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Marc Simmons

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TLASCALANS IN THE SPANISH BORDERLANDS

By MARC SIMMONS*

THE ROLE played by the Indians of Tlascala as allies of the Spaniards in the conquest of central Mexico is well known.¹ Less familiar, but no less deserving to be recounted, is the record of their services in the Spanish borderlands to the north.

For their aid in overthrowing the powerful Aztec state in the Cortéz campaigns of 1520-1522, the Tlascalans were granted as reward by the king of Spain a series of privileges including exemption from specified tribute payments and the right to bear certain European arms. The special status thus accorded these people brought them into a close and harmonious relationship with their Spanish overlords. This association as the sixteenth century progressed proved mutually advantageous for both peoples. The Tlascalans, for their part, were able to retain considerable political independence, to prosper economically, and to avoid many of the burdens which fell to the lot of other Indians in central Mexico. The Spaniards, on the other hand, were provided a hard core of loyal and energetic citizens as a base for the colony of New Spain. This latter factor alone carried considerable significance in those crucial early years when the annual inflow of European settlers was comparatively small, and friendly Indians had to be relied upon to maintain and defend the region.

Whereas the period in Mexico before 1550 was devoted largely to making the central area militarily and economically secure, the half-century which followed witnessed a

* Graduate student, Department of History, The University of New Mexico.

1. Variations of the term Tlascalan are Tlaxcalan, Tlaxcaltecan, and Tlascalteco. Their story in central Mexico has been told by Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven, Conn., 1952).

vigorous drive to conquer and colonize the less hospitable vastness of the northern frontier. Once again the Tlascalans were called upon to serve the Spanish cause, and they responded enthusiastically, becoming active participants in various phases of the new pioneering ventures.

As enterprizes of exploration and settlement were undertaken, the Tlascalans came to support the Spaniards in several capacities, 1) as formal colonizers clustered around mission centers where they functioned as teachers and exemplary farmers to Indian neophytes, 2) as free laborers in the new mining regions, 3) as auxiliary soldiers, and 4) as individual servants and assistants to Spanish explorers and friars going north.

As the Spaniards approached the northern perimeter, they were confronted by a horde of assorted tribes, mostly nomadic and barbarous, who went generally by the collective name of Chichimecas. One of the gravest tasks besetting sixteenth century administrators of New Spain was that of controlling these belligerent Indians. Viceroy Luis de Velasco assaulted the problem in part by inducing four hundred families of Tlascalans to move northward beginning early in 1591, and to establish settlements among the obstreperous Chichimecas. It was thought that the Tlascalan presence would help stabilize the frontier and that their example would provide a healthy model for the Chichimecas to follow.²

Several prominent friars voiced objections to the plan initially for they feared that the harsh realities of frontier life would jeopardize the spiritual welfare and the bodily safety of the Tlascalans.³ Nevertheless, the measure was approved, and under the supervision of Rodrigo del Rio de

2. France V. Scholes and Eleanor Adams, eds., *Advertimientos generales que los virreyes dejaron a sus sucesores, 1590-1604* (Mexico, 1956), pp. 43-44. The idea of using Tlascalans in this manner had been current as early as 1566. See Charles W. Hackett, ed., *Historical Documents Relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and Approaches Thereto, to 1773* (3 vols.; Washington, D. C., 1923-1937), I, 155.

3. Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana* (Mexico, 1870), pp. 245, 733.

Loza the Indians were distributed in three peripheral districts: Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, and the region around Saltillo.⁴

In Zacatecas the Tlascalans were well received by the local populous, and soon they were established at Chuchihuites, San Andrés, and Colotlán to the south. Within a short time, the prosperous district of Durango was requesting the presence of Tlascalans, not only to serve as an example to the erratic nomads, but to provide much needed labor in the mines. Shortly after 1600, some one thousand Tlascalan and Tarascan Christian Indians were imported from the south in response to this call.⁵

Several settlements of Tlascalans were developed at San Luis Potosí including the new parish of Tlaxcalilla. Contiguous to their towns and fields were placed the Guachichiles Chichimecas who were admonished by the Franciscan friars to observe and imitate the Tlascalans at every opportunity.⁶

The most distant area occupied by the Tlascalans at this time was centered around Saltillo in the extreme northeast. The severity of Chichimeca incursions here had prompted the few Spanish colonists to threaten abandonment of their homes unless government support was forthcoming. The authorities in September of 1591 responded by transferring eighty families of Tlascalans from San Luis Potosí to Saltillo where they were lodged on the western outskirts of the Spanish town in their own pueblo of San Estéban de Nueva Tlascala.⁷ This Indian community was to become the parent

4. Under orders of the viceroy, Tlascalans at about the same time were placed in the sparsely settled district of Guanajuato along with other groups of Indians from central Mexico. While various Christian tribes were drawn upon for colonists, the Tlascalans remained the leading participants in such Spanish ventures. Philip Wayne Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver* (Berkeley, 1952), p. 197.

5. Elias Amador, *Bosquejo Historico de Zacatecas* (Zacatecas, 1892), p. 276; R. H. Barlow and George T. Smisor, eds., *Nombre de Dios, Durango* (Sacramento, 1943), p. 56n.

6. Primo Feliciano Velazquez, *Historia de San Luis Potosí* (4 vols.; Mexico, 1946-1948), I, 438.

7. Vito Alesio Robles, *Francisco de Urdiñola y el Norte de la Nueva España* (Mexico, 1931), chap. VI, *passim*.

of similar Tlascalan towns located later along the northeastern rim of the viceroyalty.

An extension of the Saltillo colony blossomed forth in February, 1598, when mission Santa María de las Parras was founded to the west among the Lagunero Indians. The Christian Tlascalans assisted the Jesuits who directed this undertaking, and within a year the mission and the new town of Parras boasted a population of 1,600 persons.⁸ There followed in the same area the organization of fifteen communities all ministered by the Jesuits. The fecundity of the newly opened lands apparently lead a number of the Tlascalans to desert their mission duties and turn to the more profitable business of fulltime farming. That they openly asserted their independence in this matter is evidenced by the censure of a local priest who remarked of the Tlascalans that with "the enormous abuse of their privileges, it is a wonder they have not brought about the total ruin of our enterprize."⁹

Through the first half of the seventeenth century the northeast frontier stood as a ragged line extending from Cerralvo and Monterrey west by way of Saltillo and Parras. Texas remained to be explored and colonized as did the stretch of broken country along the Gulf coast known as the Seno Mexicano.

It was rumors of French intrusion into east Texas that first bestirred the Spanish to regard that region seriously. In 1688, a Tlascalan scout sent by the Governor of Coahuila to reconnoiter the Texas coast reported the discovery of a whiteman living as a chief among the Indians. The fellow sat in royal fashion on a throne made of buffalo hide and was waited upon by several retainers.¹⁰ He received the scout kindly, and presented him with several pages from a French

8. Peter M. Dunne, *Pioneer Jesuits in Northern Mexico* (Berkeley, 1944), pp. 79-81.

9. Vito Alessio Robles, *Coahuila y T exas en la  poca Colonial* (Mexico, 1938), p. 401.

10. Alonso de Le n, *Historia de Nuevo Le n* (Mexico, 1909), pp. 314-315; William E. Dunn, *Spanish and French Rivalry in the Gulf Region of the United States* (Austin, 1917), pp. 86-88.

book to take back as a message. The "chief" proved to be a survivor of the ill-fated La Salle expedition, and his presence fanned the fears of provincial authorities. A number of parties were outfitted at the recently established presidio of San Francisco de los Tlascalans (near present Monclova), and were dispatched to Texas to search for other remnants of La Salle's force. Tlascalans served as auxiliary soldiers with these probing expeditions and with that of Domingo de Terán who in 1691 supplied the several small missions erected in east Texas as a buffer against further French encroachment.¹¹

A proposal in 1691 to plant Tlascalan settlements in Texas at strategic points failed to bear fruit, but by 1700 these Indians were firmly established at the presidio of San Juan Bautista near present Eagle Pass.¹² Again in 1722, Tlascalans were proposed for the work of strengthening the Texas frontier. The Marqués de Aguayo ambitiously urged that two hundred

be brought by way of Vera Cruz to La Bahía, to serve as an example to the Indians with devine worship and other spiritual matters. The said . . . families should be divided between La Bahía, San Antonio, and the missions of Adaes and Texas . . .¹³

A project similar to the one advocated above involved a few decades later the placing on the lower Trinity River of "a presidio, mission and subsidized colony of fifty families, half of Spaniards and half of Tlascalan Indians, both classes to be enlisted at Saltillo.¹⁴ Still later, in 1778, Athanase de Mézières, Governor at Natchitoches, recommended the dis-

11. Charles W. Hackett, *Pichardo's Treatise on the Limits of Louisiana and Texas* (3 vols. ; Austin, 1931-1941), III, 177.

12. Herbert E. Bolton and Thomas M. Marshall, *The Colonization of North America* (New York, 1922), p. 292.

13. "El Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo . . . da quenta á V. M. de haver restaurado á el amable dominio de V. M. la provincia de Tèxas . . ." June 13, 1722, in *Documentos para la Historia de Tèxas* (Madrid, 1962), pp. 443-44.

14. Herbert E. Bolton, "Spanish Activities on the Lower Trinity," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XVI (April, 1913), 354, 361.

patching of Tlascalans to the Taovaya country on the upper Red River where their example "as regards customs, government, religion, and industry would undoubtedly give rise to one of the most opulent and advantageous settlements of these realms."¹⁵

None of these plans, so far as is known, were ever executed. At the San Sabá mission established in central Texas in 1757, however, nine Tlascalan families were brought from Saltillo to assist in the reduction of the Apaches. The tragic destruction of this mission in the following year by the Comanches and their allies is well known. A punitive expedition formed by Colonel Diego Ortiz Parilla in 1759 was composed of five hundred men including a contingent of thirty Tlascalan auxiliaries.¹⁶

As a postscript to the story of Tlascalan activities in Texas, reference should be made to their part in opening the Seno Mexicano—that strip of coastal wilderness lying athwart the lower Rio Grande extending north to the Nueces and south to the Pánuco. The formidable Sierra Gorda in this area sheltered fierce remnants of Chichimeca bands driven from their homes in the west, and offered refuge to Indian neophytes who periodically fled from the missions of Coahuila and Nuevo León. Until the eighteenth century Spanish colonists by-passed the Seno Mexicano in favor of more hospitable climes elsewhere. Infrequently military forces penetrated the region to round up escapees from the mission. These Indians on their return were distributed among the Tlascalans who received the responsibility of reconciling their charges to civilized ways.

In 1746, the district was erected as the new and separate province of Nuevo Santander, and José de Escandón, given the title of governor and captain-general, was delegated to colonize it. By promise of subsidies and of lands unencum-

15. Herbert E. Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768-1780* (2 vols.; Cleveland, 1914), II, 204-207.

16. Fray Juan Agustín Morfi, *History of Texas, 1673-1779* (2 vols.; Albuquerque, 1935), II, 389.

bered by taxes, over seven hundred families including many of Tlascalan origin were persuaded to enter into the scheme. Escandón's enthusiasm and careful management resulted in the complete success of the project, and by 1755, two dozen communities containing a total of more than six thousand souls were counted.¹⁷ The Tlascalans, being in on the ground floor, obtained some of the best agricultural lands and their settlements grew to be among the most prosperous in the province.

Far to the north and west of Texas and Nuevo Santander, the Tlascalans were active for a time on another front. In New Mexico they were not needed to instruct the relatively advanced Pueblo Indians among whom the missionaries concentrated their energies, so no formal program of Tlascalan colonization was entered upon here. Nevertheless, fragmentary evidence indicates that a number of these people reached this province in a more or less haphazard fashion. Some were included among the rank and file of the soldiery in the first exploratory expedition, others came independently with the caravans of the Spanish colonists, and still others arrived attached to the entourages of officials and friars. This is not surprising since, as we have seen, Zacatecas and Durango situated on the road to New Mexico were well seeded with Tlascalans.

An old legend, lacking any basis in fact, claimed that a small body of Spaniards and Tlascalan Indians with Coronado had elected to remain in New Mexico after 1542 where they constructed a town with a chapel on the site of Santa Fe.¹⁸ There is little in the documents to suggest the presence of Tlascalans in the army of Coronado, but one or more may have been with the Chamuscado party which explored the upper Rio Grande forty years later. The expedition named the district around Taos Nueva Tlascala perhaps in honor

17. *Estado General de las Fundaciones Hecho por D. José de Escandón en la Colonia del Nuevo Santander* (Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación, 2 vols.; Mexico, 1929-1930), I, 97.

18. Benjamin R. Read, *Historia Ilustrada de Nuevo México* (Santa Fe, 1911), p. 105.

of the homeland of one of its members.¹⁹ Antonio de Espejo on his sally into New Mexico in 1582 brought with him an Indian known as Gregorio de Tlascalala, a fine soldier who possessed the talent of carving new gunstocks for the Spaniards from the durable *tornillo* wood.²⁰

Juan de Oñate in 1598 undertook the permanent occupation of the upper Rio Grande valley, and some writers have supposed that his infantry was composed largely of Tlascalans.²¹ There is no direct evidence to support this, but it may be reasonably assumed that a number were present in some capacity. At least one of the Franciscans with Oñate, it is recorded, brought a Tlascalan assistant from the south, and others may have done likewise.²²

Whatever the circumstances in which they arrived in New Mexico, the Tlascalans seemed to have gravitated to their own ward or *barrio* of Analco in Santa Fe soon after the *villa* was founded. The word *analco* is of Nahuatl origin meaning "on the other side of the river" referring to the south bank of the Rio de Santa Fe.²³ A chapel, the *hermita* of San Miguel, was probably constructed especially to minister to the Indian's spiritual needs. An early reference to Mexican Indians, no doubt Tlascalans, living in Santa Fe is found in a document of 1640, and suggests that the *barrio* of Analco was already a growing concern by this time.²⁴

In the Pueblo revolt of 1680, the Tlascalans suffered along with the Spaniards. Governor Antonio de Otermín reported that their houses and chapel were burned by the

19. J. Lloyd Mecham, "The Second Spanish Expedition to New Mexico," *New Mexico Historical Review*, I (July, 1926), 281. H. H. Bancroft suggests that the Tlascalala of Chamuscado was at Zia Pueblo. *Arizona and New Mexico* (San Francisco, 1888), p. 79n.

20. George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, eds., *Expedition into New Mexico Made by Antonio Espejo, 1582-1588* (Los Angeles, 1929), p. 69.

21. F. S. Curtis, Jr., "Spanish Arms and Armor in the Southwest," *New Mexico Historical Review*, II (April, 1927), 112.

22. Fr. Agustín de Vetancurt, *Teatro Mexicano* (4 vols.; Mexico, 1871), III, 374.

23. The Tlascalans for the most part spoke the Nahuatl or Mexican language. A few, however, were speakers of Otomi or other tongues harking back to the day when representatives of diverse linguistic groups settled in the old state of Tlascalala. Jacques Soustelle, *La Famille Otomi-Pame du Mexique Central* (Paris, 1937), p. 451.

24. Archivo General de las Indias, Patronato, leg. 244, ramo 7.

enemy while they themselves retreated across the river and joined in the spirited defense of the *villa*.²⁵ With the Spanish withdrawal, the Tlascalans retreated to new homes at El Paso.

After the reconquest and the refounding of Santa Fe, only a few Tlascalans appear to have returned to reside at the site of their former homes. In 1728, an Indian Juan de León Brito identified as "a Mexican, and settler of the ward of Analco, in this town of Santa Fe" requested from the governor title to lands which had belonged to his father. Twitchell concludes that the Britos were Tlascalan Indians.²⁶ If this was indeed the case, then here is the last reference to Tlascalans in Santa Fe which has thus far come to light. Mention of the *barrio* of Analco in several documents of the later eighteenth century indicates that *genízaros* or acculturated plains Indians were occupying this district.²⁷ Accordingly, it may be conjectured that the few Tlascalans who perhaps returned in the years following the reconquest were rapidly assimilated, abandoning in the process all traces of tribal identity.

Several recent historians, notably Adams and Chavez, deny the existence of a Tlascalan colony at Analco. They hold that the generic term "Mexican Indians" which was commonly employed in the documents merely emphasises that the people came from the south and were members of any of a number of Nahuatl or "Mexican" speaking groups.²⁸

Sufficient evidence, however, seems to exist apart from that noted above to substantiate the claim tendered in this paper that of the early residents of the ward of Analco, at least the majority were persons of Tlascalan origin. A

25. Hackett, *Historical Documents*, III, 331.

26. Ralph E. Twitchell, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico* (2 vols.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1914), I, 36.

27. Letter of Jacobo Ugarte y Loyola, January 21, 1788, Spanish Archives of New Mexico, Santa Fe, doc. no. 991; Fray Juan Agustín de Morfi, "Geográfica del Nuevo México," 1782, Archivo General de la Nación, Historia, vol. 25.

28. Eleanor B. Adams and Fray Angelico Chavez, *The Missions of New Mexico, 1776* (Albuquerque, 1956), p. 304n.

memorial penned by several Franciscan friars in December of 1693, calls attention to "the chapel of San Miguel which before [the revolt] served as the parish church of the Tlascalcan Indians."²⁹ Similarly, Fray Velez de Escalante in 1778, observed in a letter that the "houses of the Tlascalcan Indians who lived in the *barrio* of Analco" had been burned to the ground in the Pueblo revolt.³⁰ Further, a modern Franciscan historian, Fernando Ocaranza, agrees on the basis of additional documentary evidence that specifically it was the people of Tlascala who inhabited the eastern limits of the *villa* of Santa Fe in 1680.³¹

The Tlascalcan Indians, doubtless, were active in areas within the Spanish borderlands other than those described here. Further archival investigation should uncover fresh details enabling a fuller account to be drawn. Nevertheless, from the brief sketch just presented, it is possible to detect the salient theme of the Tlascalcan story—wherever these Indians ventured, whatever enterprise they undertook, they inevitably assumed the character of frontier heroes.

29. Memorial of Fray Salvador de San Antonio, *et al.*, December 18, 1693 in *Documentos para Servir a la Historia de Nuevo México* (Madrid, 1962), p. 347.

30. *Documentos para . . . Nuevo México*, p. 309.

31. *Establecimientos Franciscanos en el Misterio Reino de Nuevo México* (Mexico, 1934), p. 41.