced Francophilia so soon after the French Intervention) roundly embraced popular Social Darwinist thinking regarding contemporary Indian race and culture. As in Europe and the United States, such a position clearly justified the exploitation attendant to the plantation economy, or *hacienda* system, and incipient industrialization of the *Porfiriato* (Knight 1990:78).

During the *Porfiriato* archaeological imperialism was rife in that many "investigators" came as part and parcel of foreign missions. However, under the positivist climate of the *Porfiriato*, institutionally it was an extremely productive period. The *Museo Nacional* received increased support as the repository of national antiquities (in emulation of European examples - no modern, civilized nation could be without its own national museum) and the first reconstructions of archaeological sites were carried out by Leopold Batres at Teotihuacan and Mitla (Bernal 1980:149). In 1877, the museum added departments of anthropology and ethnology and began publication of the *Anales del Museo Nacional* which continues to this day as the *Anales del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (Bernal 1980:154; Suárez Cortés 1987:25). In 1885, the *Inspección y Conservación de Monumentos Arqueológicos de la Republica* was created to guard and conserve archaeological monuments (Suárez Cortés 1987:27). In 1896, the first federal law was passed identifying archaeological monuments as national patrimony and providing for their protection and conservation (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:12-3). The first courses in archaeology were given at the *Museo* in 1906 and were subsequently moved to the *Universidad Nacional* (Bernal 1980:160). In 1909, the *Museo Nacional* was divided into the *Museo Nacional de Historia Natural* and the *Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnografía* (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:12).

The beginnings of a nationalist art with indigenous themes can also be traced to this period. In 1877, Díaz, through the *Ministerio de Fomento*, commissioned a sculpture of Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, as proto-nationalist (Suárez Cortés 1987:33-4). At the same time, events from Mexico's pre-Hispanic past were the favored subjects in the history painting course at the Academy of San Carlos (Ramírez 1990:505). The neoclassical works of José Obregon and Rodrigo Gutiérrez stand out as examples. In addition, the landscape and common folk of Mexico also found increasing acceptance as subject matter, with noteworthy examples being the landscapes of José María Velasco and the folk scenes of Agustín Arrieta (Ramírez 1990). This pre-*muralismo* nationalist trend in painting perhaps culminated with the efforts of Dr. Atl (he changed his name from Gerardo Murillo to Dr. Atl, the *Nahuatl* word for water) and his student Saturnino Herrán. Atl returned from a three year sojourn in Europe in 1903 calling for a revitalization of Mexican culture and as teacher at the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* (among his students were Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco) was the first to suggest that murals treating nationalist themes be painted in public buildings (Messenger 1990:559). Both Atl and Herrán were key organizers of an iconoclastic exhibit of paintings by Mexican artists held during the 1910 centennial celebration of the declaration of Mexican Independence (Debroise 1987:58). Begun in 1914, Herrán would leave unfinished on his death in 1918 the first mural, aptly entitled *Nuestros Dioses*, to represent the conception of *mestizo* Mexico out of the violent clash of Indian and Spaniard.

In summary, we see in the long period from the Conquest to the eve of the revolution the punctuated development of a Mexican national identity impelled by three primary forces: 1) growing friction between *criollo* and *peninsular* classes, culminating in independence from Spain, and itself situated within the wider defense of America against Enlightenment *philosophes*; 2) transgressions of Mexican sovereignty by the United States and European powers, and 3) the efforts of both liberals and conservatives throughout the nineteenth century to consolidate and modernize the country along the European model of the nation-state. Following from these were various implications for the perception of the Indian past and, therefore, for the development of archaeology in Mexico. Despite conservative opposition, the glorious Indian *past*, but not the conquered Indian (for the *criollo* the vitality of Indian culture having died with the conquest), was mobilized by the *criollo* class as a key defining element of Mexican nationalism with the consequent support for archaeological investigation, museum display and representation of Indian themes in the arts. But it is important to realize that in this first incarnation of a Mexican national identity the crisis of race and ethnicity had not yet been addressed - the question of the contemporary Indian would have to await the profound cultural redefinitions of the Revolution.

### Revolution, Archaeology and Art, 1910-1939

In the giant forge of America, on the giant anvil of the Andes, virile races of bronze and iron have struggled for centuries. From this struggle emerged the national race of Mexico, the national culture of the future. Now it is time for Mexico's rulers to take up the hammer and gird themselves with the blacksmith's apron, so that they may make rise from the miraculous anvil the new nation of blended bronze and iron [Gamio 1960:5-6].

The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, the first successful revolution of the twentieth century, in which over one and a half million people lost their lives, fundamentally transformed the conception of Mexican identity and the role that archaeology would play in its construction. Hatched by liberal intellectuals and northern *caudillos*, the Revolution did not begin as a "self-consciously Indian project" even though the overwhelming majority of the landless peasantry that was mobilized by the millions to fight in the revolutionary armies was Indian; any popular pressure (there were significant agrarian demands) should probably be "couched in class rather than caste terms" (Knight 1990:76).<sup>2</sup> By the end of the Revolution, however, the Revolution would be reconstructed as one by and for the Indian.

For the architects of the Revolution the nineteenth century goal of consolidated nationhood was still primary, and the integration of the Indian into the nation was the single most important step towards economic development and modernization (Knight 1990:84). Thus both during and in the aftermath of the Revolution the various revolutionary regimes faced the critical task of incorporating the disenfranchised Indian and *mestizo* peasantry into the new nation. In contrast with the oppression of the Porfiriato, however, integration and assimilation after the Revolution would proceed in a "planned, enlightened and respectful" manner (Knight 1990:80).

Unlike the nineteenth century claiming of the Indian *past* only, the revolutionary redefinition of cultural values would require the rehabilitation and promotion of both the Indian past and the *contemporary* Indian in a program termed *indigenismo* (Keen 1971; Knight 1990; Lorenzo 1980).<sup>3</sup> The glories of the Indian past would be brought to light through

archaeological research while contemporary Indian folk culture would be revitalized through the anthropological study of Indian arts, crafts and music. Several *indigenista* efforts outside of anthropology are noteworthy: Gerardo Murillo's (the painter Dr. Atl) compendium of Indian arts and crafts, *Las Artes Populares de México* (1928); Gregorio López y Fuentes' novel *El Indio* (1935); and the composer Carlos Chávez's *Sinfonía India* (1935) and *Xochipili-Macuilxochitl* (1940) which were scored for pre-Columbian instruments.

*Indigenismo* was coupled with the cult of the *mestizaje*, a concept that would fundamentally alter the vision of Mexican identity past, present and future. The concept of the *mestizaje* states that the Mexican race is a new race, "*la raza cósmica*," formed of the miscegenation of European and Indian, and it is through this racial and ethnic unification and a return to native (although not abandoning Mexico's European heritage) spiritual roots that national development will take place (Knight 1990:85). It is important to note that while *indigenismo* valorized Indian culture past and present, there was never any question that the ultimate goal was the total assimilation and modernization of Mexico's Indian population into a *mestizaje* mainstream (Knight 1990:84-5). This notion of assimilation was anathema to a small but vocal minority of *indianistas* who called for the complete rejection of European culture in Mexico and instead believed that postrevolutionary Mexico should be guided by purely indigenous traditions and values (Knight 1990:81). In a teleological view of Mexican history, the destiny of the *mestizaje* became the guiding nationalist ideology in the aftermath of the revolution (Knight 1990). In order to promulgate both *indigenismo* and the ideology of the *mestizaje*, the revolutionary governments turned to archaeology to provide the symbols of a glorified Indian past and to public art to disseminate this new vision of Mexican identity.

Three intellectuals, among many, who figured prominently in this effort were Manuel Gamio, José Vasconcelos and Diego Rivera. Gamio, usually remembered for having conducted the first stratigraphic excavations in Mexico, studied under Franz Boas at Columbia University and was director of the International School of American Archaeology and Ethnology in Mexico City, a school founded in 1910 by US, German and French institutions, and the Mexican government (Bernal 1980:164). During the Revolution, Gamio outlined the active role that archaeology would play in the incorporation of the Pre-Hispanic past into a postrevolutionary, *mestizo* Mexico in *Forjando Patria* (1960). In 1917 he founded the *Dirección de Antropología*, revolutionary Mexico's first official body devoted to archaeology and anthropology and which "as an office of the State spearheaded the implementation of the most important ideas found in the Constitution, governing ideas followed by the men who made the Revolution" (Noyola Rocha 1987:144). Gamio also was editor of the *Dirección's* journal *Ethnos*, which served as an important forum for many of the Revolution's leading intellectuals (Noyola Rocha 1987:144). Afterward, in 1922 Gamio published the three-volume *La Población del Valle de Teotihuacan*, an important work of applied anthropology that linked both Indian past and present by presenting not only the prehistory and history of the Teotihuacan Valley but the social anthropology of the contemporary inhabitants as well and which would have an enduring impact on the structure of subsequent anthropological research in Mexico. In the introduction he states the ambitious and holistic aims of the project:

The gradual acquisition of knowledge regarding the racial characteristics, manifestations of material and intellectual culture, languages, economic situation and condition of the physical and biological environment of the past and present regional populations of the republic.

And,



... to investigate the historical antecedents, the present physical state and the aspects of "civilization" that the population exhibits and the measures needed to better the physical, intellectual, social and economic conditions of the population [Gamio 1922:X-XII].

After 1930 Gamio would increasingly devote himself to problems involving the national integration of indigenous groups not only in Mexico but throughout Latin America. In this regard, he directed the *Instituto Indigenista Interamericano* from 1942 until his death in 1960 (Keen 1971:464).

José Vasconcelos, philosopher, rector of the *Universidad Nacional* and prominent critic of the positivism of the Díaz era, was instrumental in conceiving and operationalizing the "cult of the *mestizaje*" (though he would later vehemently reject *indigenismo*) (Knight 1990:86). Noyola Rocha notes in his history of Mexican anthropology during this period that: Vasconcelos' conception of the *raza cósmica*, although derived from diverse intellectual sources and a certain dose of orientalism, in practice became a project with real results, whose principal objective was racial unification as a vehicle to make possible economic development, to provide fertile ground for the manifestation of artistic and cultural restlessness and to prepare the population for democratic life [1987:145].

It was Vasconcelos, as Secretary of Public Education from 1920-24 under president Obregón, who introduced Diego Rivera and other intellectuals who had just returned from Europe to Mexico's pre-Hispanic heritage on official trips to the Maya sites of Chichén Itzá and Uxmal in the Yucatan (Hurlburt 1986:53) and who, with a close eye on the recent Soviet experience in instituting a vast program of education incorporating all of the arts, subsequently gave the first government commissions to Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco and other artists eager to play a vital role in building postrevolutionary Mexico (Ashton 1990:555; Keen 1971:465; Ramírez 1987:104). In a country that was over eighty percent illiterate, the educational and legitimizing value of a didactic, public art at the monumental scale of the mural was not lost on Vasconcelos (Ramírez 1987:106). Perhaps equally important was the explicit link made to the monumentality of pre-Hispanic art and architecture; modern practice would simply be a resurgence of ancient *Mexican* traditions (Ashton 1990:555; Billeter 1987:26).

In 1922, Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco and others formed the Union of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors whose manifesto proclaimed:

The Union believes that, since art is not *only* a reflection of the social conditions in which it is created, but also is an expression of the geographic conditions in which it is produced, it must take Indo-American traditions into account [Ramírez 1987:106-7].

Among the muralists, Rivera was the most ardent writer of revisionist history through the medium of the mural, tending "to glorify the Indian heritage and vilify that of the Spaniards as a means of rectifying a historical imbalance" (Goldman 1982:114). In this effort he was also the most explicit in his borrowings from archaeology when depicting aspects of everyday pre-Hispanic life. He prided himself on the authenticity of his reconstructions, saying "I took grave care to authenticate every detail by exact research because I wanted to leave no opening for anyone to discredit the murals as a whole by the charge that any detail was a fabrication" (March 1960:168). He often conferred with Alfonso Caso and other archaeologists. This emphasis on authenticity not only applied to content but also manifested

itself in technique - Rivera went to the extreme of using the juice of the nopal cactus as a binder for his pigments, which he claimed was the practice of the ancient muralists at the site of Teotihuacan. But while the detail may have been verifiable, his idealized scenes of pre-Hispanic life often juxtaposed disparate elements misplaced in time and space. As a leading member of the Mexican Communist Party and having worked in the Soviet Union in 1927-28, his visual mythograms of the course of Mexican history often conflated the birth of the *mestizaje* from the struggle between Indian and Spaniard with the triumph of the proletariat over capitalism and not surprisingly portraits of Marx, Engels and Lenin appear frequently in his work. Given his Marxist orientation it is perplexing that he eschewed celebrating scenes of the agrarian common-folk of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, time and again preferring to concentrate on the elite contexts of the most stratified societies, usually the Aztec (Brown 1986). Regardless of such problematic representations and political contradictions, it was principally through Rivera's work that the new vision of Mexican identity was seen, and with time became synonymous. As Betty Ann Brown remarks:

From Indians to tourists to scholars, more people have viewed the pre-Columbian world through Rivera's eyes than in any other fashion. If you have seen images of the pre-Columbian world on a streetside mural in East Los Angeles, or on a restaurant menu, or on a souvenir box, odds are they were derived from the work of Diego Rivera, rather than from pre-Columbian originals [1986:155].

The aforementioned Union of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors advised "its members to closely link autochthonous values with modern international currents in art, since the new world conditions require it" (Ramírez, 1987:106-107). It was this aspect of the muralist movement that would prove very important to its nationalist purposes: its wider international acceptance as an important movement of *modern* art served as a statement of modernity legitimating both the Revolution's break with what came before and the new conception of Mexican identity (Ramírez 1987:107).

Relatedly, the muralist movement was also a tremendous boost to a general trend transforming pre-Columbian *artifact* into *art* that had begun in the late nineteenth century with Alfred Maudslay sending carved Mayan lintels to the British Museum. Rivera himself was one of the first private individuals to collect pre-Columbian artifacts as art (he eventually amassed 60,000 items) (Brown 1986:139). It was this transformation, in which the primitivist impulse of modern art no doubt played a part, that would also, as with the muralist movement itself, lend international legitimacy to the new vision of Mexico. The volumetric pre-Columbian influence evident in the sculpture of Henry Moore is one well known example of this wider acceptance of pre-Columbian forms as legitimate artistic sources (Keen 1971:511). Pre-Columbiana had passed from the realm of the pagan and primitive curio to that of the timeless aesthetic of universal art.

Finally, it is important to address developments with the colossus to the north. Relations between the United States and Mexico during this period were deeply strained by US fears over the possible equalization of lop-sided business arrangements that foreign interests had traditionally enjoyed during the Porfiriato; an eventuality that would come to pass in 1938 with the expropriation of seventeen US and British oil companies by the leftist president Lázaro Cárdenas (Meyer and Sherman 1983:604). The threat of direct intervention from "yanquilandia" (the United States actually carried out two "punitive" actions against Mexico during the military phase of the Revolution [Meyer and Sherman 1983:531, 541]) was of

continuous concern to the revolutionary governments and can be identified, as in the 19th century, as a fundamental rallying point around which Mexican nationalism was defined.

Given this relationship, it is interesting to note on the part of a United States still reeling from the atrocity of World War I a profound rejection of Europe as a cultural model and a corresponding search for autochthonous, truly New World, inspiration south of the border (Ingle 1984; Keen 1971:463). Testament to this were the usually warm embrace and many commissions received by Rivera, Orozco and others in the US. Indeed, the mural form, directly inspired by the Mexican artists, became the dominant medium in WPA sponsored art projects (O'Connor 1986:170). Architecture in the United States experienced a similar development, now known as the Mayan Revival Style (Ingle 1984), which incorporated pre-Hispanic architectural forms and motifs. This, notably, found expression in many works by Frank Lloyd Wright and perhaps culminated in the Mayan Building at the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 which was a partial to-scale reconstruction of the Nunnery Quadrangle at the Yucatan site of Uxmal (Ingle 1984). Archaeologically, it was during this period that US institutions and individuals laid claim in earnest to the spectacular archaeological potential of Mexico, being primarily focused on developing regional chronologies. Notable among the former are the work of the Carnegie Institution and the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University; and among the latter stand out the efforts of George C. Vaillant, Sylvanus Morley, Alfred Kroeber, and Isabel Kelley (Schoenberg 1988).

To summarize this period, we see the role of archaeology as provider of authentic symbols and the aestheticization of the pre-Hispanic past in the mural movement and in the artifact into art transformation. The Indian past was valorized, and as the living link with that past, so was the anonymous and timeless contemporary folk culture of the Indian (*indigenismo*); but the ideology of *mestizaje* precluded difference - contemporary Indians were expected to subsume and assimilate into the *mestizo* culture of modern Mexico. In ways, the Revolution promised the simultaneous birth of the Indian past and death of the Indian present.

### Consolidation of the Myth, 1939 - Present

The founding of the present-day *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* in 1939 from the integration of the *Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Etnografía e Historia*, the *Departamento de Monumentos Prehispanicos* and other services (Bernal 1980:186) marks the state's consolidation of the key institutional apparatus responsible for implementing the ideology of *indigenismo/mestizaje*. Its first director was the archaeologist Alfonso Caso, who would also later head the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* founded in 1948. President Cárdenas, a socialist and populist who reinvigorated official support for the *mestizaje* program, had for some time wished for a more powerful and centralized body to carry out both the conservation of the country's pre-Hispanic monuments and the anthropological study of indigenous groups (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:17). Its mandate was to realize the following functions:

- 1) Exploration of archaeological zones in the Republic.
- 2) Protection, conservation and restoration of the Republic's archaeological, historical and artistic monuments.
- 3) Realization of scientific and artistic investigations that pertain to the archaeology and history of Mexico, and the realization of anthropological and ethnographic investigations principally dealing with the indigenous population of the Republic.

4) Publication of these activities.

5) All other activities that the laws of the Republic require [Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:19].

Recognizing the need for qualified personnel to carry out this mandate, the INAH opened the *Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (ENAH) in 1940 (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:20). Through the INAH the state assumed a virtual monopoly on all anthropological and historical research carried out in Mexico.

Since its founding, the INAH has grown to be one of the world's largest (perhaps the largest; exact figures are hard to come by but in 1980 the budget approached 900,000,000 pesos [approximately 40,000,000 dollars][Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:97]) entirely state-run organizations devoted to the investigation, protection, and divulgation of national patrimony. The INAH bureaucracy is comprised of over thirty major and minor departments (this number varies with frequent reorganizations) serving the primary functions of investigation, museography, conservation, publication, and library/archival services. Among these activities, an examination of the way the INAH's product has been represented through its network of museums and archaeological zones is particularly important for a discussion of national identity.

Since Vasconcelos' tenure as Secretary of Public Education in the early twenties the role of the museum in Mexico has been clear. The official history of the INAH states that:

With the creation of the modern Secretary of Public Education, in 1921, the function of the museums as supports of the federal educational system was clearly established and furthermore, as cultural spaces through which the ideology of revolutionary nationalism would be disseminated. This ideology places emphasis on the rescue of the indigenous past and on the break from the Spanish mother country, elements considered essential for the formation of a national historical consciousness shaped out of the nation's own values and symbols [Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:213].

The INAH's message is divulged through several specialized museums in the Capital, each covering a certain segment of the official periodization of the Mexican time-line. *History* begins in Mexico with the conquest. The *Museo del Virreinato* covers the colonial period. The *Museo Nacional de Historia*, symbolically located in the Castillo de Chapultepec, where several military cadets, *los niños heroes*, died defending the Castillo during the North American invasion of 1847, covers the nationalist period after the watershed of Independence and through the Revolution. But these museums, being primarily populated, as Shelly Errington (in press) observes, "by named white male Christian Europeans preoccupied with politics" do not, and can not, alone represent the myth of the *mestizaje*. It is the cultural space of the world renowned *Museo Nacional de Antropología*, inaugurated in 1964, that is the linchpin in this system of representation. The *Museo* rescues and resurrects the native symbols with which the "national historical consciousness" is forged. It is here where Mexico returns to its exalted pre-Hispanic roots and pays homage, and where, if only momentarily, the lingering wounds of the conquest are healed.

In accordance with this most important role the museum building is a truly monumental and imposing structure that dwarfs its sister history museums, and in so doing diminishes and even vilifies through its architecture the white, European, and colonial history that they present. We are left with no doubts as to which heritage, Indian or Spanish, is given ideological preeminence and to which the Mexican *mestizo* identity is said to owe its

distinctiveness. To explain this difference we must remember that while it is true that the *mestizaje* is equally of Spaniard and Indian, it is the Indian that has suffered the grand historical injustice and so it is the Indian who must receive apologetic recognition on such a monumental and humbling scale. The dominant European heritage needs no such aggrandizement. This sentiment can be found in the dedication at the entrance to the museum:

The Mexican nation erects this monument in honor of the great cultures that flourished during the pre-Columbian era in regions that now form part of the Republic of Mexico.

In the presence of the vestiges of those cultures, contemporary Mexico pays tribute to indigenous Mexico, in whose expression it discerns the characteristics of its national identity.

Mexico City, 17 September, 1964  
Adolfo López Mateos  
President of Mexico

The original museum catalogue boasts that the museum cost over \$20,000,000 to design and build and that pre-Hispanic materials and construction techniques were consciously employed in order to consecrate the museum as part of the long tradition of Mexican master craftsmanship and to link the museum with the ancient cities of Mexico: Tenochtitlan, Teotihuacan, Tula, Monte Alban, Palenque, etc. (Ramírez Vásquez 1968:21). This sense of an immutable connection with the past is further heightened when we read that:

At night, when the sounds of work had died down, dozens of camp-fires would appear, and the (work)men would have their supper, now as in the pre-Hispanic past, made up of tortillas, rice, beans and an occasional piece of meat [Ramírez Vásquez 1968:21].

The museum surrounds a huge rectangular courtyard, one half shaded by a immense steel parasol supported by single central stone column, the other half open with a shallow pool. The flow through the museum is counterclockwise around the courtyard. After several introductory halls that acquaint the visitor with the discipline of anthropology, the physiography of Mesoamerica, the place of Mesoamerican developments within world prehistory, the peopling of the New World and the pre-Classic foundations of Mexican civilization, one works one's way through a series of halls that each deal with a specific culture area of ancient Mexico.

The order chosen for the presentation of these developments is both chronologically and regionally based and quickly reveals much about which specific development is to be considered paramount and taken to *stand* for all of Mexico's pre-Hispanic heritage. Continuing along on the right side of the courtyard one passes through halls displaying the Valley of Mexico cultures of Teotihuacan and the Toltec. We then turn left out of the Toltec hall into the museum's "largest and most important exhibition hall, The *Mexica* (Aztec) Room, characterized by a strongly ceremonial air that causes an immediate respectful response (Ramírez Vásquez 1968:20)," and presented as the culmination of pre-Hispanic cultural development in the highland hearth of the Valley of Mexico. Continuing back around on the left side of the museum we pass through, as if spiralling out of the Valley, the various regional developments to the south, in the hot and humid lowlands to the east and finally areas

to the north and west: respectively, The Valley of Oaxaca, The Gulf of Mexico, The Maya Area, Northern Mexico and Western Mexico.

The *Mexica* hall is the largest hall, it is the only one that rises two stories and it is the central hall that one faces upon entering the museum. The other developments have been clearly located in supporting and subservient roles. Among these, though, the developments in the Valley of Mexico on the right side of the museum, since they lead up to the grand *Mexica*, have been placed first in the visiting order. This privileging of the *Mexica* reflects the historical hegemony that the center, first Tenochtitlan, then Mexico City, *La Capital*, has exerted and continues to exert over Mexico's periphery. It was there where the great city of Teotihuacan and Tula of the Toltecs flourished; it was there from the capital of Tenochtitlan that the *Mexica*, heirs to the Toltecs, expanded their empire; it was there where Cortés took Moctezuma prisoner and conquered the *Mexica*; it was there where the capital of New Spain was built directly over the ruins of Tenochtitlan, thereby drawing power from what came before and symbolizing the utter nature of the conquest; and it was there that the capital remained after the nationalist struggles of Independence and the Revolution.

Remembering that the ideology of the *mestizaje* requires that the museum not only serve the promotion of the pre-Hispanic Indian heritage but, as heir to that heritage, contemporary indigenous culture as well, we find the second floor of the museum devoted to ethnographic exhibits. As with the authentic construction of the museum, we are told in the museum catalogue (Ramírez Vásquez 1968:40) that members from each of the represented indigenous groups were imported to the capital to construct, using authentic materials and techniques, their own dioramas. Not accidentally, the museum floor plan reveals that the exhibits, wherever possible, are located directly above their archaeological "roots" below so that Maya ethnography is above Maya archaeology and so on. The catalogue goes on to say that this juxtaposition of Indian past and present :

is indeed the essential and comprehensive purpose of the museum. It not only offers the visitor of whatever cultural origin or affiliation a visual understanding of what Indian Mexico is like, but equally important it gives the native Indian himself the means by which to see himself in relation to his own ancestors. In effect, and without the slightest condescension, the pre-Columbian past, in all its human drama and historical order, is *created* before the very eyes of the Indian visitor. The native visitor to the museum makes it clear that the Indian has survived as a person; the museum makes it clear that he has also survived in the strength of his past [Ramírez Vásquez 1968:177; emphasis mine].

The catalogue also tells us that:

... as more and more Indian groups are absorbed into contemporary culture, the Indian traditions surviving in Mexico are threatened with disappearance. However, the costumes, artefacts, dwellings and customs of the major Indian groups have been preserved for posterity in the National Museum of Anthropology [Ramírez Vásquez 1968:177].

Thus, not only is the National Museum of Anthropology, as repository of Mexican Indianness past and present, the cultural space where the modern *mestizo* Mexican learns about his or her Indian heritage, but, as the integration of the Indian into a national *mestizaje* culture proceeds, it is also the place where the Indian must go to learn about not only his or her ancient traditions, but the more recent, disappearing ones as well.

As with the realm of archaeology we again see a privileging of the *Mexica* in the ethnographic sphere - but this arises through the conspicuous absence of any corresponding ethnographic exhibit. There is no exhibit above the two-story *Mexica* hall. The catalogue simply states, "a rigorous correspondence was not always possible; a number of archaeological exhibits do not have an ethnological counterpart" (Ramírez Vásquez 1968:38). Shelly Errington, with much insight, has suggested that:

By failing to locate the descendants of the *Mexicas* in a single Indian group, region, or set of language speakers, the exhibition asserts that modern *Mexicas* cannot be located in a single group in Mexico, but have as descendants all Mexicans, who are their heirs...The Museo Nacional de Antropología... is not saying that Aztecs were proto-nationalists but rather that Mexicans are present-day Aztecs [in press].

The overall effect is to glorify Aztecs, who become the center, the unmarked category, from whose implicit point of view the past and present are organized into a coherent narrative. Insofar as people of regions outside Mexico D.F. assert an identity different from that of the abstract citizen, they are "indios," "ethnics," the "other" and the objects of ethnography [in press].

While highlighting local developments, the same basic narrative as found in the *Museo Nacional* is disseminated throughout the Republic by the INAH's 27 regional museums (Figure 1) located in the state capitals (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:211).<sup>4</sup>

In conjunction with the network of museums, the INAH provides perhaps a more direct connecting experience with the pre-Hispanic past through the ninety *zonas arqueológicas* (Figure 2) that have been opened as of 1988 (Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988:211). The state has intervened in the process of ruination, taking possession of the local site; enclosing and sanitizing (often involving forced eviction of communities, as was the case with the Olmec site of La Venta in 1984) the *zona* in the creation of a nationalist landscape. These usually are sites with impressive features such as monumental architecture, sculpture or murals and so are mostly found in the "high culture" area of Mesoamerica in central and southern Mexico. While accurate reconstruction is certainly the goal, the restoration emphasis is on a finished product - better to guess than leave an untidy mound. Here the visitor can climb the sacred pyramids, enter the royal palaces and otherwise experience the past.

This raises the question of the impact of tourism on the INAH's mission. There is no doubt that the INAH's role has expanded over the years to provide cultural attractions to an increasingly international audience. Tourism, after oil, is Mexico's most important foreign exchange earner and the role of the INAH in helping to ameliorate the foreign debt crisis is not considered insignificant; most Mexican tourism advertisements, promising the fulfillment of gringo fantasies of the exotic and romantic destination, form a composite picture of tropical paradise and mysterious pre-Columbian pyramids. While the Museo Nacional de Antropología is a top draw, the INAH's efforts have been increasingly directed towards the creation of more and more *zonas arqueológicas* with attendant tourist facilities such as Club Med Chichén Itzá. At times, the INAH's commodification of the past has even extended to rather tasteless Hollywood-like productions, where the archaeological site becomes more a theme park; for example, visitors to Teotihuacan can witness a nightly laser light-show extravaganza illuminating the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon while listening to Ricardo Montalban recount the mythic history of the sacred city. But it would be cynical and incorrect to say that the INAH's original mission has been compromised for the sake of the almighty dollar. Evidence

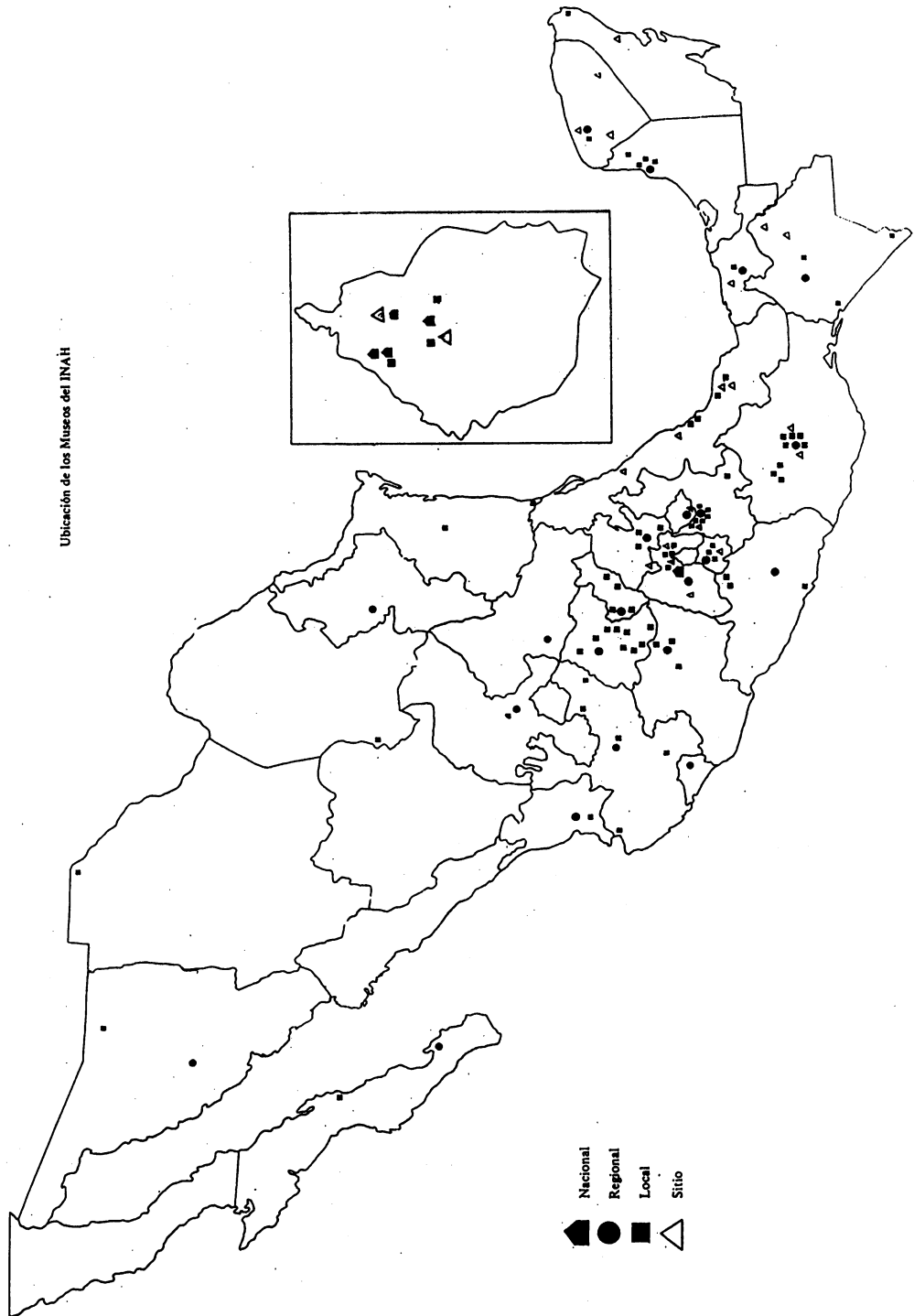


Figure 1: Network of regional museums (from Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988).



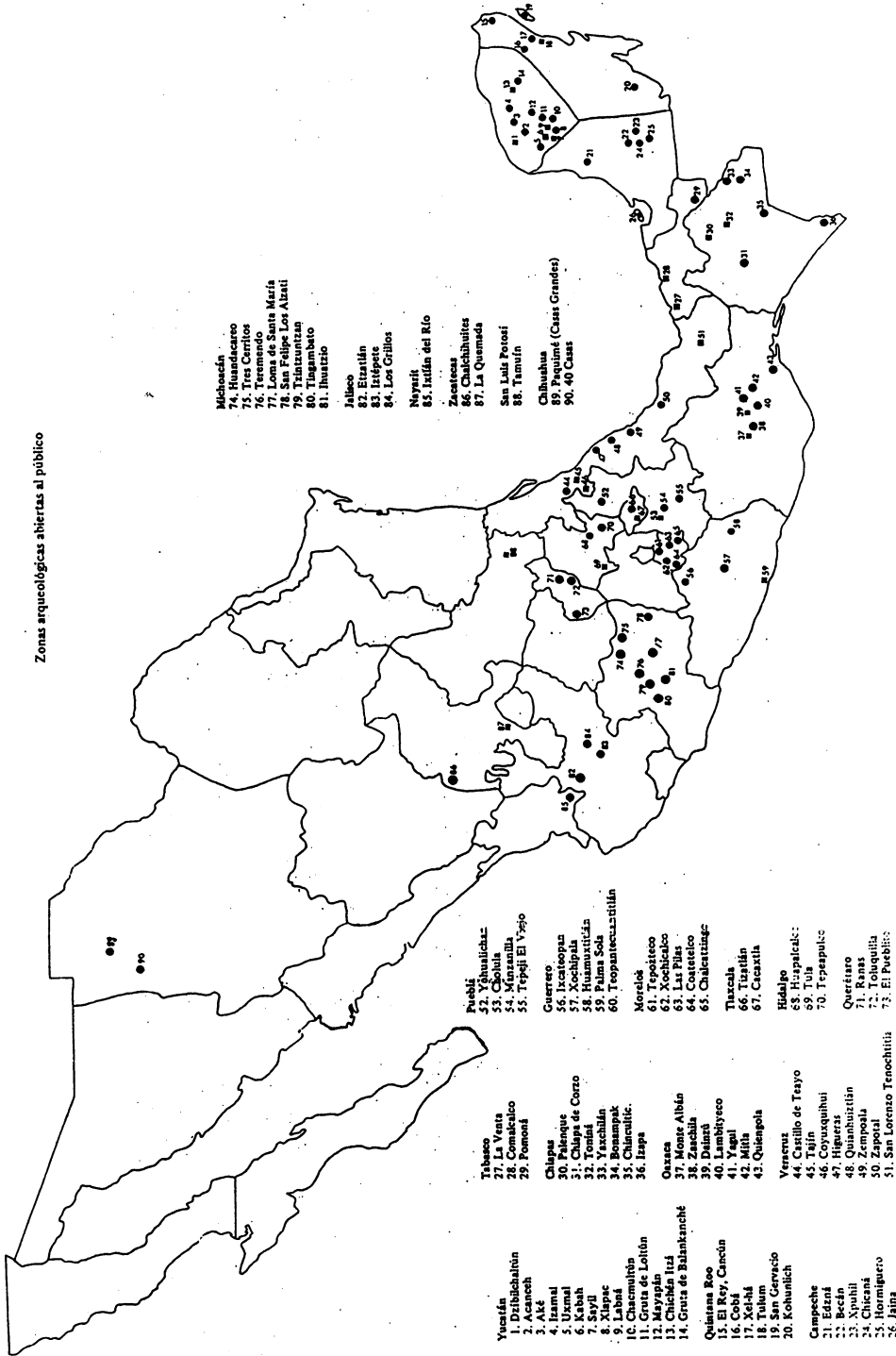


Figure 2: Network of Zonas Arqueológicas (from Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988).

of fidelity to its primary domestic function of education is found at the ticket booth; while it could charge the wealthy hordes from the north several dollars each, the entrance fee to all of the INAH's facilities is on the average around 20 cents, keeping the sites accessible to most Mexicans. Furthermore, insofar as international prestige is an important legitimating factor for any nationalist program, rather than compromising its domestic function, tourism dovetails well with the INAH's original mandate.

Octavio Paz, in his *Critique of the Pyramid*, wrote:

This exaltation and glorification ... transforms the Museum of Anthropology into a temple. The cult propagated within its walls is the same one that inspires our schoolbooks on Mexican history and the speeches of our leaders: the stepped pyramid and the sacrificial platform [1985:110].

Paz recognized that in many ways, the INAH, through its network of museums and *zonas arqueológicas*, had restored, after the brief interruption of the colonial and pre-revolutionary periods, the original function of the Mesoamerican temple pyramid: sacred mountains rising from the earthly to the divine, home of the ancestors, where ritual ensured continuity between past and present. Just as we analyze the ancient settlement patterns of Mesoamerica, we can gaze across the modern Mexican landscape and discern the distribution of new sacred places, with, of course, the *Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia* in Mexico City as the high altar, where modern Mexico pays homage to the ancestors and where the cosmic, mythological origins of the national race, the *mestizaje*, are revealed. And just as *Mexica* cosmology was legitimated through the sacred rites of ancestor worship performed on the altar platforms of Tenochtitlan, so too is the nationalist ideology of the *mestizaje* legitimated at the modern altars of the INAH.

## Conclusions

The foregoing has shown that the development of Mexican national identity and the corresponding archaeological responses primarily were defined by how Indianness past and present was to be treated. The attitude toward the Indian, from initial awe during the Conquest, shifted from repudiation during the early colonial period to the slow rediscovery and taking of the Indian *past* as their own by liberal *criollos* during the late colonial and Independence periods to what would appear to be the final reconciliation and emancipation in the official *indigenista* embrace of Indian past and present during the postrevolutionary period.

An assessment of the success of this last construction, the nationalist ideology of the Revolution, is fraught with ambiguity. Clearly, the promise of the cult of the *mestizaje* remains unfulfilled; in ways, the severance of the contemporary Indian from the glorious pre-Conquest Indian is as strong as before the Revolution. Officially, all Mexicans are *mestizos*, half-Indian, half-European, each half equally valued. Privately, "... in Mexican Spanish, *indio* is a seller of Chiclets, a sidewalk squatter. *Indio* means backward or lazy or lower-class" (Rodríguez 1991:52). No long-term visitor to Mexico can fail to notice a pervasive racism, despite demographics indicating an overwhelming *mestizo* homogeneity, manifest in the positioning of individuals along an Indian to European scale based on fine-grained distinctions in skin color and other somatic features, language, dress and other customs; or that most media figures, especially women, are white, if not blonde and blue eyed (Knight 1990:100). The tenacious colonial oppositions persist: dark, Indian, backward against white, European, modern.

Successive administrations of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), now the longest ruling political party in the world, have found it much easier to pay lip service to the ideology of the *mestizaje* through entities such as the INAH than they have been able, or inclined, to affect real political and economic changes that would improve the conditions of indigenous groups and poor *mestizos*. Fernando Benítez has decried the hollowness of the official rhetoric:

The fact that we restored Teotihuacan or that Father Garibay labors to translate Aztec poems brings no benefit to the Indians, adds not a single tortilla to their daily diet. We adorn ourselves with their jewels, excavate the earth to turn up their ancient artifacts, but we stubbornly ignore their rags, protect the men who steal their lands, fail to punish their exploiters... We have one attitude toward the dead Indians, a very different one toward the living. The dead Indians excite our admiration, stimulate a stream of tourists; the living Indians make us blush with shame, give a hollow ring to our fine words of progress and democracy [Benítez as translated in Keen 1971:467].

It can be argued that in place of the church, one of the principal enemies of the Revolution, the nationalist ideology of the Revolution became the new *opiate of the masses*, masking the social reality of racial and ethnic prejudice and gross inequality in wealth and opportunity. In this respect, Mexican state- and nation-building follows the pattern of mitigating class and ethnic conflict through the masking ideology of the "nation" whereby national development can take place (Gellner 1983).

Perhaps equally disturbing as the ideological superficiality is that, insofar as the *Indigenismo/mestizaje* program was itself embedded within a program for modernization and assimilation, Mexican Indianness was rendered a totalized, static abstraction. An abstraction in which Indian diversity past and present dissolves into the *Mexica* ideal, reflected also politically and economically in the relationship of the *Mexica* center, Mexico City, to the periphery, the rest of Mexico. As Alan Knight notes:

Postrevolutionary *Indigenismo* thus represented yet another non-Indian formulation of the "Indian problem"; it was another white/mestizo construct, part of a long tradition stretching back to the Conquest. Certainly it was a more enlightened and sympathetic formulation than its colonial or Porfirian predecessors. But, like them, it involved the imposition of ideas, categories and policies from the outside. The Indians themselves were the objects, not the authors of *indigenismo*. This the *indigenistas* frankly admitted. As Gamio apostrophized this "poor and suffering race:" "you will not awaken spontaneously. It will be necessary for friendly hearts to work for your redemption." It was therefore the task of skilled and sympathetic intellectuals, ethnographers, and anthropologists above all, to "forge an Indian soul." [Knight 1990:77]

Still, acknowledging these pernicious aspects, it is useful to ask what if there had been no *indigenismo*, no cult of the *mestizaje*? There can be no doubt that the program of cultural reconstruction envisioned by Vasconcelos, Gamio and others during the Revolution was a remarkable ideological, if not substantive, solution to a racial, ethnic, political and economic crisis of critical proportions. By integrating *all* Mexicans into at least a vision of Mexican national identity it is likely that continued civil war and massive repression were averted. Additionally, the resulting national unity and stability formed a significant defense against the

political and economic, if not territorial, depredations of a United States historically both nervous of, and opportunistic towards, instability south of the border. Moreover, it is instructive to compare Mexico to other countries in Latin America: Mexico has largely escaped the scale of political violence exacerbated by exclusionary nationalist ideologies, as in Guatemala. Finally, outside of Mexico, the Mexican-American population in the United States, beginning during the civil rights era of the sixties, successfully employed the *indigenista/mestizaje* model (including a vital Rivera-inspired mural movement) to build a Chicano identity and resist the dominant Anglo culture (O'Connor 1986:178).

But what of the future? Will the *indigenismo/mestizaje* model continue as a viable construct in Mexico? Knight (1990:98-102) concludes that the prophecy of the Revolution, that of a homogeneous *mestizo* nation (he cites the 1970 census indicating that eight percent of the population was linguistically defined as "Indian"), has largely come to pass; not as the result of "Revolution as conscious policy" but rather as the result of "Revolution as unconscious process," that is through the rapid economic development of the postrevolutionary era and the attendant changes in mobility and communication. He further sees the eventual disappearance of the "Indian problem" as "development" furthers the well advanced transformation of "ethnically patterned forms of subordination" into class relations. We might predict, then, that as this process continues, the perennial, ethnically patterned crisis of Mexican identity might be ameliorated as social reality reflects more and more the *mestizaje* ideal. There is no doubt that the process of *mestizaje* continues apace, but I would argue that development will not diminish, but perhaps intensify, the contestation and negotiation of Mexican national identity and that this process will remain couched in ethnic terms, using the traditional symbols provided by the *indigenista/mestizaje* model. Indianness will continue to be mobilized not only by what would be defined as traditional indigenous groups, but by dissatisfied *mestizo* interest groups as well.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, Anthony Smith observes that:

Creating nations is a recurrent activity, which has to be renewed periodically. It is one that involves ceaseless re-interpretations, rediscoveries and reconstructions; each generation must re-fashion national institutions and stratification systems in the light of the myths, memories, values and symbols of the 'past', which can best minister to the needs and aspirations of its dominant social groups and institutions. Hence that activity of rediscovery and re-interpretation is never complete and never simple; it is the product of dialogues between the major social groups and institutions within the boundaries of the 'nation', and it answers to their perceived ideals and interests [1986:206].

There have been signs over the last twenty years that the monolithic dogma of the *mestizaje* may indeed be undergoing such re-interpretation and reconstruction, from both within and without. From within, and somewhat unexpectedly on the part of a state entity, the INAH has produced several recent self-critical histories of both the institution and Mexican archaeology (García Mora 1988; Olivé Negrete and Castro-Pozo 1988). So far, such introspection has not produced a critical museography that could engage the visitor and challenge the traditional narrative.

From outside, the PRI, the INAH's sponsor, has recently faced its most serious challenge from opposition political parties; most significantly from Lázaro Cárdenas' son Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (his name proof of his father's *indigenista* sympathies). Economically,

and increasingly politically, centrifugal forces in the rest of Mexico are acting to diminish the traditional hegemony exercised by Mexico D.F. Concurrently, across the country *self-defined* indigenous groups are organizing themselves, resisting assimilation and demanding self-determination (Knight 1990:81). This, no doubt, will include a reclaiming and rewriting of *their own* pasts.

These forces, in that they affect what it means to be Mexican, will without question change the way archaeology is practiced and the way its product is presented. The archaeological terrain in Mexico, both literally and figuratively, will certainly become more contested. As far as the INAH is concerned its monopoly over archaeological practice will probably continue, but it may indeed show the characteristic and legendary flexibility of its sponsor, the PRI, to accommodate an increasing archaeological pluralism.

## Notes

1. A version of this paper was presented at the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) Conference, Saint David's University College, Lampeter, Wales, UK, Dec. 17th, 1990. I wish to thank Shelly Errington for the useful discussions and her suggestions for comparative sources and Margot Winer for critiquing various drafts of this paper.
2. "Indian" and "Mestizo" are socially and culturally determined, relational categories (Knight 1990:74) and consequently there has been tremendous variation in the estimates of the Indian population in Mexico; official census figures, defined by language, have been criticized for grossly underestimating the true size of the Indian population, committing "statistical ethnocide." Measured by other criteria some authors conclude that roughly two thirds of Mexico's population in 1910 was Indian (Knight 1990:74).
3. Knight (1990:77) makes the interesting argument that the policy of *Indigenismo* could be safely adopted in Mexico, as opposed to in Andean countries, precisely because of the lack of direct Indian pressure.
4. This same narrative also structured the design of the recent exhibit, *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the pre-Hispanic sequence began with regional developments and culminated with the *Mexica*.
5. Indeed, Knight (1990:100) notes that there have been many cases of the "instrumental" or utilitarian exploitation by both indigenous groups and *mestizos* of the opportunities presented by *Indigenismo*: in "Michoacán, Indianness becomes a useful political weapon for hardheaded Tarascan caciques engaged in rough power-politics. In this last case, it is clear, ethnicity represents a political option more than an ascriptive inevitability."

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