

## NATURAL HISTORY, NATIONAL MUSEUM AND ANTHROPOLOGY IN MEXICO

Some reference points in the forging and  
re-forging of national identity\*

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*Legacies are always problematic and they must be  
sorted out to answer to new undertakings.*

Eric R. Wolf, 1999

### I

In the late nineteenth-century, Mexican society, like that of other Latin American countries, found itself in the process of constructing its identity as a modern nation.<sup>1</sup> The predominant outlook at the time was that if Mexico wished to make its way toward the goal of a promising future in which reason and progress would be enshrined, then new social, political and educational values of a lay nature should replace those of the colonial period, already seen as a dark age, hostile to the development of science. An example of this attitude can be seen in the words of Justo Sierra (1848-1912), who was one of Mexico's most outstanding intellectuals and served as education minister during the final years of Porfirio Díaz's regime; for Sierra, the "black dragon" of the Inquisition had raised an unbreachable wall against all philosophical and scientific development throughout the three centuries of the colonial administration in the Viceroyalty of New Spain (Sierra, 1991:124).

The historian Elias Trabulse, on publishing, some eighty years later, works by scientists of seventeenth-century New Spain, wrote that the history of science in Mexico had been "a secret history" —one that, nonetheless, had existed and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Olga Restrepo's work on the Choreographic Commission, 2002.

evolved in dissimulation “against the agitated backcloth of our social and political history” (Trabulse 1983:16).

An example of the somewhat clandestine nature of these scientific developments, and the need felt by the scholars of New Spain to conceal the products of science from the central power —under pain of expropriation of such products and their expatriation to Spain— is the advice given by Father Cavo to Father José Antonio Pichardo, in a letter written in 1804. Pichardo was an heir to the estate of Antonio León y Gama (1735-1802), a mathematician, astronomer and collector whom Bernal calls “the first Mexican archeologist” (Bernal, 1979:74). Referring to León y Gama’s legacy Cavo advises him:

I implore your Excellency to hide all those monuments which were in his possession, such as codices, ancient paintings, etc., lest they suffer the same fate as so many treasures that have been taken from this realm to be buried in the archives of Madrid (Pichardo, 1934:VII).

Thus, at the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment the new ideas regarding reason and science maintained a semi-clandestine existence, whether because of censorship or because scientific work was limited to the efforts of a few Creoles working in near-isolation. Around the second half of the eighteenth century the Bourbon reforms permitted a policy of promotion of science to be implemented in New Spain, with the aim of reducing the colonial power’s backwardness in comparison with the rest of Europe, and at the same time raising the income received from its overseas possessions. During the last decade of the century and because of military confrontations with France and Great Britain the Crown increased taxes, forced loans and “donations” to hitherto unheard-of levels, while for some years it had been hedging in ecclesiastical jurisdictions and promoting the development of mining, from which exports rose substantially.<sup>2</sup>

In this socio-political ambience a successful process of scientific institutionalization took place in New Spain aimed at diversifying teaching at the Universidad Real y Pontificia and introducing greater specialization; this process resulted in the establishment of the Real Escuela de Cirugía (Royal College of Surgery) in 1768, the Academia de las Nobles Artes de San Carlos (Academy of Fine Arts) in 1781, the Jardín Botánico (Botanical Gardens) in 1788, and —of particular note— the Real Seminario de Minería (Royal Seminary of Mining) established between 1792 and 1821, and which at the time was the most important institution of its kind in the whole of the Americas.

In the period before the Independence war, and in fact throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, a climate of cultural renovation was in

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<sup>2</sup> This exaction was stepped up during the last decades of the century and constituted one of the basic causes of the so-called *colonial crisis*. Carlos Marichal (1997) notes that around 60 per cent of the money raised by Spain between 1798 and 1800 came from America, and that in view of the demands of the Crown it was even necessary to cut into the funds of the indigenous communal estates. See also Semo, 1977.

evidence in the Viceroyalty. The clash of political interests between landowning Creoles and the colonial administration (consisting mainly of Spanish expatriates), resistance to repressive measures by the Crown (such as censorship and the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767), the obvious decadence of scholastic philosophy and the increasing economic transfers to Spain, were all factors that stimulated this ambience and led to the Viceroyalty of New Spain and other colonies in the Americas acquiring a dynamics of their own. In this environment of change, a community of scientists came into existence of unprecedented vigor and succeeded in giving a special impulse to mathematics, physics, chemistry, mineralogy, metallurgy, geography, geology, botany and zoology.<sup>3</sup>

Among the enlightened scholars of New Spain one of the most prestigious was José Antonio Alzate y Ramírez (1737-1799), due both to the quality of his work and his efforts to disseminate knowledge at national and international level. His encyclopedic knowledge and his observational and analytic capabilities accompanied a critical spirit and an outstanding passion for the natural sciences. Alzate y Ramírez's scientific efforts had a sense of purpose: science ought to serve the nation, one's own nation, and must at the same time stress the value of the autochthonous (Saladino, 1990). Alzate y Ramírez laid considerable emphasis on this political nuance, a matter which was to acquire considerable importance in later Mexican scientific traditions: namely, nineteenth-century natural history and the anthropology and archeology of this and later periods.

Alzate y Ramírez took exception to the classificatory system established by the Swedish botanist Linnæus, by that time a central component of the first lectures in botany imparted by the Spaniards Vicente Cervantes and Martín de Sessé (from May, 1788, onwards) at the Universidad Real y Pontificia, where a Botanical Garden was laid out.<sup>4</sup> With justice, Alzate criticized those who—whether out of ignorance or bad faith—despised the autochthonous natural science tradition. In 1788 he wrote that the notion that “botany had not been cultivated before in New Spain” was false.<sup>5</sup> Two centuries later, in 1988, Mexican ethnohistory recognized the beginning of Mexican botany in the pre-Hispanic cultures “and not in the sixteenth century, as has been erroneously believed and written” (Anzures y Bolaños, 1988:17).

On describing a small portion of the history of science in Mexico it is worth bearing in mind the context of production of knowledge of which this

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<sup>3</sup> Trabulse, 1985: 21ff.; Saldaña, 1992. In a bibliography of Latin-American scientific works of the eighteenth century, Saladino García (1998) notes that such works were already being written in *vernacular* languages, in other words, Spanish and Portuguese.

<sup>4</sup> A well-documented study concerning the expedition, the Botanical Garden and the course in Botany imparted by Vicente Cervantes up to the second decade of the nineteenth century in Mexico is that by Zamudio, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> As quoted by Lozoya, 1984:45. Present-day ethnobotany and ethnohistory have revealed that the different ethnic groups in the national territory had a long tradition of knowledge of medicinal plants. In some languages, such as Nahuatl, Maya and Tarahumara, “the name of the plant incorporates its taxonomy”, since through specific suffixes and prefixes, the word referring to the plant may designate not only sex and methods of preparation, but also the different organs of the human body to which the plant is applied therapeutically. Anzures y Bolaños, 1988:18.

forms part, marked by deep-rooted traditions of various indigenous cultures and three centuries of Spanish colonization. The independence movements of 1810 culminating in the country's political independence in 1821 swept this context away; what followed was a long period of internal struggles and foreign invasions until the second half of the nineteenth century, when a period of relative political stability began maintained by the exercise of a strong central power. Despite frequent social rebellions,<sup>6</sup> the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz sustained a repressive political control lasting until late 1910, when the revolutionary processes began which were to inaugurate, with the 1917 Constitution, the construction of the new contemporary Mexican State, which in recent years has given way to a "transition towards democracy", with the apparent weakening of a political party which exercised political hegemony throughout a period of 71 years. Today Mexico is forced into a process of neocolonial globalization, whose economic and social logic confronts and conflicts with national ideas and institutions, including the defense of its cultural heritage. This process has also shattered the nineteenth-century dream of a prosperous, developed and educated nation.

Since the founding of scientific societies in the nineteenth century, many histories have been written of the different sciences in Mexico. But profound changes have taken place in the comprehension and explanation of autochthonous scientific development within Latin-American countries. These changes have followed an evolution from the predominance of national history to the contemporary effort at a regional and comparative historical perspective which is still in its initial stages. The ambivalent criticism of economic dependency theory, the influence of European social history, and the interest of North American and European historians in finding disciples prepared to carry out a kind of *maquila* operation on their behalf in Latin America are all factors which, as Ignacio Sosa describes, have prevented a comparative knowledge of its impact in the region and a "definition of approaches taking into account the characteristics of the region" (Sosa, 2000:22; *cf.*, also, Saldaña, 1992, and Gunder Frank in J.M. Blaut, 1992).

In a review of the most outstanding work in the recent history of Latin-American science (Hebe Vessuri, Marcos Cueto, Antonio LaFuente and others), López Beltrán (1997) argues that revisions of the center-periphery model must set out from the inclusion of situated and multiple objectivities—which are at times of a rapidly changing nature—in accordance with the specific and local historico-cultural contexts of countries such as Mexico. From this point of view, there is no reason to introduce the divorce between the history and epistemology of science often established in the name of universal science; even less so should we conceive of the local or regional history of science as of merely passing or provincial interest.

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<sup>6</sup> Almost every year between 1847 and 1899 uprisings were registered involving practically the whole national territory; among these the Maya and Yáquí ethnic wars (1847-1851 and 1851-1861 respectively) were the most prolonged.

The richness of such reflections must be matched by studies capable of offering answers to questions concerning the conformation and development of modern disciplines in their respective national and local spheres. How did a discipline come to be constituted? Who were the principal actors in this process? What institutions did they belong to, and how did their scientific communities evolve? The following is an attempt at describing in broad outlines the background and characteristics of the institutionalization and professionalization of anthropology and archeology in Mexico. Unlike other countries of Latin America, the coming of age of these scientific disciplines during the *Porfiriato*<sup>7</sup> (and the post-revolutionary governments) was of great importance for the defining of national consciousness and identity, as well as for the growing tourist activity from the 1920s onwards. Since the late nineteenth century and up to the present time, these disciplines have been promoted to a remarkable degree by the State. The thesis upheld by this essay is that the first processes of professionalization and institutionalization of these disciplines can only be understood in connection with the formation of a national consciousness, linked to concepts regarding education and the reforms of scientific institutions that were current during the *Porfiriato* (Rutsch, 2002). Finally, the article attempts to draw a link between these processes and certain contemporary problems in Mexico and Mexican anthropology.

## II

Elias Trabulse paints a depressing picture of the scientific panorama in post-Independence Mexico: in the space of a few years the tide had turned from a “climate of advancement and scientific optimism” to one in which research was reduced to a minimum and “editions of scientific works of any value” were unavailable.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, despite the adverse socio-political conditions during the first half of the nineteenth century, even then governments demonstrated an interest in promoting the sciences, since—in accordance with enlightened ideals—education and science were the essential elements that permitted the advancement of civilization, progress and the well-being of nations. The secularized science of the new nation ought, besides, to fulfill important auxiliary functions in the gathering of information and exercise of control over people and territory; for this purpose statistics was to assume an ever more important role. In this sense its function in the construction of the new “national imaginary” was, on the one hand, to assist in the ordering of the national universe in a context of political disorder and, on the other, to forge a union of science and nation, believed to be necessary for the attainment of social and

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<sup>7</sup> The dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz, which lasted from 1877 to 1911.

<sup>8</sup> Trabulse, 1985:28. López-Ocón Cabrera (1998), on the other hand—while recognizing the structural fragility suffered by the sciences down to the present day—maintains that their development was continuous throughout Latin America during the whole nineteenth century.

economic progress. In particular, the medical statistics of the nineteenth century can be read as a set of “figures with meanings perfectly tied to the culture of the period [which] were to become the base for modeling the population as normal, for healing it and transforming it into a civilized, rich nation ready for progress.”<sup>9</sup>

Official recognition of education as a necessary basis on which the new State should erect its institutions goes back as far as the bill presented by José María Luis Mora in 1824; in 1833 Valentín Gómez Farías’ government established the Geographical and Statistical Institute (*Instituto de Geografía y Estadística*, which in 1850 was renamed the *Sociedad de Geografía y Estadística*) aimed at assembling bodies of statistical information at national level for all the states and territories of the Republic. Its publications also took in other disciplines such as natural science, linguistics, literature, history and archeology. The educational reform of the same year included the endowment of a chair in Natural History (imparting courses in zoology and botany) at the Colegio de Minería, and in 1843 President López de Santa Anna set up the bachelor’s degree in natural science; both initiatives were, however, to disappear shortly afterwards. Nonetheless, studies in natural history (botany) continued to take place in the provinces, for example in Yucatán and Michoacán (Azuela, 1996; Guevara, 2000).

Also, in 1822, a year after the country’s political independence, the first laws and decrees were issued setting up a “National Museum”, known initially as the *Museo Mejicano*; a Conservatory of Antiquities was also established in the University with a section devoted to natural history.<sup>10</sup> During the following years, and until the regime of the Emperor Maximilian, the *Museo Mejicano* seems to have subsisted with great difficulty. The first chairs associated with the Museum were established between 1831 and 1835;<sup>11</sup> there were three of them: botany (Miguel Bustamante), natural history (the same professor), and ancient history (Ignacio de Cubas), but during the long years of political ups and downs “the Museum scarcely offered signs of life”.<sup>12</sup> Thus, while it is true that during this period various institutions were created and continued to exist, what was lacking was a process of sustained and unbroken institutionalization.

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<sup>9</sup> Cházaro, 2000:8. On Mexican statistics in the first part of the nineteenth century, see the pioneering study of Leticia Mayer Celis, 1999. On the role of the State in the construction of Mexican science in general, see Saldaña, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Castillo Ledón, 1925:16; Alamán, 1990:XVIII. It is also worth mentioning at this point that, according to the Maritime and Frontier Customs Tariffs Act (*Ley de Aranceles de Aduanas Marítimas y de Frontera de la República Mexicana*) of November 1827, the exportation of “Mexican monuments and antiquities” was prohibited under penalty of confiscation. Lombardo/Solis, 1988:39-41.

<sup>11</sup> The chairs were set up as professorships whose incumbents, apart from designing courses and delivering lectures, also exercised the responsibilities of museum curators.

<sup>12</sup> Galindo y Villa, 1922:12; Castillo Ledón, 1925:19. In 1840, an eye witness wrote that the Museum was set up within the University and that it contained “many rare and valuable works, and a profusion of curious Indian antiquities”; towards the end of the same year the same witness noted that: “In the field of Natural History one notices serious deficiencies, and, taken as a whole, the Museum is not worthy of a country which seems destined by nature to become a great emporium of all the natural sciences”. Calderón de la Barca, 1959:136 & 286-287.

In this state of affairs, Mexican scholars of the post-Independence period who wrote important works on ancient Mexico were all members of the country's Creole economic and political elite. Notable examples are the lawyer José Fernando Ramírez (1804-1871), the merchant Joaquín García Icazbalceta (1825-1894), the engineer and lawyer Manuel Orozco y Berra (1816-1881), and the Zacatecan landowner Francisco Javier Pimentel (1832-1893).

While this generation had a Eurocentric and slanted vision of, for example, indigenous art, judging it by the standard of universal reason, this judgment (which tended to diminish the value of ancient Mexican history) also brought with it a desire to defend the autochthonous past. This was very pronounced in, for instance, José Fernando Ramírez—an author with an urge to construct a cultural synthesis in which the indigenous is an important ingredient. Ramírez's consciousness favoring racial miscegenation and a fair appreciation of Mexican history and the Conquest comes clearly into the foreground when criticizing the work of William H. Prescott.<sup>13</sup> This protestant of the Presbyterian tendency had described the Mexicas as “barbarians” and “savages” whose armies “howled”. Not only this, but in Prescott's book, Náhuatl is despised as an unmusical language. To this Ramírez replied that Prescott would have had “difficulty in pronouncing and measuring the melody or harshness of certain Mexican words or phrases, a point upon which—and I say this without aggression—the ear accustomed to harmonies such as those of Yankee Doodle can hardly be a competent judge.” (Ramírez, 2001, II:234).

Ramírez reproaches Prescott basically for three faults: his use of the criticism of sources, his “instinctive racial indifference”, which Ramírez also describes as racial “antipathy” or “disdain” and which becomes abundantly plain in his extolment of Cortés, for whom “there is nothing that can be reprimanded”. This “immoderate enthusiasm for Cortés, reinforced in no small measure by racial antipathy” for the indigenous people, leads Prescott even to undervalue the value of the Mexican historical sources. For this reason, Ramírez is convinced that it is only possible to accept a history of the Conquest written by its own descendents (i.e. the Mexicans of his day); judgments regarding the Mexican past would take on the characteristics of a “family trial, bearing in mind that justice is going to be done to [our] own progenitors. We may then, and only then, conceive the hope of having a complete, impartial and faithful history of the Conquest” (Ramírez, 2001:231 ff.). In 1855, José Fernando Ramírez—then curator of the Museum—published a description of selected items from the Museum. In this he laid stress on what seemed to him “oriental analogies” in style and form, pointing out that his selection of 43 archeological pieces formed only a small part of what the Museum conserved at that time.

In spite of the efforts of Ramírez and others, it was not until the period of Maximilian's government that the Museum actually took on new life as the *Museo Público de Historia Natural, Arqueología e Historia*, which was later to

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<sup>13</sup> *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 2 vols., New York, 1843.

become the *Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnología* (today the *Museo Nacional de Antropología*).

On the other hand, the liberal program with regard to the contemporary indigenous peoples is well summed up in Volume III of Francisco Pimentel's *Situación Actual de la Raza Indígena de México y Medios de Remediarla* (1903-1904:136) in which the author reaches the following conclusion:

The system of community and isolation must be done away with immediately. See to it that the Indians mix with the white race; do not let them live apart. In order that the Indian may be a property owner, furnish him with the same means to acquire as white people —work— so that property continues to be accessible to all, but nothing of special privileges or laws that only serve to enclose us once again in the vicious circle of the *Leyes de Indias*: leave them, leave them behind as the venerable Gregorio López said. (July, 1864).

Now, the nationalism which followed in the steps of the Reform Laws oscillated not only between political conservatism and liberalism, but also between Enlightenment thought and Romanticism. What the latter sought was to found the Mexican Nation's own myth of origin. This was a political discourse which drew its inspiration from classical republicanism. Such a discourse was produced by a new class of intellectuals not necessarily of aristocratic origin or economically well-off, but of "new men", whose heritage and confidence was based rather on their education and their pens, and who forged a counter-myth in which —in contrast to the panorama depicted by the histories of Prescott and others— the heroes with strength of character are the rebels, the Indian insurgent Benito Juárez and also Cuauhtémoc, while weakness and corruption were the hallmarks of the European interloper Maximilian.<sup>14</sup>

I am here indebted to David Brading's thesis regarding the emergence of a new type of Mexican intellectual after the restoration of the Republic, the appearance of "new men" on the national stage. I wish, however, to lay greater stress on the fact that these men increasingly depended on their scientific work for economic support, and likewise on their concern for the rescue and defense of their own culture; this entailed an increasing emphasis on rejecting all foreign intervention, which in turn, of course, presupposes the existence of an idea of nation and nationalism<sup>15</sup>. In the case of the Museum staff this concern meant actively promoting their institution and reflected both their unshakable faith in the idea that science was the path that would lead to the progress of Mexico and the consciousness that their efforts were an essential component of the idea of science of the *Porfiriato*. For these "new men" it was impossible to imagine a nation —or a national history— in the absence of education and science; without

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<sup>14</sup> Brading, 1988:126 ff.; Cf. also Andrés Molina Enríquez, 1909 "El secreto de la Paz Porfiriana", pp. 61 ff.

<sup>15</sup> It must be noted here that —as Camp (1996:80ff.) writes— among the politicians of the generation of Porfirio Díaz (1820-1839), two thirds had fought against the United States invasion and many were committed opponents of the Habsburg government.

these it would be equally impossible to incorporate the indigenous population into a modern nation.<sup>16</sup>

Justo Sierra thought of political history in terms of that new civic being who was born after the Conquest: the *Mestizo*, who henceforth was to form “the yeast of future Mexican society”.<sup>17</sup> Unlike those Creoles who were anxious to conserve the interests of the Crown (the Spanish trader, *encomendero* or conquistador), or those born on the land and immobilized in slavery or in physical and spiritual poverty, the *educated mestizo* arose as a physical and spiritual fusion of the two races, the Spanish and the Indian, forming “the new family —of one nation and two races— the Mexicans”, and thus constituted the desirable and genuine political subject. And if political evolution still lagged behind social evolution, political discipline *per se* (i.e., the Republic) had been established with Independence, becoming fully valid in 1867, at the end of the French intervention.<sup>18</sup> The efforts of a commission of ten important figures of the scientific community (among which was the naturalist and chemist Alfonso Herrera),<sup>19</sup> resulted in the *Ley Orgánica de Instrucción Pública* (1869), which sets out its purposes clearly in the following statement: “disseminating enlightenment among the people is the surest and most effective means to moralize them”. Primary education was introduced as both free and obligatory and became a lay preserve.

As a consequence of this political vision of education during the years of the *Porfiriato*, the National Museum gradually evolved from a Natural History Museum into a National and Ancient History Museum. The work of systematization —both of natural history collections and, later, those of national history and archeology— follows a similar pattern to the process observed by Curtis Hinsley (1994) for museums in the nineteenth-century United States, and has a similar aim: that of ordering and moralizing the future, constructing the

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<sup>16</sup> I do not wish to deny the considerable differences in their efforts and political convictions. By way of example, the contrast between José María Vigil and Justo Sierra comes to mind; the former was still convinced of the old liberalism that Sierra described as “metaphysical”. Dumas, 1992:131 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Sierra was for years the holder of the chair in history at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (a key element in the system of the national-positivist educational régime) and, later, Education Minister (1905-1911).

<sup>18</sup> The first duty of the new entity known as the Mexican nation was to find its appropriate organs of governance, at the center of which was the creation of the educational function. In this sense it appears that for Sierra the educational function of the State was even conceived as a question of national security; the very freedom of the nation and the political and civic commitment of the future was anchored to it. Only in its fulfillment could the incorporation of the great indigenous mass be guaranteed and only thus might the sovereignty of the nation become deeply rooted. Cf. Sierra, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> Alvarado, 1997:249. Alfonso Herrera (1838-1901) was a naturalist of academic prestige, and for some years director of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria. He was famous for his Sunday excursions in the company of his students as well as for following the tradition of creating small natural history displays, a botanical garden in the first patio of the School, a greenhouse, a zoological garden and a “cabinet” for study and exhibition of preserved specimens. He also introduced, as an optional subject, laboratory study groups, with apparatuses his predecessor had imported from Europe. This shows that Herrera, like other scientific naturalists, was well aware of the immense value and richness of the flora and fauna of his country and of the urgent need for research into it, while at the same time attentive to the growing European laboratory tradition.

new narrative of the nation. And so important was this for the management of the “national imaginary” that it may be regarded as its reason for being.<sup>20</sup> This conception of history as an instrument of education, as the morality of the new nation, was something that both radical liberals and conservatives shared.<sup>21</sup>

In the Museum and throughout the 1870s and 1880s, *natural history, ancient and national histories were still interconnected subjects*, and at this time the naturalists themselves regarded the museum as an institution of great relevance with an important task of social dissemination; they accordingly fought hard to win the State’s economic and political support. During the 1880s the separation of natural history began, in a process that lasted until 1909 and was a consequence both of the expansion and increasing ideological importance of archeology (and archeological collections) for the Porfirist government, and of a new vision of science divided into more distinct disciplines involving the study of separate branches such as biology and chemistry, a specialization before which the naturalist vision of a comprehensive science receded.

The interconnection of the three “histories” is also expressed physically in the exhibitions of the Museum. In 1896, Galindo y Villa described the various departments of the Museum that exhibited their collections on different floors. While the ground floor was occupied above all by the archeological collections, the middle and upper floors were devoted to natural history, national history, physical anthropology and ethnography. In 1880 the Museum possessed nine exhibition halls, and the natural history collections had a large number of pieces: 63,945 in total, most of which (60,000) related to insects, followed by shells and zoophytes (3,000), paleontology (of the Valley of Mexico: 245) and mammals (200). There was also a collection of minerals and teratology.<sup>22</sup> Not all the exhibits had to do with Mexican species, but these quantities give an idea of the character the Museum had acquired by that time, predominantly of natural history.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, ancient history was, in 1882, represented by only 147 archeological pieces. On this point it is worth noting that during this period

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<sup>20</sup> Mauricio Tenorio expressed it as follows: “But in fact one of the mandatory roles of the national state—and perhaps its ontological *raison d’être*— was the theatrical dimension: to invent, recreate, and manage the national mythology.” Tenorio, 1993:86.

<sup>21</sup> The law passed on May 15, 1869, conferred on education a nationalist and homogenizing character and had set particular store on the improvement of primary teaching. Other schools were organized, such as the Young Ladies’ Secondary School, the faculties of Law, Medicine, Agriculture and Veterinary Science, Engineering, Fine Arts, the Conservatoire of Music and Oratory, the School of Trade and Administration (*Comercio y Administración*), the Teacher Training Institute (*Escuela Normal*), the School for the Deaf and Dumb and that for Useful Arts and Trades (*Artes y Oficios*). It is worth noting that education remained an elitist matter, since at the end of the *Porfiriato*, and despite all the efforts that had been made, more than two thirds of a total population of approximately 15 million inhabitants were unable to read and write.

<sup>22</sup> Galindo y Villa, 1922:13-14 and 1896; Castillo Ledón (1925:24 y 25) give even higher figures. According to the latter, the natural history collection extended to over 90,000 exhibits.

<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that the Museum’s second publication dates from 1852 and was the catalogue of the Museum’s mineralogy collection (*Catálogo de la Colección Mineralógica de este Museo Nacional*), “arranged by the Museum’s Professor of Mineralogy, Antonio del Castillo”. (The first, dating from 1827, bore the title *Colección de las Antigüedades Mexicanas que existen en el Museo Nacional*, with lithographs by Waldeck and Pedro Robert) Iguiniz, 1912:7-9.

Mexico suffered archeological pillaging by foreigners, above all from the United States, Germany and France.

On the other hand, objects connected with national history were continually being donated and acquired. Thus for example when the illustrious General Vicente Riva Palacio donated to the Museum objects which were to serve as “relics” of national history he made a specific allusion, explaining:

The nation needs to be educated “objectively”; the social classes the world over like material and even trivial things, which are also educational. Even a simple forelock of hair from horses that belonged to some hero of their admiration will serve to awaken patriotic sentiments in them, either individually or collectively, and even the memory of some high and noble deed connected with this person.<sup>24</sup>

The intimate relationship between the “histories” referred to here can also be seen with clarity in the profile and output of the community of scientists who took part in the creation of the national narrative during this period, particularly in those connected with the National Museum.<sup>25</sup> In 1880, the Museum staff consisted of the establishment’s director, also directly in charge of the Archeology and History departments,<sup>26</sup> and the professors of Natural History “Botany, Zoology, Mineralogy, Paleontology, plus a collector who traveled in search of specimens corresponding to all these sciences” (Galindo y Villa, 1922:14). We know from the Museum’s historical archive that in 1873 the engineer Antonio del Castillo (1820-1895)<sup>27</sup> was appointed professor of mineralogy and paleontology, the physician Jesús Sánchez (1842-1911) as taxidermist, and the physician Manuel M. Villada (1841-1924) as collector and assistant to the taxidermist.<sup>28</sup> Some years later, in 1879, the surgeon Antonio Peñafiel y Barranca (1831-1922) was appointed professor of taxidermy.<sup>29</sup>

The pharmaceutical chemist Gumesindo Mendoza was director of the

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<sup>24</sup> Galindo y Villa, 1979:44. Among the objects donated by general Vicente Riva Palacio were “the tricolor plumage that Iturbide wore [...] when [...] he entered Mexico City in triumph on September 27, 1821 (it was said to be a gift from the famous ‘Güera Rodríguez’), the scapularies of Riva Palacio’s grandfather, etc. *ibid*: 44ff. As late as 1912, Pedro González brought to the Museum “a sketch in oils of Sr. Ocampo’s heart and the photograph of the automatic foot used by General D. Antonio López de Santa Anna, so that these specimens should take their place in this Establishment”. BMNAHE, I(8):151, 1912.

<sup>25</sup> For a list of authors, which also indicates the frequency of their appearance in publications on natural sciences and those of the Museum, for example, see Brambila and de Gortari, 1997: 110-111.

<sup>26</sup> According to the Museum’s organizational chart, until 1889 the chair in archeology and history existed and was occupied simultaneously by the Museum’s director. Not until 1899 was the post of assistant in archeology and history created and it was only from 1903 onward that separate chairs in archeology and history existed.

<sup>27</sup> Since the beginning of the Porfirato, Antonio del Castillo had been Director of the Escuela Nacional de Ingenieros (an offshoot of the Escuela de Minería), whose curriculum he reformed, since “Its contents were highly theoretical and wide-ranging; they seemed to have been designed more with a savant than an engineer in mind”. Bazant, 1996:241.

<sup>28</sup> AHMNA, v. 2, file 103.

<sup>29</sup> AHMNA, v. 4, file 230; José M. Velasco, who worked for the Museum on a fee basis from 1877 onward, was appointed as the Museum’s draughtsman on July 22, 1880. AHMNA, v.5, file 258.

Museum from 1876 to 1883. Jesús Sánchez (director from 1886 to 1889) and the physician Manuel Urbina (director between 1890 and 1899) —like most of the Museum's staff during this period— were professionals of the natural and medical sciences who, after or even during their degree courses, had specialized in botany, zoology, geology, etc., and also devoted themselves to producing and publishing texts on the ancient history of Mexico. Another such was Francisco del Paso y Troncoso (1842-1916), who presented his medical thesis on indigenous botany and inaugurated the chair in Náhuatl at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (the school set up to prepare students for entry to the University). At the same time they held chairs in various natural sciences at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, the National School of Agronomy (*Escuela Nacional de Agricultura*), the Teacher-Training School (*Escuela Nacional para Profesores*), Medical School (*Escuela Nacional de Medicina*), at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, and that of Useful Arts and Trades (*Artes y Oficios*). These scientists directed the few archeological expeditions and excavations carried out by the Museum up to that time, examples being those carried out in Puebla in 1878 directed by Jesús Sánchez (church of San Francisco) and the archeological expedition to Xico, Veracruz, led by Villada and Sánchez in 1880.<sup>30</sup>

Here we are dealing with a network of productive professionals, men of encyclopedic vocation and also founding members of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Historia Natural* (1868-1914), “formed by scientists sympathetic to the ideas of Benito Juárez who received all possible support from the State for its setting up”, and whose objectives were: to promote the study of Mexican natural history, bring together and publish works by national and foreign academics relating to indigenous products and to set up collections of exhibits relating to the three realms of nature.<sup>31</sup>

During the four decades of its existence the Sociedad de Historia Natural published its official journal *La Naturaleza: Periódico Científico de la Sociedad Mexicana de Historia Natural*, enjoying considerable prestige at national and international levels.<sup>32</sup> For this period it is worth noting the findings of Marcos Cueto with regard to the formation of the biomedical community in Peru, namely that the gulf separating the sciences in the central countries from those in countries then embarking on their modernization did not always exist.

The intimate relation between the Museum and the Natural History Society, as well as the role of the corporations (the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* and, later, the *Sociedad Científica Antonio Alzate*) in the history of the institutionalization of Mexican science has been pointed out by several authors (Azuela Bernal, 1994; Guevara Fefer, 2000). The Society not only resuscitated the Museum, but dominated it until well into the period of the

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<sup>30</sup> AHMNA, v. 3, file180 and v. 5, file 254, respectively.

<sup>31</sup> Azuela, 1994: 23 and Guevara Fefer, 2000: 33.

<sup>32</sup> Beltrán, 1948: 148-171. In 1936 Enrique Beltrán continued the traditional line of the Society, now under the title of Instituto Mexicano de Recursos Naturales Renovables AC, and that of its journal, now entitled *Revista de la Sociedad Mexicana de Historia Natural*.

*Porfiriato*. Furthermore, according to Galindo y Villa the Society “was born from within the Museum” (Galindo y Villa, 1922: 61).

This Society took up with enthusiasm the botanical tradition and made available once more texts by José Mociño and Vicente Cervantes; it also published the *Flora Mexicana* of Sessé (1891) and the *Plantae Novae Hispaniae*, by joint authorship of Sessé and Mociño (1887).<sup>33</sup> The interest, on the other hand, in archeology and the past of the nation was an integral part of the Enlightenment attitudes and the nationalism of these authors. Manuel M. Villada (1841-1924) represents the typical profile of members of this generation: apart from his training and practice as a surgeon, he was a botanist, zoologist, geologist and paleontologist. He managed to integrate all these interests and disciplines, besides earning his living from his professional activities as a physician (Galindo y Villa, 1923: 60-62; Guevara Fefer, 2000). Antonio Peñafiel y Barranca (1831-1922) is another good example. At the age of 50, after years of practice as a medical surgeon, he changed course and, apart from heading the Department of Statistics and thinking up projects for the drainage of Mexico City, he also undertook studies of archeology, philology and linguistics (Galindo y Villa, 1936: 414 ff). Due to this change of course in his life, he was of great importance for Professor Eduard Georg Seler and his wife, since with “the accustomed Mexican friendliness towards foreigners” (Seler-Sachs, 1925), it was he who invited them on what was for the Selers their first archeological excursion, to Xochicalco in the State of Morelos in 1887. The physician Manuel Urbina (1844-1906) published in his *Anales del Museo* his various studies on the botanical work of Hernández. Gumersindo Mendoza, on the other hand, collaborated with the elder Alfonso Herrera (1838-1901) in studies of “the saline formations of the lake of Texcoco”,<sup>34</sup> but also (and during the same period) published in the *Anales del Museo* works of archeological and linguistic interpretation.<sup>35</sup>

The initiatives of these men also breathed new life into the study and teaching of the autochthonous languages. Jesús Sánchez, for example, encouraged the reprinting of the linguistic texts of the colonial period and a renewed study of the indigenous languages. This aim was taken up anew by Francisco del Paso y Troncoso and Antonio Peñafiel; the latter reedited the Náhuatl grammar (*Arte Mexicana*, 1595) of the Jesuit Antonio del Rincón at the Secretaría de Fomento in 1886, and the *Gramática de la Lengua Zapoteca*, among other linguistic texts.<sup>36</sup> The field notes and the vocabularies gathered by

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<sup>33</sup> José Mariano Mociño joined the expedition of Sessé as a naturalist and carried out journeys of exploration as far as the Island of Vancouver (Nootka Sound).

<sup>34</sup> Gumersindo Mendoza was of indigenous (Otomí) origin. As a result of considerable efforts he managed to study and reach Mexico City, where he met and made friends with Alfonso Herrera (Guevara Fefer, 2001; Alvarado, 1997: 250).

<sup>35</sup> See the contents of Vol. I of the *Anales del Museo* in Iguiniz, 1912, as well as the work by Rebeca de Gortari and Rosa Brambila, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> See *Anales del Museo Nacional de México*, vol. III, in Reimpresos n. 7, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, UNAM, Mexico City and the reedition of the *Gramática de la Lengua Zapoteca*, Innovación, Mexico City, 1981.

Peñafiel from the Zapotec region were used in the linguistic works of the *Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología Americanas* (or *International School of American Archeology and Ethnology*), and Peñafiel himself was a correspondent of the *Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* and the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* in Berlin.

José María Vigil (1829-1909) and Alfredo Chavero (1841-1906) were also members of this generation. Vigil, the Museum's first librarian, formed part of the liberal group of Guillermo Prieto and Ignacio Ramírez which was represented by the newspaper *El Monitor Republicano*. Vigil was anti-positivist and took over from Porfirio Parra (1854-1912), a pupil of Gabino Barreda in the chair of Logic (which formed the backbone of the curriculum of the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*).<sup>37</sup>

Alfredo Chavero was a man of generally liberal political orientation who regarded himself, nonetheless, as a follower of Manuel Orozco y Berra; he inherited the directorship of the library from José Fernando Ramírez but spent only three months working in the Museum, as interim director shortly before his death, and before the engineer Francisco M. Rodríguez was appointed director.<sup>38</sup> Chavero was a lawyer, a deputy Foreign Minister, and author of plays and zarzuelas, for which he drew inspiration from his country's pre-Hispanic past (which has won him the title of a "romantic nationalist"). Marshall H. Saville, an archeologist from Columbia University, referred to Chavero in the obituary he published on him in 1906, as "*beyond question the dean of Mexican archaeologists*" (Saville, 1906: 701; my italics); he was also a cofounder of the *American Anthropological Association* and a member of the editorial committee of the *American Anthropologist* since this journal became the official organ of the AAA (1897). Chavero's erudition and his appreciation of the pre-Hispanic past still embodied the ideology of his teachers, half-way between the appreciation of Spanish and homegrown cultures. Regarding the question of the origin of ancient Mexican and Central American cultures he preferred to assume the hypothesis of cultural transmission and not that of the autochthonous capacity for invention. He was internationally recognized as a proponent of the theory of diffusion, as opposed to the arguments of the German Eduard Seler and others.

All these men belonged to a small but intellectually and politically active elite,<sup>39</sup> which, unlike the previous generation of students of ancient Mexico, actually lived from their intellectual work: apart from working in the Museum,

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<sup>37</sup> See Alvarado, 1997: 254; Meneses Morales, 1983: 297 ff; Bazant, 1996: 170 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Chavero was interim director from December 2, 1902, to March 18, 1903. Rodríguez was interim director of the Museum for a period of four years, from March 19, 1903, to April 18, 1907 (Catalogue of the Historical Archive of the MNA, 1992: VII).

<sup>39</sup> It is worth illustrating this affirmation with the following data assembled by Azuela (1994: 188): a third of the *corpus* of over 1,500 articles published between 1890 and 1912 by the three scientific societies analyzed by this author, i.e. the three mentioned in the present article (486 out of 1,529, to be precise) represented the output of 13 scientists. It must be made clear that —although the most important— these are not the only scientific societies created during the four last decades of the nineteenth century: Guevara Fefer (2000: 28) lists 14 such societies and committees.

they were teachers and government officials, and some practiced medicine. This group also maintained links with other countries and their networks of scientific communication. In a recent and well founded article, Saldaña and Cuevas maintain that the scientific community centered on the Museum at that time, judged by its activity in the creation of societies, its scientific journals and its links with the world scientific community, met “the necessary requirements to be considered a modern and professional scientific community in the strict sense” (Saldaña y Cuevas, 1999: 311). What united these “new men” with the old elites was, however, a unitary and encyclopedic vision of knowledge. Although, in the last resort, this generation accepted the breakdown of knowledge into natural and social sciences, it still believed in its basic unity and was convinced of its own historic, integrating and national vocation.

This period concluded with the new National University (Universidad Nacional de México, founded in 1910), which established an institutional separation between social and natural sciences; a corresponding separation took place between the Natural History Museum and that of History, Archeology and Ethnology. In the organizational chart of the Escuela de Altos Estudios—whose duty was to coordinate higher education—this separation is evident, since the school had two sections: one for exact and the other for social sciences. From November 16, 1910<sup>40</sup>—by order of the Ministry, signed by Deputy Minister Ezequiel A. Chávez—the National Institutes of Medicine, Pathology and Bacteriology and the Natural History Museum came under its Section of Exact, Physical and Natural Sciences, while the Museum of Archeology, History and Ethnology and the Inspectorate of Archeological Monuments became the responsibility of the Section of Social, Political, and Juridical Sciences. In addition to the physical demise of the generation of naturalists referred to above, this of course put an institutional end to the integral and encyclopedic tradition. The first director of the Natural History Museum was Jesús Sánchez, who made veiled complaints about the process of relegation suffered by natural history in the National Museum in previous years, as compared with the support given to archeology and anthropology. After taking over as director of the new establishment he wrote:

The sections of which the National Museum was comprised at the beginning of the last year, included that of Natural History, made up of the branches of zoology, botany, mineralogy, geology and paleontology; this section has, for many years, and even more so in recent times, been in a state of almost complete inactivity, due above all to the fact that *the considerable development attained by the archeology, ethnography and history sections led to these occupying the attention and expenditure of the Museum's Directorate to an extraordinary degree, and to the serious detriment of the Natural History section* and for national culture likewise, which needs to possess numerous, varied and well arranged collections in this branch [of knowledge], given that the exhibition of such pieces constitutes an important objective

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<sup>40</sup> AHUNAM, FENAE, box 7, file 132, f. 3502.

education for the public in general, and offers foreigners an important sample of the culture and natural wealth of the country. (Sánchez, 1910:1; my italics).

The plans to develop a Natural History Museum envisaged a role in research and scientific education which, as Sánchez wrote, would give it significant scope and influence; it was to include botanical and zoological gardens, which have never been put into effect, not even in the present day. In comparison with the budget granted by the State to the country's anthropology and archeology, that devoted to the Natural History Museum—which in any case, according to Galindo y Villa, was not opened to the public until 1913—was minimal. It can thus be fairly stated that the period dealt with here concluded not only with the separation of the collections to form two more specialized Museums, but also in the decline of the natural history tradition—at least as far as the museums are concerned—which yielded before the irresistible rise of Mexican archeology with its greater importance for the national consciousness and tourism.

### III

Archeological matters—which during the *Porfiriato* became a matter of national security—also occupied the attention of the Federal Congress. One case of archeological pillage in Mexico was that of Desireé Charnay, which set off an important debate in the tenth period of Congress in 1880.<sup>41</sup> Among its consequences was the setting up, a few years later, of a specific government institution for Mexican archeology; a further consequence was the promulgation of stricter laws to protect the nation's heritage.

In the debate of 1880, Justo Sierra—who was later to maintain a (national(istic) respect for the vestiges of the national past which henceforth he would never renounce—still assumed the defense of the universal values of the cultural patrimony. The response of Vicente Riva Palacio—coordinator of *México a través de los siglos* (reprinted, 1983)—and Guillermo Prieto to Sierra's posture in the debate was immediate. While Riva Palacio proclaimed that he would rather see a fire destroy the exhibits in the Museum than witness the "domination of the foreigner", he also protested at the comparison of Mexico "with the decadent Egypt and with India", an interesting argument, if we consider the attitude mentioned above of scholars like Orozco y Berra who did not believe Mexican archeology to be worthy of comparison with those of Egypt or Rome.

The most imposing arguments against Sierra's universalist position were formulated in part by Guillermo Prieto, who as well as being by that time a

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<sup>41</sup> It should be pointed out that little has been written on the pillaging of Mexican archeological remains; some incidents from this period are, however, recorded in Rutsch, 2002.

politician and former Finance Minister, was also “the most loved and admired poet of Mexico, the singer of the national soul”. Prieto seeks to refresh Sierra’s memory; he goes so far as to accuse him of despising the knowledge produced on Mexican soil:

Has not Mr. Sierra seen the decipherment of hieroglyphics carried out by Mr. Orozco y Berra? These archeological antiquities are letters in the alphabet of human kind, they are letters that enshrine the writing (*gramma*), so to speak, of many civilizations. How can Mr. Sierra permit himself to cut away letters from this alphabet, mutilate that statue, annihilate those civilizations? (as quoted by Díaz y de Ovando, 1990:42)

The writing of national history could not be entrusted to others, but neither ought Mexicans to “go around like beggars” among other nations, where their own historical relics were concerned. By that time, almost a century had past since the metaphor of Mexico as a “beggar” had been introduced by Antonio Alzate, who wrote (in 1788), in defense of the local scientific tradition, and against Linnæus’ system of classification:

If thus a new botanical language were to be constructed, it would be of great utility to the public, but going begging for Greek words forged among the snows of Denmark is nonsense.<sup>42</sup>

Of long-lasting use, this metaphor expressed the increasing opposition to the role assigned to Mexico by the central countries in the sphere of production of their own knowledge —both in the natural and the historical sciences, and particularly in relation to the indigenous past. In any case the defeat of Justo Sierra’s position on the matter of the archeological concessions was overwhelming and tumultuous: the voting held on October 28, 1880, resulted in 6 votes in favor and 114 against. It set an important political precedent, although it was only after another twenty years that the Act of May 11, 1897, was to declare the archeological monuments to be the property of the nation and to place them—at least in theory—beyond the laws of the capitalist market.<sup>43</sup> Its most immediate political consequence, however, was the setting up of the Directorate of Inspection and Conservation of Archeological Monuments (*Dirección de Inspección y Conservación de Monumentos Arqueológicos*) in 1885.

It should be mentioned at this point that the most radical aspects of Riva Palacio’s speech were not shared by his students and admirers, although there

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<sup>42</sup> As quoted by Aceves, 1993:62. López-Ocón Cabrera (1998:209-10) writes that Francisco José de Caldas also wished to become a disseminator of enlightened science in the Viceroyalty of New Granada (Colombia-Venezuela) in order not to have to “go begging to Humboldt who was roaming around the Viceroyalty at that time.”

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the Congressional Decree: “Ley sobre Monumentos Arqueológicos”. This Act introduced criminal sanctions for the pillaging or destruction of archeological remains, while also—in view of the public utility status of the same—establishing the right to expropriate archeological sites from private owners. Cf. Lombardo/Solis, 1988: 68-69.

was agreement among them as regards the equal value of national history with the Western past in general. Galindo y Villa wrote 36 years later:

Mexico has with justice been called the Egypt of the Americas, on account of the fascinating remains of past civilizations that lie scattered in its soil. The mysterious valley of the Nile —land of colossuses and mummies— [...] lies strewn with infinite archeological treasures [...] Here, too, in our own National Museum of Archeology, do we not gaze in awe at the solemn diorite head, reminiscent [...] of a finished work by some maker from Memphis or Thebes? [...] This brief observation bears out the precise expression that the present Mexican nation is indeed the Egypt of the New World (Galindo y Villa, [1918] 1979:7 y 16).

As can be seen, in those years the official representation of the country's own pre-Hispanic past —no longer merely an agglutinating value to be rescued as such, but in any case inferior to a Western past taken as a yardstick— was raised to a condition of equality with it. The “imaginary” of the Mexican past underwent a turnabout in its self-appreciation.

In December, 1885, Leopoldo Batres (1852-1926) was appointed *Inspector and Conservator of Archeological Monuments of the Republic*, a post he held until 1911, under the personal protection of Porfirio Díaz and Justo Sierra. Twenty years after the founding of this first national institution devoted specifically to the protection of the archeological heritage, Justo Sierra's administration —through the institutionalization of anthropological teaching— gave particular stimulus to research into the Mexican historical memory and the education and training of specialists in that field. On many occasions, however, the Museum diverged from the conceptions of the Inspectorate, not only from the personal views of Leopoldo Batres (whose opinions often clashed with those of archeologists and anthropologists both at home and abroad), but also opposing the Inspectorate as an autonomous entity, set apart from the Museum. The Inspector actually functioned as a sort of field worker, who at the same time controlled the collections placed in the Museum's keeping and watched over the permits granted to foreignness. Ostensibly his faculties set him to one side of the Museum, but, in fact, he occupied a superior position. With such powers the Inspectorate was able to promote or hinder the Museum's activities, both in the field and behind office doors.<sup>44</sup>

The differences between the Museum and the Inspectorate form part of the anthropological tradition in Mexico, a tradition of much longer duration than the period dealt with here. It seems to me that the causes of the conflicts between the National Museum and the Directorate of Conservation and Inspection of Archeological Monuments can be divided schematically into four. Of course, these appear interconnected, but their specific weight varies as they appear and reappear throughout the coexistence of both institutions:

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. “Comunicado de Atribuciones del Inspector de Monumentos Arqueológicos”, Lombardo de Ruiz / Solís Vicarte, 1988:66-67.

- The subordination in fact, if not officially, of research and conservation of monuments to the political criteria of the moment.
- The political affiliation of the protagonists (whether *Porfirista*, *Carrancista*, *Huertista* or others) which led to rivalries and differing projects.
- The budget of the Inspectorate which grew constantly over the years in competition with that of the Museum.
- Disagreements based on divergent (epistemological) visions of anthropology, and particularly of archeology.

At this point a detail of institutional organization becomes of fundamental importance: the Inspectorate of Archeological Monuments was, from its origins, a department of the Museum; by “department” I mean that the Inspectorate’s budget formed a specific item in the Museum’s own financial budget. Nonetheless, the decree which set up the Inspectorate did not specify precisely to whom it was answerable. Its functions were laid down in an communiqué issued by order of the Ministry of Justice and Public Instruction (*Secretaría de Justicia e Instrucción Pública*). This communiqué dated October 17, 1885, states explicitly that the Inspector General:

May employ porters or guards, but on an unpaid basis.

The functions of the Inspector are the authorization of archeological works, so as to avoid pillaging,

and,

Every archeological finding must go the National Museum to which it shall be delivered via the Inspectorate.<sup>45</sup>

It is to be inferred that the Inspectorate was intended to serve the Museum and the interests of the national heritage, but as an institution it was not explicitly assigned to the direction of the Museum. In effect this ambiguity led to the Inspector rendering accounts directly to the Justice Ministry, and not to the director of the Museum. In later years the Inspectorate’s budget was in fact to appear in a separate section. This was a fundamental structural cause which underlay the conflicts between both institutions. The original communiqué, however, ordered a collaboration, and not an institutional relation of hierarchy between the institutions.

Over the years —and especially those between 1900 and 1911— the Inspectorate’s budget grew to the point where it practically equaled that of the Museum. The growth in resources allocated to the Inspectorate was channeled

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Lombardo de Ruiz, Solis Vicarte, 1988:66-67.

above all towards the recovery, restoration and conservation of what the *Porfiriato* made its own particular archeological site, Teotihuacan, where the work to reconstruct the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon began with 160 laborers in March, 1904, and for which the "Vice-Minister's office had given full powers to Leopoldo Batres". Here it was necessary to construct a railway line to clear away the rubble, and Batres even had recourse to dynamite, all in order to finish the monumental reconstruction on time, that is to say for the celebration of the centenary of Mexican independence in September, 1910. This was an occasion for which visits were expected from abroad; also, for the second time, an International Congress of Americanists was to be held in Mexico City (second session of the Seventeenth Congress). Delegates from foreign universities were invited, at the expense of the Porfirist government, to the inauguration of the National University, and in the same month the reconstructed site was presented to the representatives of the different nations (among the delegates on this occasion were Eduard Georg Seler and Franz Boas who were later to accept teaching posts in Mexico). In the government's eyes, the important legitimizing function of monumental archeology justified the substantial budget resources employed. In defense of the budget allocation for the restoration of Teotihuacan, Justo Sierra presented the following arguments to the Finance Ministry:

For you, men of finance and taxation, this archeology is a trifling matter, one of little importance; but for us it is *the only thing that guarantees the personality of Mexico before the world of science*; all the rest is just the same as what exists elsewhere, and [in any case] is exercised here by foreigners (as quoted by Dumas (II), 1992:364, my italics).

Meanwhile, members of the Museum staff such as Genaro García made substantial contributions to paleography, recovery and publication of colonial texts. García, a lawyer and politician, directed the collection of *Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de México* (Unpublished or Very Rare Documents for the History of Mexico), which appeared between 1905 and 1911 and extended to several volumes (García, 1972). García, like his contemporaries, championed an idea of science as a synonym for the search for truth; consequently, his own idea of the historian's duty was the achievement of maximum impartiality and faithful reproduction of the documents. Shortly after his appointment as assistant director of the museum in April, 1907, he was given the responsibility of preparing a special collection of Mexican historic documents,<sup>46</sup> edited by the Museum. García had previously published translations of Spencer and also a volume of historical documents in homage to the Thirteenth International Congress of Americanists in New York in 1902; his publications of the *Documentos* began to appear in print from the start of his activity at the Museum. In May, 1907, in other words a month after his

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<sup>46</sup> García, *Documentos históricos mexicanos*, 1910. The same year he also published an official account of the celebrations of the Centenary of Independence. Facsimile Edition, 1990.

appointment as director of the Museum, Sierra requested of García:

a project for a historical work in which the Museum might commemorate National Independence in a fit manner at its first centenary, worthy, that is, of the Fathers of the Nation, who, in order to give it life, began an unequal struggle with superhuman heroism... (García, 1910:X ).

The *Documentos* finally reached six volumes, the result of searching through archives and libraries, but also of “the copies of the manuscripts and printed documents concerning Independence that I had been assembling for many years” (García, *ibid.*). And, in order to clarify any doubts regarding who were the actual authors of this work, García states:

The Museum strove assiduously to ensure that this work, humble as it is, should be entirely a national one, and believes that it has achieved this, at least so far, because these six volumes have been made exclusively by the sons of Mexico (García, 1910:XII).

It seems that the accent placed here on the “exclusively national” is not merely an affirmation of national history, but also and at the same time an affirmation directed against the foreign and any attempt to usurp national history and historiography.

At this point it is worth remembering that, apart from the high rate of illiteracy and the lack of a mass education system, the problem of education under the *Porfiriato* was connected to the labor market in an economy co-opted by foreign capital and interests. The level of the Mexican intellectual elite formed in the positivism of the National Preparatory Schools, the Schools of Jurisprudence, Medicine, Engineering, Fine Arts, etc., was generally very high.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the graduates of these schools —unless they worked for the government— had little opportunity in the free labor market where executive jobs were generally a monopoly of foreigners. With time this created such a problem that, for example, Justo Sierra spoke in 1903 of the “black phalanx of the intellectual proletariat” (Bazant, 1996:221). In addition to this there was the problem that those who did manage to get hold of jobs in the government bureaucracy were very badly paid, a situation that led to many of them taking on extra jobs or having recourse to other means.<sup>48</sup> All this in turn had a decisive effect in accentuating animadversion towards everything foreign in general and to certain scientific people in particular. The nationalism of many intellectuals

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<sup>47</sup> “The academic education obtained in the special schools was worthy of admiration...” Bazant, 1996: 223; see also, in the Appendices to the cited work, the Preparatory School curricula for 1867 and their successive reforms.

<sup>48</sup> For example, for lawyers the economic situation had become so critical in 1902 that many of them had emigrated; in that year too the degree course for the title of notary was suppressed and the title was declared to be incompatible with any public responsibility, commission or employment; in addition to the title of barrister, a minimum period of practice and a special exam became a requisite for those wishing to exercise the profession. Notaries were also limited by quota and so it “was not easy to become a notary”. Bazant, *ibid*: 229

was strengthened by these factors of considerable weight and forms an important part of the background of disputes and battles for prestige and academic influence (for instance, that headed later by Manuel Gamio and Ramón Mena, *cf.* Rutsch, 2001). As long as the economy of the *Porfiriato* was co-opted by foreign interests, academic excellence and intellectual elitism could not remedy the situation. (Viewed in this light, the country's situation at the turn of the twentieth century was strikingly similar to that at the dawn of the twenty-first.)

The Museum's workers, on the other hand, defended an anti-monumentalist approach to archeology and the indivisible nature of archeology and anthropological studies, since for the engineer Jesús Galindo y Villa (first holder of the chair in archeology) for example, an indigenous codex was as much a monument as a pyramid. The latter published in 1914 a lecture entitled "General Exposition on Mexican Archeology". Among the questions addressed by this lecture was that of the place of Mexican archeology among the sciences. Without going too deeply into this matter, it is worth mentioning that for Galindo y Villa archeology was not a synonym for the science or history of antiquity; rather,

Archeology [...] walks across fields covered with remains; but only analyzes an aspect of Ancient History, for which purpose it is an aid of the first order. [...] Despite this limitation, the term Archeology has been conceded an enormous latitude [...] but while regarded as the science of ancient things, it must not be confused with the science of Antiquity, the latter is generic while the former is specific. (Galindo y Villa, 1914:191).

This notion of an integral study of anthropology entails an anti-monumentalist concept of archeology, for in this respect Galindo y Villa writes:

Some etymologists narrow the limits of the concept by reducing Archeology to the study of the monuments of Antiquity, understanding by monument all material work carried out or made in memory or honor of heroic actions or of persons. This definition is scarcely complete, since by extension the term monument is [properly] applied even to literary works of great value and universal fame; in this sense both the immortal work of Cervantes and the breathtaking manuscripts of the Mexican Indians are monuments. (Galindo y Villa, 1914:191).

Likewise for Andrés Molina Enríquez (1858-1940), a lawyer, notary and journalist from Jilotepec in the State of Mexico, who in 1907 took over the chair in ethnology from the physician Nicolás León, archeology is a science which forms part of *ethnology*. Moreover, Molina Enríquez inaugurated a new note in the conception of the Museum's purposes and thus its programs of study and professional training. The ethnology of the moment, the only one possible and desirable in twentieth-century Mexico, is an *applied* ethnology. It is thus Molina Enríquez who, much before Manuel Gamio, has this political and revolutionary vision of Mexican ethnology.

## IV

The counterpoised visions regarding what archeology and anthropology ought to be in Mexico led to frequent conflicts between the two primary institutions of Mexican anthropology, which were to continue over many years following the Revolution, and which led, among other consequences, to a stagnation in the process of professionalizing them. Following the Revolution, Manuel Gamio Martínez (1883-1960), head of the Inspectorate after Batres and Francisco M. Rodríguez, brought this body under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture and Development (*Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento*) and, in the name of the Directorate of Anthropology (which headed the departments of archeological and of ethnographic studies and disappeared in 1925), concentrated a large part of the country's ethnological research and all of its archeological administration and carried on the tradition of dispute with the Museum.<sup>49</sup>

This contraposition has been little investigated, among other reasons, because Manuel Gamio has been turned into the “founding father” of anthropology according to Mexican official historiography. Nor do we know much about the archeology of the 1920s in Mexico and the restructuring of its institutions and projects. However, it does seem that the reform of the anthropological institutions led later on, and in the early 1930s, to the Museum's archeological research becoming ever more distant from the remaining anthropological specialties (Hernández López, 2003). The process of unequal, contradictory and competitive institutionalization between Museum and Inspectorate and its unresolved consequences still manifests itself today in the tension between research and conservation of the country's archeological and historical objects and sites. Although the Inspectorate was created as a consequence of the need for protection of the archeological heritage in the face of pillaging and private collectors, the support granted it by the State at a particular moment in time was of such dimensions that, to an extraordinary degree, it led to the creation of power structures whose conception of science turned out over the years to be forged rather with criteria of a technical and instrumental nature in mind, designed to serve the political needs of the moment.<sup>50</sup> What we are looking at, then, is a conflict with a historical origin, but not only of an institutional and political nature: it is also related to concepts of knowledge, its object and function. These tensions between archeology and other specialties that afflict Mexican anthropology are an inheritance of conflict

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<sup>49</sup> Historians of Mexican anthropology have generally viewed Manuel Gamio as a kind of “cultural broker” of the values of Franz Boas; this thesis has, however, been questioned by more recent studies (Castañeda, 2003; Rutsch, 2002; Hernández López, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Cf., for instance, Vázquez León and Rodríguez García's study (1996). In this context it is worth drawing attention to Marcos Cueto's work (1989) on biomedical research in Peru between 1890 and 1950, which concludes that this, likewise, had a marked emphasis on practical work that ended up “stifling” basic research.

handed down from the discipline's very beginnings.<sup>51</sup>

With regard to the 1920s it is sufficient to say at this point that the educational development of those years began with the Education Minister José Vasconcelos (a student of Ezequiel A. Chávez), whose cultural missions and rural schools set out to incorporate the peasants and Indian peoples socially, economically and educationally into national life. Together with the development of important artistic movements with a powerful autochthonous inspiration—such as Mexican mural painting—these years witnessed government efforts to extend literacy and the Spanish language while at the same time rescuing certain indigenous elements, particularly handicrafts. The history of Mexican “indigenism” is complex, but I would go as far as to say that the policies applied have had a fundamentally evolutionist and paternalistic focus, which has led to demands—on the part of several indigenous people's movements—for the disappearance of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, which was set up in 1949 as a government agency responsible for these policies. In reality—and in every-day life—“indigenist” policies often took an opposite course from reasons of state. In Mexico today, as in Peru, there is a tendency to consider the problem of the indigenous peoples as a question of national security and therefore to oppose the extension of rights at constitutional level (Gómez Rivera, 1997).

The teaching of anthropology and archeology that was formalized in the Museum from 1906 onwards passed through precarious moments during the 1920s: at times these subjects were handed over to the University and at others they returned to the Museum. In those years Franz Boas also finally gave up hope of resuscitating the International School of American Archeology and Ethnology, a unique institution in which this anthropologist carried out the archeological work which inspired the continent's first stratigraphic excavation in the Valley of Mexico (1911-1912).

Nonetheless, the professionalization of Mexican anthropology received a new impulse in late 1935, when a School of Anthropology opened within the department of Biological Sciences of the National Polytechnic Institute (*Instituto Politécnico Nacional*). The inaugurators of the new school were the physician and physical anthropologist Daniel Rubín de la Borbolla, the archeologist Alfonso Caso, and the German ethno-historian Paul Kirchhoff. Kirchhoff, who was later nationalized Mexican, was the last of the “classic” German anthropologists in Mexico. In 1942 the School of Anthropology—now under the aegis of the INAH (*Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*), created in 1939—became the National School of Anthropology and History (*Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia*).

It is worth mentioning two other matters from the 1930s which have come

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<sup>51</sup> According to Vázquez León (1990), the present-day national archeological and historical institution, INAH, is a highly complex and hyper-formalized institution. Nevertheless, as in the past, the social use of the archeological patrimony tends to answer to political purposes, since “the complexity and hyper-formality are linked to an influential, and extremely hierarchized, political structure.” Vázquez, 1990: 321.

back to light in discussions on the nation's cultural heritage. In 1930 the Civil Code for Mexico City and the Federal Territories Act (*Ley Especial del Código Civil del Distrito y Territorios Federales*) was approved, setting up the Department of Artistic, Archeological and Historical Monuments under the Public Education Ministry. Its function was to "catalogue and protect monuments and places of natural beauty, under national ownership or subject to the jurisdiction of the federal government, as well as those monuments situated in Mexico City and the Federal Territories" (Cottom, 2002:23); the department was absorbed into the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) some years later.

The other matter concerns the discovery of jewels and tombs at Monte Albán in Oaxaca. From that moment it was Alfonso Caso who came to the foreground as the regime's "official" archeologist. With the success of Caso the last remaining archeologists of the "Porfirist" generation were fired from the Museum. Following these discoveries, in 1932, the State of Oaxaca tried to promote a legislation on archeological affairs. This attempt failed, since in litigation with the federal level of government, the High Court found in favor of the Federation.

Tensions between the States and municipalities and the federal level have persisted down to the present day, when political processes demand a lessening of centralism and presidential power. One of the economic reasons for these conflicts is the unequal distribution of taxes collected by the nation and the scarcity of resources in general.

In 1964 during the sexennium of Adolfo López Mateos [1958-64] which signaled a new boom in financial and ideological resources for archeology, a new National Anthropology Museum was inaugurated in the woods at Chapultepec. This, in its arrangement of collections and exhibitions halls, illustrates not only a certain cultural diversity but —more importantly— political centralism side by side with archeological monumentalism. Shortly afterwards, in 1972, a Congressional Act on Archeological, Artistic, and Historical Monuments and Zones (*Ley Federal de Monumentos y Zonas Arqueológicas, Artísticas e Históricas*) was promulgated which confirmed the federal character of archeological remains and the responsibility of the INAH for their conservation. The archeological board of this Institute still retains responsibility for authorizing permits to excavate and restore archeological properties.

During recent years Mexico has experienced —or rather suffered— the consequences of neoliberal and globalizing policies which, behind a smokescreen of rhetorical diversity— has implied an ever lower budget for education, alarming unemployment figures and extreme poverty in the cities and rural areas, which —in the wake, first, of the so-called "green revolution", and then of the NAFTA agreement— have undergone a process of destructuring and decapitalization.

In this panorama, in 1999 the cultural committee of the Federal Senate presented a bill for a "General Law on the Nation's Cultural Heritage". This was intended to replace the 1972 Federal Law and open the possibility of

“concessioning out” sites, monuments and collections to “juridical and natural persons”, under the pretext of progress, “social development” and “drawing full benefit” from these properties. Many intellectuals and social sectors raised their voices in protest at this bill which, at the time, did not go ahead. Among opposition sectors, the general conviction is still that the national heritage and its administration should retain their federal character.

Of course, the problem —leaving aside the private interests in play— is complex and many-sided, since what the neo-Zapatist movement has brought into the public view with greater force than ever before is the right of the Indian peoples to voice their opinions and to participate in decision making on matters that have to do with the preservation of their historical memory in the framework of a national identity that, traditionally, and in many different ways, has excluded plurality. This demand was enshrined in the San Andrés Larráinzar Accords, signed between the Zapatist National Liberation Army (EZLN) and government representatives in February, 1996, but defaulted upon by the Federal Government. The most important points of these Accords in relation with the matters dealt with in this article were: free access (without cost) of indigenous peoples to the archeological sites for reasons of worship, participation in their administration and a share in the economic resources derived from them.

Indisputably, pressures towards privatization are at the moment insistent (in practically all economic fields, including the cultural patrimony), as is also the combativeness of various social groups —not only indigenous groups— and these are factors to be reckoned with; at the same time, the administration of the cultural heritage has become excessively bureaucratized. So far, however, no solution has been found that might save the traditional national historical identity. This was indeed forged —as I hope this essay has made clear— under actual historical conditions in which “the constitutions of our countries resulted from the imposition of certain Creole-Mestizo hegemonic groups over the rest of the country, with the fiction that the whole or total of the individuals of the nation was constituting, promulgating those laws” (Villoro, 2002:53). This traditional identity is today undergoing transformation, as can be seen in the much debated reform of the country’s political constitution.<sup>52</sup> The most important areas of controversy concern the recognition of a multiethnic society; the full guarantee of free self-determination of the indigenous peoples in a framework of autonomies; the recognition and protection of their lands and territories; their acknowledgment as corporate entities in public law, and recognition of their right to the preferential use and usufruct of the natural resources existing in their territories. The 318 constitutional lawsuits which have been filed by municipalities and states with indigenous majorities in favour of these reforms are still in the process of being resolved. Simultaneously, the 100 million Mexicans (more than 20 million of which live in the United States) continue

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<sup>52</sup> Even after the Zapatist march of January 2001 to Mexico City and the failure of the administrations of Ernesto Zedillo to comply with the San Andrés Larráinzar Accords, Vicente Fox Quezada’s government has not succeeded in finding a just resolution of the conflict in Chiapas.

re-forging their concept of nation, while Mexican archeologists and anthropologists are debating new concepts of administration and use of their myths of foundation (and remain divided upon the matter). Some (the majority) are of the opinion that the administration of archeological properties must be retained at the federal level, under the danger of creating anomalous situations which would end up fragmenting the nation's patrimony (Olivé Negrete, 1997); others (the minority) are convinced that the law itself and the very concept of cultural patrimony contain contradictions that are beyond resolution (Escalante Betancourt, 1997; López Palacios, 1997), and that the federal government should accede to the indigenous demands. Some archeologists even adopt the position that "it would be an honor to work for the indigenous people". Nonetheless, due to the historical conformation of the profession and the country's political centralism, there are few archeologists whose interests embrace an approach to the life and culture of contemporary indigenous Mexicans.

However, historically and from a legal point of view —as Boly Cottom so well points out—the Mexican State founded its national identity (and in the final instance, its sovereignty) on education, culture and the cultural heritage conceived as matters of federal competency. In the final instance, in the specific conditions of Mexico, "history, education, culture and cultural heritage are essential elements for avoiding the nation's falling apart" (Cottom, 2002:52). And it is this traditional concept of nation —and with it certain matters connected with Mexican anthropology— that is today in question.

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### Abbreviations and Archives

AHMNA

Archivo Histórico del Museo Nacional de Antropología, México;  
Historical Archives of the National Museum of Anthropology.

AHUNAM

Archivo Histórico de la UNAM  
Ramo Universidad, Centro de Estudios sobre la Universidad, Fondo Escuela de Altos Estudios (FENAE), México.

BMNAHE

Boletín del Museo Nacional de Arqueología,  
Historia y Etnología, México.

MNA

Museo Nacional de Antropología - National Museum of  
Anthropology

UNAM

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México – National Autonomous  
University of Mexico.

**Dirección de Etnología y Antropología Social-INAH,  
México**