

CIVILIZING THE PREHISPANIC:  
NEO-PREHISPANIC IMAGERY  
AND CONSTRUCTIONS  
OF NATIONHOOD  
IN PORFIRIAN MEXICO  
(1876-1910)

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**CIVILIZING THE PREHISPANIC:  
NEO-PREHISPANIC IMAGERY AND CONSTRUCTIONS  
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**VOLUME ONE**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## ABSTRACT

This work looks at the artistic production of the Porfiriato (1876-1910) with particular attention to the representation of prehispanic cultures and their incorporation into an official historiography. Whilst highlighting the growing popularity of prehispanic and conquest themes, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the research centres on the study of what may be described as a 'neo-prehispanic' genre in order to explore issues of identity and nationalism in the arts.

The use of academic styles for the artistic interpretation of prehispanic material coincides with an already growing concern to redefine prehispanic cultures as 'classical' civilisations. The neo-prehispanic as a style may therefore be understood as a reappropriation of the past via western canons and art schools, and the construction of a neo-prehispanic imagery as a means of 'cleansing' the barbaric.

The analysis concentrates on the function of neo-prehispanic representations by looking at the reception of these images in relation to the aesthetic ideas operating at the time, and their production within the institutional framework of the Academy of San Carlos. It also looks at State-funded projects in order to highlight the cultural politics of the Porfiriato which sought to celebrate the cultural legacies of prehispanic Mexico. The study will hence seek to explore the particularities of a national style, the function of art in the Porfiriato, and the relationship between artistic production and the construction of a national identity. All of this will be looked at in relation to history painting, monuments and architecture.

The main objectives of the research aim to be both practical (a catalogue of material 'Appendix B'), and interpretative. The correct cataloguing and identification of this material together with an analysis of their function within the context of Porfirian society will provide invaluable material for future research, and will constitute the original contribution of my PhD.

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## PREFACE

I have grown up with the intellectual baggage of a post-revolutionary ideology based on the celebration of *mestizaje* as the essence of *mexicanidad*. This has made me question issues of identity and nationalism in the arts. What is 'Mexican' about Mexico and what makes me 'Mexican' are questions I may never be able to answer, but understanding the historical and cultural processes involved in the construction of identity may at least help me take a step in the right direction.

One of the legacies of the Revolution has been to reduce a complex historical predicament into a binary formula of Spanish + Indian = Mexican. This history does not acknowledge the influence of other groups such as the thousands of Asians and Africans who arrived in Mexico during the colonial period. Although this work attempts to disclose some of the difficulties involved in the construction of national identity it does not consider the influence of those silent voices. Their absence in this work must not be attributed to my unawareness of their existence, but to the purpose of this research which investigates the incorporation of prehispanic cultures into an official national history in the Porfiriato. I do hope however, that new histories will emerge to enrich our understanding of the variegated cultural and racial richness that has been masked behind an official guise of *mexicanidad*.

Since I started looking at the construction of national identity in Mexico I have been interested in the way in which Mexico has tried to be 'different but not too different'. In other words, on how it has negotiated modernity whilst maintaining an aura of authenticity, and the predicament of being distinctively Mexican without appearing backward, or modern without being 'westernised'.

My engagement with these questions has been greatly enriched by my participation in the project 'Modernity and National Identity in Art: India, Japan and Mexico 1860s – 1940s' funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) and guided by the leadership of Professor Partha Mitter, Professor Oriana Baddeley and Professor Toshio Watanabe. Through our discussions in the workshops I became aware that Mexico was not alone in trying to accommodate its 'difference' within a universal history shaped by the intellectual legacies of western Europe. The cross-cultural nature of the project made apparent the way in which these three countries were adapting and transforming notions of modernity and nationhood to suit their own political, cultural and social needs. This helped me put into perspective the position of Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century and

understand that, like other countries, Mexico was trying to forge its own national identity based on ideas that could not be simply viewed as 'western' or 'European'. In other words modernity, nationhood and progress were the tools of survival – as it were – for any country wishing to compete in an increasingly capitalistic and industrialised world. I therefore realised that it would be misleading to view the modernisation of Mexico as 'westernisation' because there is no paradigmatic modernity just as there is no paradigmatic idea of nationhood.

## INTRODUCTION

The Porfiriato is one of the key points in the history of modern Mexico. During this period the skill and ambition of Porfirio Díaz led the future and destiny of his fellow citizens. In Mexican historiography the Porfiriato covers the years between 1876 and 1910<sup>1</sup> when Díaz was forced out of office by the revolutionary movement led by Francisco I. Madero. Díaz was re-elected seven times but his long presidency was interrupted by Manuel González who occupied the presidential chair between 1880-1884. González' term however, is generally integrated into the Porfiriato because the overall policies of Díaz and his administration established the political, economic and intellectual parameters that shaped the mentality of this period. The Porfiriato has been extensively studied by scholars in Mexico and abroad, and an attempt to provide a summary of this important chapter in Mexico's history would do no justice to the existing literature.<sup>2</sup> I will therefore limit my analysis to highlighting the elements and characteristics that relate to my overall discussion.

The Porfiriato is generally viewed as a period when the country experienced a wave of extreme 'westernisation',<sup>3</sup> but it was also a time of introspective reflection when the government sought to consolidate the basis of a national culture. In this context the internal refashioning of Mexico's prehispanic past became an intrinsic element of nationalist propaganda. This trend towards what has been called an 'indigenismo histórico' (historic indigenism) became particularly apparent in the 1880s. During this decade two important events gave visual and material evidence of the government's desire to promote a national history based on the legacies of prehispanic cultures: the inauguration of the Monument to Cuauhtémoc in 1887, and the opening of the new 'Salon de Monolitos' in the National Museum – also in 1887. This gallery was designed to host some of Mexico's most important prehispanic 'relics' such as the Aztec 'calendar' (*Piedra del Sol*) which was finally placed in a protective environment after years of residence in the open air.<sup>4</sup>

The use of prehispanic elements in the construction of a national history was not new to the Porfiriato, but the years between the 1870s to the 1900s were marked by an institutionalised effort to forge the blue print of an official *mexicanidad*. It is here therefore that the roots of post-revolutionary ideologies celebrating *mestizaje* can be found, and the visual predecessors of the now famous 'Mexican renaissance' studied. Unlike the murals painted after the Porfiriato, however, many of the works produced during this period fell into oblivion and – except for a few – have not been properly integrated into the canon of

Mexican art history. On the whole, the corpus of what we may describe as a neo-prehispanic genre was buried underneath a post-revolutionary edifice that sought to undermine the historical importance of the Porfiriato. The relative obscurity of the genre and its positioning at the periphery of Mexican art history was established in the twentieth century by Mexican art critics and art historians whose work defined the parameters of canonical art in Mexico. The particularities of this consensus and its relationship with the study of neo-prehispanic art is analysed and discussed at length in chapter two.

I identify the neo-prehispanic as a style that developed during the second half of the nineteenth century, and which represents prehispanic or conquest themes following the canons of academic styles. These kinds of representations have also been described as *indigenista*, or *neoindígena*, but I prefer the term neo-prehispanic because their subject matter is primarily concerned with the representation of prehispanic history rather than with the specificities of contemporary indigenous cultures. In other words they do not represent the customs and traditions of contemporary *indígenas* –for example– which we do find in photographs and lithographs, from this period.<sup>5</sup> The term neo-prehispanic has already been used by Daniel Schávelzon (1988), and Robles García et.al (1987) in their studies to refer to the use of prehispanic elements in the artistic production of this period.

This work will explore the way in which images of the nation were constructed in the academic art of the Porfiriato, and the relationship between history painting and an official historiography. The analysis will centre on the depiction of prehispanic cultures, and the appropriation of prehispanic history into official narratives in order to consider the role of Amerindian cultures in the consolidation of Mexico as a modern nation. Since attention will be given primarily to the interpretation of prehispanic history, the ongoing ambiguity towards the participation of contemporary *indígenas* in the cultural and political life of Mexico will only be considered in relation to their role in the construction of a national identity.

In order to understand the construction of a national imagery the study will also analyse the processes through which prehispanic cultures were transformed from 'barbaric' to 'civilised', and the discursive manipulation of the past by an elite of artists, intellectuals, and government officials. The study of artistic production during the Porfiriato is particularly important to understand issues of identity and representation because art was intertwined with nation building projects that sought to legitimise the cultural status of Mexico. One of the underlying aims of this study will hence be to explore the particularities of a national art in the Porfiriato, and the relationship between form and content as expressed in the search for a national style. By looking at the creation of a

national school we will highlight the difficulties involved in the appropriation of the prehispanic within a conceptual framework of progress and modernity; and the way in which Mexico sought to insert its precolonial and postcolonial histories into an acceptable discourse of universality defined by notions of high culture and civilisation.

The material that constitutes the basis of this research has been limited to the paintings and studies produced or exhibited in the Academy of San Carlos, and to the monuments and architecture commissioned by the State. It therefore centres on the production of 'High Art' within a rigidly institutionalised framework that sought to legitimise the appropriation of the past by the hegemonic groups in power. One of the topics which this work does not consider however, is the relationship between the National Museum and the Academy of San Carlos. The representation of archaeological sites like José María Velasco's views of Teotihuacán have not been included because they need to be considered in relation to the study of archaeology and the National Museum. We hope that future research will look at the collaboration between these two institutions and further our understanding on the relationship between the discipline of archaeology and the representation of prehispanic cultures in the academic art of the Porfiriato.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the intellectual exchange occurring between the National Museum and academic artists, the study of landscape and the significance of Velasco's work is also absent from this research. In spite of Velasco's unquestionable position as one Mexico's most prestigious artists, and his role in the creation of a national imagery through his skilful representations of Mexican landscapes, his paintings are not considered here because they do not engage directly with the representation of prehispanic history. As a landscape artist Velasco was more concerned with capturing the particularities of the Mexican landscape (in the most minute detail),<sup>7</sup> and with the representation of modernity as it entered the rural landscapes of Mexico. Even though his views of the Valley of Mexico do encapsulate the essence of a nationality based on the legacy of prehispanic Mexico these need to be analysed in relation to landscape painting and the significance of this genre in the history of western art. The representation of landscape is a complex subject which deserves an in depth analysis in order to understand its role in the formation of national geographies and topographies in the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the emphasis placed on the construction of a national historiography –with its accompanying heroes and civic values– excludes the agency of landscape painting in this work because it lacked the pragmatic qualities which the genre of history painting allowed in terms of narrating 'stories'.

This is not to say that landscape painting did not play a crucial role in the construction of national narratives in the nineteenth century. Like Mexico, many countries in Europe and America were forging the form and content of a national school in painting, and landscape

painting became a tool for expressing this growth in national consciousness. The use of landscape was particularly strong in the United States where the representation of nature became a source of nationalist pride and propaganda (see for example Hughes 1997; and Boime 1991). The American artists associated with the Hudson River, Luminist, and Rocky Mountain Schools became the representatives of a national sentiment which, during the second half of the nineteenth century, became associated with the virgin lands of the American West. Unable to celebrate a history rooted in the legacy of ancient cultures or civilisations Americans turned to nature and found pride in the awesome beauty of their land. Apart from landscape, genre painting was also popular and enabled artists to express the values of democracy so dear to the core of American politics. North of the border, Canadian artists were also seeking to convey the essence of their nationality through landscapes and genre painting. In the case of Canada however, the association between landscape and nationality became stronger during the first two decades of the twentieth century through the work of artists known as the 'Group of Seven'. These artists found their inspiration in the wintry landscapes of the North, and were influenced by the work of Scandinavian artists (see Osborne 1988). In spite of the predominance of landscape in the United States and Canada many artists also painted historical events and portraits of national heroes, but unlike Mexican history paintings their canvases were mainly limited to contemporary and modern history.

In Latin America the use of history and landscape painting was also related to issues of nationalism in the arts. Even though each country experienced a different cultural, economic and political development after their Independence from Spain certain characteristics can be outlined. Firstly, France became the reference point of artistic creativity and artists sought to emulate the aesthetic principles of the French Academy. Secondly, as the power of the Church declined art became more vernacular, and hence more concerned with the depiction of history, topographies and the people who inhabited the land. Thirdly, the secularisation of art and the rise of genre and *costumbrista* paintings was in most cases influenced by the work of European traveller artists who spread across the continent when Spanish domination ceased to restrict access to these largely unexplored lands. Lastly, an urgency for national cohesion after Independence and the need to forge a common sense of identity encouraged the development of history painting (see Castedo 1988). Artists throughout the continent recorded the most important events that marked the path towards a democratic and Independent future. Similarly to Mexico, other Latin American countries used the narrative qualities of history painting to create visual records of their distant and recent histories, and to promote the formation of societies bound by civic values and a shared national history (see Ades 1989c).

In Western Europe where countries already possessed a rich historical legacy validated by the heritage of the Greco-Roman world, nations turned to their past in search of a national style. This retrospective outlook was particularly apparent in the gothic revival movement of England and France, which was linked to a growing concern for the preservation and conservation of historical monuments (see Choay 2001).<sup>9</sup> In other countries like Italy and Spain the Renaissance was used as a model to express the ideals of the emerging nation (see Pavoni 1997; and Vázquez O. 1997: 115); whilst Germany celebrated the heritage of its Germanic roots.

In short, as the nineteenth century developed countries in Europe and America selected particular events, places or topographies to foster a sense of national identity, and to promote the internal allegiance of regions which had been brought together by the political force of the nation.

In terms of methodology, I concentrate on the production and reception of neo-prehispanic representations in order to understand their function within the context of Porfirian society. The study of their reception develops around the topics of art criticism and aesthetics, and considers the way in which 'romantic realism' became the preferred style for the depiction of national themes. The relationship between style and the characteristics of a national art is hence the key element to understand the particularities of neo-prehispanic representations, and the success or failure of certain images to become representative of the nation. Apart from issues of style, this work is in many ways a study about the relationship between art and national identity, and about the politics involved in the representation of the past. It therefore looks at the function of the Academy of San Carlos, the consolidation of a national historiography, and the construction of a national identity as reflected in the artistic production of the Porfiriato.

My approach to the study of nationhood takes into consideration the work of Benedict Anderson whose concept of 'imagined communities' (2002) has become a useful tool for understanding the rise of national consciousness in the nineteenth century. After discussing the rise of nationalism in Europe as a result of print-capitalism creating 'languages-of power' (2002: 37-46), Anderson moves into Spanish America to understand the specificities of a region where Creole patriotism –rather than the rising popularity of publications in vernacular languages– foresaw the victory of nationalist movements. The questions that intrigue Anderson in relation to the rise of nationalism in Latin America are very useful to our enquiry: "why was it precisely *creole* communities that developed so early conceptions of their nation-ness –*well before most of Europe*? Why did such colonial provinces, usually containing large, oppressed, non-Spanish-speaking populations,

produce creoles who consciously redefined these populations as fellow nationals? And Spain, to whom they were, in so many ways, attached, as enemy alien? " (ibid: 50). Anderson's provisional conclusions however leave one unsatisfied and unsure of what the answers to such ambitious and interesting questions are, his main point being that neither Liberalism, nor the Enlightenment nor economic factors can explain the consolidation of the particular kinds of national consciousness arising in the 'New World' (ibid: 65). Instead Anderson explains that it was "pilgrim creole functionaries and provincial creole printment [who] played the decisive historic role" (ibid). Precisely what that historic role implied however remains largely unexplained. Anderson's analysis is mainly based on the growing difference between *criollos* and *peninsulares*<sup>10</sup> –due to economic, political and racial factors– but no new insights are given other than what is generally argued in much of the literature on this subject (see chapter five). We may argue that this historic role was characterised by the impressive historiographical task undertaken by the creole intelligentsia whose work began to shape the basis of a national history (see Guy Rozat 2001). After all, the precondition of nationhood was the notion of a past leading towards the present. In other words, nations were built on shared histories which provided the source of lore and traditions (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The stronghold of history was therefore intrinsic to independentist movements trying to claim difference from their colonial oppressors. The topic is vast and complex however, and it would be wrong to pretend that definitive answers to Anderson's questions can be found within these pages. The aim of what follows is to advance understanding rather than provide unquestionable answers. A fruitful discussion may arise, for example, from understanding the particularities of Mexico in the context of European imperialism, capitalism and industrialisation combined with the primacy of race as a dominant discourse during the XIX century.

Even though a postcolonial approach may be seen as the best theoretical framework for approaching the study of artistic production in the Porfiriato –as it was indeed informed by Euroamerican racial discourse and the effects of imperialism– this study has been consciously directed away from postcolonial theory.<sup>11</sup> Although I seriously considered the use of postcolonial discourse at the beginning of my research, as my work developed I became increasingly aware of the uneasiness with which postcolonial theory is greeted by Mexican (and Latin American) academics. This often unfriendly reception made me aware of the lack of postcolonial studies in Mexico and the fact that most of these studies arise from scholars working in British and American Universities. Reading on the subject I then became aware that scholars working in the United States were already questioning the use of postcolonial theory in the context of Latin America. In the introduction to his book *Determinations*, for example, Neil Larsen (2001) highlights the dangers of using

postcolonialism as a blanket theory and argues that too much relevance is given to the field of postcolonial studies: "the term (in whichever of its variations: postcolonialism, postcoloniality, postcolonial studies, postcolonial theory, etc) signifies little more than its own (waning) novelty or exoticism *outside* the walls of the academy" (2001: 3). Larsen explains that Latin American scepticism in regards to postcolonial discourse is due to its association with an anglo-centred 'commonwealth studies' legacy. And explains that the first independentist movements in Latin America were not a conscious effort to break away from western hegemony (since they sought to emulate the bourgeois revolutions of France and the United States) what they hoped instead was to break free from the anti-democratic and anti-modern oppression of Spain and Portugal. It was after 1898, Larsen continues when these countries began to be more critical and sceptical of western eurocentrism (ibid: 184). Contrary to this John Beverly defends the use of subaltern studies in the context of Latin America. In his *Subalternity and Representation* (1999) Beverly acknowledges the critical responses to subaltern studies by Latin American scholars who have questioned the validity of theories based in the experience of Indian colonialism and the commonwealth in general. He also addresses the assumed authority of North American scholarship denounced by Latin American critics who argue that academic knowledge derived from it contradicts the nature of subalternity and cannot therefore contribute to understanding the particularities of coloniality in Latin America (1999: 17). In response to this the author argues that unlike postcolonial theory subaltern studies developed primarily from the work of Gramsci:

Many Latin American colleagues have worried about the wisdom of taking a theory developed for the Indian subcontinent under conditions of English colonial domination that persisted up to and in some cases beyond World War II and translating it to Latin American countries which (on the whole) became formally independent in the early nineteenth century. It is worth recalling, therefore, that the idea of subaltern studies itself comes initially not from postcolonial India but from fascist Italy. It is to be found in Gramsci's sketch of the elements of a 'history of the subaltern classes' in the 'Notes on Italian History' in the *Prison Notebooks* (1999: 11).

Apart from these authors, scholars like Patricia Seed (1991), Rolena Adorno (1993), Klor de Alva (1991), and Walter Mignolo (2001) have also addressed this issue. The ongoing debate and resistance of Latin American scholarship to adopt postcolonial discourse highlights the dangers of applying one theoretical framework to different cultural and historical contexts. We should hence be aware of the political implications that using a blanket theory may entail, and the potentiality of any academic discourse to become a

meta-narrative able to perpetuate structures of power. This would seem ironic in the case of postcolonial theory which in itself seeks to disclose the mechanisms involved in the construction of difference and otherness, and the way in which this has sustained the cultural dominance of the 'West'. Its emphasis on hybridity and 'difference' however is precisely what we should be aware of when applying postcolonial theory if we do not want to prolong the divisions that patrol the boundaries between a normative 'us' and an exotic 'them'.

### **Chapters/structure**

The dissertation has been divided into three parts, and each part into two chapters. The first part 'From Prehispanic to Neo-prehispanic' is designed to provide the contextual framework for the analysis of the two subsequent sections. The first chapter looks at perceptions of the prehispanic and the development of archaeology in the nineteenth century; and the second chapter gives an outline of the Academy of San Carlos, and finishes by establishing the general scope of neo-prehispanic representations.

Part two 'Art and History' explores the relationship between the characteristics of a national art and the representation of history. Its first chapter (chapter three) considers the importance of style, and the influence of western aesthetics in the art criticism of the Porfiriato. Particular attention is given to the work of Diego Baz and Sales Cepeda in order to understand the characteristics of Porfirian aesthetics and the function of art in this period. The following chapter (chapter four) then moves on to the study of history painting and its relationship with the construction of an official historiography. This is done through the study of prehispanic and conquest themes established for the Academy's history painting competitions, and their relationship with prehispanic historiography. It also considers the significance of works sent to represent Mexico during the Chicago Columbian Exhibition of 1893, the agency of neo-prehispanic paintings, and the ability of history paintings to act as historical evidence.

Lastly, part three 'Art and Identity' looks at the construction of identity and the politics of representation involved in presenting a favourable image of the nation in Mexico and abroad. The first chapter in this section (chapter five) discusses the concepts of *mestizaje* and *criollismo*, and argues that the Porfiriato was a period of transition between the legacy of *criollismo* and the legitimisation of *mestizaje*. The discussion centres on the tradition of Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas, and analyses changes in perceptions of the prehispanic, and attitudes towards *indígenas* as a result of positivism, social Darwinism and the influence of Euroamerican racial discourse. The second, and last chapter (chapter six), looks at the difficulty of creating a national style in architecture using prehispanic material culture, and considers the complexity of monuments as representatives of the nation. The debate over

the characteristics of a national architecture is discussed in relation to the Mexican pavilion sent to the Paris International Exhibition in 1889, and the Monument to Cuauhtémoc in Reforma. Other monuments like Casarín's *Indios Verdes*, and examples of monuments to Juárez are also discussed in order to consider the difficulty of using a neo-prehispanic style to represent a modern image of Mexico.

### Appendices

Apart from the interpretative work presented in this volume, one of the main objectives of the research is also to provide a catalogue of material that may serve as the basis for the correct cataloguing and identification of neo-prehispanic material. I believed this to be necessary because there is no single body of work which contains all the examples I was able to collect, and also because I found that sometimes important information was either missing or incorrect.

Appendix B is therefore a catalogue of neo-prehispanic representations that provides basic facts (date, authorship, etc), but also information about production, ownership, location and display. Each record is accompanied by an image (when available) and a note specifying the source of its reproduction in order to help people interested in the subject find a source for the image. All the works mentioned in the dissertation, which are included in the catalogue, will be followed by a number in square brackets the first time they are cited. This digit refers to its identification number in the catalogue. Please note that all the titles in the main text have been left in Spanish, but their translations can be found in the catalogue.

Appendix A is designed to complement the study of history painting competitions by providing information on the historical sources used for the selection of prehispanic and conquest themes. The document is divided into the same three categories used for the analysis of history painting competitions in chapter four, and has been arranged chronologically. The month and year for each competition has been included whenever possible, as well as references to documents related to each competition based on the information recorded in the catalogues of Báez Macías (1993, 2003), and Romero de Terreros (1963).

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<sup>1</sup> There is no consensus over the dates that cover the Porfiriato because Díaz was elected at the end of 1876 but did not start his term until 1877. Some sources therefore date this period as 1877 – 1910 or even 1911 when Díaz left the country to seek exile in Paris.

<sup>2</sup> For an enlightening and up to date account of Porfirian historiography see Tenorio Trillo and Gómez Galvarriato *El Porfiriato. Un balance historiográfico* (forthcoming). This book presents an extremely useful review of the literature that has been published dealing with different aspects of

the Porfiriato (cultural, economic, social, political etc.). Apart from the literature review, the authors also point out changing attitudes towards this period of Mexican history, and the way in which its study remained for many years marred by the subversive slant of post-Revolutionary ideologies. In the last chapter the authors suggest new avenues of enquiry and research.

<sup>3</sup> The extent and impact of this westernisation, (often branded as *afrancesamiento* when referring to the cultural allegiances of the elites) is still the subject of study and debate.

<sup>4</sup> Before its relocation to the National Museum this piece used to be in one of the outside walls of the Cathedral. According to Morales Moreno modern museography in Mexico began with the inauguration of the 'Salon de Monolitos' in 1887 (see Morales Moreno 2001).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Dawn Ades (1989b) for an interesting study on the depiction of 'types' and landscapes by European traveller artists in Latin America during the nineteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> This topic has only been looked at in relation to the work of José María Velasco for the National Museum (see for example Altamirano Piolle 1993), and the relationship between archaeology and architecture.

<sup>7</sup> Velasco was an avid botanist and zoologist. He belonged to the Mexican Society of Natural History (founded in 1868) and produced many lithographs and watercolours depicting the flora and fauna of Mexico (see 'A young teacher and scientist' in Altamirano Piolle 1993: 145-161, vol. 1).

<sup>8</sup> An interest in the study of landscape painting has been growing since Kenneth Clark published his seminal work *Landscape into Art* (1949). Since then, a large number of multidisciplinary studies have been published enriching our understanding of the subject. Some of the most influential ideas have come from the work of John Berger (*Ways of Seeing*, 1972), Raymond Williams (*The Country and the City*, 1973), and W.J.T Mitchell (*Iconology: image, text, ideology*, 1986, and in particular his edited book *Landscape and Power*, 1994). An interesting interdisciplinary study of landscape was also presented by Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove in their edited book *The Iconography of Landscape* (1988). For a review of books published on Anglo-American landscape painting see Angela Miller (1995).

<sup>9</sup> Choay explains that the concept of the historical monument gained strength during the nineteenth century thanks to the work of Ruskin and Morris (in England), and Viollet-le-Duc (in France).

<sup>10</sup> The word *criollo* was used to differentiate the children of Spaniards born in America from *penisulares* who had been born in Spain but lived in one of the Spanish colonies.

<sup>11</sup> One of the most interesting studies in relation to Latin American visual culture has been presented by Deborah Poole. In her book *Vision, Race and Modernity* (1997), Poole discusses the construction of race through what she describes as the Andean 'image world' and its relationship with modernity. In stead of using the term 'visual culture' the author centres her study on the concept of a 'visual economy' arguing that economy is a more useful way of thinking about a systematic organization which "has as much to do with social relationships, inequality, and power as with shared meanings and community" (1997: 8). Poole's study is particularly important because it addresses the unfixity of meaning inherent in images and the different readings (and uses) derived from them by individuals. Following an anthropological approach Poole is able to discuss the agency of images, and the flow and exchange of ideas between Europe and the Andes exposing the way in which images of racial difference were constructed as a consequence of this exchange and not simply as a result of Euroamerican racial discourse. Even though Poole's study is extremely useful for situating the cultural exchange occurring between Mexican and European intellectuals, which I discuss in relation to race and aesthetic thought, I have not applied her concept of visual economy because the subject of my study limits the applicability of her approach. My focus on the production of academic art restricts the circulation that these images had compared to the photographs, lithographs and *cartes de visite* which Poole so skilfully analyses. To make proper use of her work this research would have had to analyse the reception of neo-prehispanic images more fully both in Mexico and abroad, and to link the discussion with an ongoing debate on *indigenismo* (the role of contemporary *indigenas* in the cultural and political life of Mexico).

## ASSIMILATING THE PREHISPANIC

Díaz long lasting administration, and the overt exploitation of the working classes which his regime encouraged as a result of industrialisation triggered the Revolution of 1910. In spite of its faults and short-sightedness, the Porfiriato was the first period of relative peace which the country enjoyed after Independence (1821). The superficial stability, enforced through military repression, allowed Mexico to consolidate as a free and independent nation. In this milieu, the concepts of progress, modernity and nationalism became the main preoccupations of the elites shaping the nature of their professional activities. The positive aspects of Díaz' presidency, however harsh for the working classes, were many and substantial in the economic front. Mining, manufacturing and communications were the main areas of development to benefit from his administration. But progress in Mexico depended on foreign investment, and to achieve this the country had to convert its image from a barbaric and underdeveloped place to a civilised and modern nation. The redefinition of prehispanic cultures from barbaric to civilised, and the complete assimilation of contemporary *indígenas*<sup>1</sup> through education was crucial to this enterprise.

A concern with the cultural status of Mexico was therefore more than a question of nationalist pride. This seemingly altruistic activity was influenced by the forces of capitalism and the expansionist policies of the West. But in order to compete with other 'developing' nations Mexico needed to become 'visible' to the outside world. After three hundred years of colonisation knowledge about the country and its resources had remained the monopoly of Spain, and it was now time to put Mexico in the public eye. Antonio García Cubas, Mexico's most famous geographer during the Porfiriato, and author of various *Cuadros Geográficos*, regretted this lack of 'visibility' saying that Mexico was " 'menos conocido y menos correctamente juzgado en cuanto a su aspecto natural, civil y político, que cualquier otra nación civilizada sobre la faz de la tierra' " (quoted in Riguzzi 1998: 140).<sup>2</sup> In his book *The Republic of Mexico in 1876*, for example, García Cubas complained in the introduction that most of the foreign literature on Mexico reflected a negative image of the nation. According to García Cubas this unflattering literature was the result of ignorance. To counteract this, the author continued, a thorough and truthful knowledge of the country had to be made available abroad. In his introduction García Cubas therefore emphasised Mexico's natural and human resources in order to present the country as "one of the choicest countries in the world for colonization,..." (1876: n.p.). The promotional nature of García Cubas' work was part of a conscious effort to promote a favourable image of the country abroad, and responded to one of the main preoccupations of the Porfirian administration (see Riguzzi 1998).

Promoting the history, geography and ethnography of Mexico abroad was hence necessary to attain official recognition of its status as a civilised nation. For this purpose government officials, artists and intellectuals joined efforts to present the world with an image of Mexico that bespoke the virtues of its cultural heritage and enhanced the potential of its natural resources. Within this programme, the archaeological remains of prehispanic cultures were transformed from pagan and idolatrous crafts to art objects worthy of display at the National Museum and international exhibitions. The legacy and history of these cultures became the cornerstone on which discourses of nationhood rested. Through them, Mexico could claim its uniqueness and authenticity as a country resting on the bedrock of 'classical' civilisations.

The redefinition of prehispanic cultures was a relatively slow process which depended on the production of knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge was on its part dependent on the study of prehispanic material remains. Antiquarians, travellers and historians were therefore necessary to collect information and responsible for the interpretation of this material.<sup>3</sup> Through their work the ancient cultures of Mesoamerica were gradually incorporated into the annals of Universal History. The development of archaeology and its professionalisation as an academic discipline began with the work of travellers who ventured into Mexico in search of new discoveries. Their writings and visual records can help us chart the changes taking place in the interpretation of prehispanic material, and the gradual assimilation of Amerindian cultures into a universalist framework that facilitated their incorporation into a rhetoric of nationhood.

### **Travel literature and archaeology**

The material remains of prehispanic cultures captured the imagination of foreign travellers just as Egyptians, Greeks, Assyrians and other ancient civilisations had done. Unlike many parts of Asia and the near East however, the area known today as Mesoamerica offered travellers a largely unexplored region where new discoveries awaited. A demand and search for the exotic, influencing the intellectual and artistic sphere of nineteenth century Europe, propitiated an increase in travel and explorations. It was the Age of Empires as Eric Hobsbawm (2002) has described it, and people in the metropolises exploited this position to satisfy intellectual as well as economic pursuits.

With the gradual loss of colonial territories by Spain, the new countries of Latin America were once more open to other European and North American interests in the region. In Mexico the opportunity to exploit its potential came around 1810 when the country declared its Independence beginning a prolonged period of economic, political and social instability. From this point the unexplored cities of the new world became accessible to

explorers from diverse cultural backgrounds who arrived to Mexico independently or financed by a particular government in the shape of scientific expeditions.<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that the country had not been previously explored by European travellers<sup>5</sup> such as Gemelli Carreri (1683 [1708]),<sup>6</sup> Boturini (1774 [1746])<sup>7</sup> and Humboldt (1810)<sup>8</sup> – to mention some of the most important names – the difference was that the archaeological and natural resources of *Nueva España* could now be exploited by other Empires, as long as they received the permission and agreement of the new Mexican government.

An interest in archaeological remains had been developing in Mexico for a long time mainly led by creoles seeking to articulate the cultural specificity of New Spain. But interest in prehispanic antiquities (including codices and early colonial manuscripts) centred mainly on the cultural production of the Toltecs and the Aztecs leaving other regions largely unexplored. Since the Toltecs were perceived as the cultural roots of all the subsequent civilisations that settled in the Anáhuac region<sup>9</sup> (see chapter four) studies on Tula and Tenochtitlán predominated whilst places like Mitla, Tajin and Palenque –for example– would take longer to surface.<sup>10</sup>

As knowledge about prehispanic cultures centred on Christian beliefs which assumed a common Christian origin located in the old world, the arrival of humans to the new world had to be explained.<sup>11</sup> To do so, various theories surrounding the origin of Americans developed including one which attributed their origin to one of the lost tribes of Israel. This particular thought prevailed during the first half of the nineteenth century but –like many others– it lost credibility in Mexico towards the end of the century due to an ideological shift which began to replace theological and religious beliefs by more rationalistic and scientific explanations. Positivism, and social Darwinism as the dominant ideologies of the nineteenth century would change the way in which America was perceived by Europeans and Americans themselves.

In spite of this, the general consensus continued to argue in favour of migration theories that would explain the arrival of human groups to America. As a result, culture contact was often seen in terms of an Asiatic migration arriving to America through land via the Bering straight or across the Pacific in lower latitudes. Wanting to assert a western origin to Americans some even went as far as suggesting that their forefathers had been Celtic settlers. Apart from these, the Atlantis theory was also used to explain a universal origin by arguing that the continents of Europe and America had once been closer, but that geological movements had submerged a large proportion of territory now under the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>12</sup> The Atlantis theory was relatively common amongst many intellectuals and historians in Mexico and abroad including Alfredo Chavero (1841-1906) who was one

of Mexico's most prominent historians at the end of the nineteenth century. The work of Chavero is extremely relevant to many of the issues explored throughout this work, and will therefore be a figure to which we shall return at various points.

A strong belief on a universal origin, articulated through western ideologies that viewed ancient classical civilisations as the forbearers of later traditions, meant that prehispanic cultures were being constantly compared with civilisations in the near East and Asia. This granted great antiquity to the cultures of America and contributed to the belief that some material remains had been made by civilisations which no longer existed by the time of the arrival of Europeans. In other words, the way in which Amerindian cultures were perceived by Europeans, before and after the colonial period, was largely determined by western preconceptions that assumed a universal origin and therefore viewed them in relation to other ancient civilisations. Because of this, prehispanic material remains and traditions were studied not as independent or autochthonous cultures but instead forced into comparisons with others. This was particularly apparent in linguistic studies that attempted to find links between prehispanic writing and Sanskrit or Latin for example.<sup>13</sup>

Discourses surrounding the origins of Americans however, were also linked to debates around the humanity of Amerindians and their status as either civilised or barbaric. For some writers the grandeur of prehispanic monuments could not be the product of the cultures Spanish *conquistadores* found because these were viewed as primitive and barbaric. In this way contemporary *indígenas* were deprived of a rightful heritage which could be more easily appropriated by creoles. This claim of unconnectedness between contemporary *indígenas* and prehispanic remains was particularly strong in regards to the Mayas because their civilisation had fallen into a state of decadence at the time of contact with Europeans. As a result, many of the cities found by *conquistadores* were already in a process of advanced decay. This is the background in which we must place the work of foreign travellers such as Waldeck, Stephens and Catherwood as it attempted, like many others, to unravel the mystery of Maya architecture and sculpture in order to reveal the origins of Americans.

Following the initial process of conquest and colonisation, Maya material remains were gradually forgotten and their magnificent structures slowly swallowed by the jungle. Their neglect was further fuelled by an overwhelming interest in Aztec and Toltec history already mentioned. At the end of the eighteenth century however, a renewed interest in the area would bring to light a highly complex civilisation which produced some of the most striking architecture in Mesoamerica. After the first expedition, funded by the Crown and led by captain Del Rio in 1787, the Maya region would attract a multitude of European

travellers in search of new discoveries. Del Rio's expedition was followed by a second imperial attempt to explore prehispanic remains and for this purpose Charles the IV commissioned Captain Dupaix to lead it, and to produce a detailed report of their findings. A Mexican artist called Luciano Castañeda was asked to make the drawings and maps to complement the explorations. Dupaix made three trips over three consecutive years beginning in 1805. Leaving from the capital the expedition covered the southeast including Oaxaca and Yucatan. By the time this task was accomplished, political instability and armed struggles fuelling the movement for Independence made impossible the materialisation and publication of their findings. It wasn't until 1834 when the book *Antiquities Mexicaines* edited by the Abbé Baradère would make public the work of Dupaix and Castañeda.<sup>14</sup>

Frederick Waldeck (1766-1875) –who lived to an amazingly 110 years after having survived one of the worst epidemics of cholera in Yucatan– trained as an artist and travelled around Africa, Egypt, India, Chile and Guatemala before going to Mexico in 1824. Whilst living in London Waldeck was asked to make some lithographs based on the expedition of Captain Del Rio to Palenque. But Waldeck was not satisfied with the truthfulness of these images and decided to visit the area himself to find the original models and satisfy his curiosity. In 1831 Waldeck was commissioned by the Mexican government to explore the area of Yucatan and he spent two years between 1834 and 1836 visiting and studying primarily the ruins of Palenque and Uxmal. His stay in the country came to an unexpected and unpleasant end in 1836 when his work and writings were confiscated by the Mexican government under suspicion of espionage. This experience left bitter memories in Waldeck whose already critical views of Mexicans became publicly announced in the book he published in 1838. Apart from his spiteful comments on Yucatecan society, Waldeck's book reveals his views on Amerindian cultures and his position in relation to the existing literature on this subject.

Waldeck dedicated his book to Lord Kingsborough whose monumental nine volume work *Antiquities of Mexico* (published between 1831 and 1848) constituted one of the most important collections of prehispanic material published to that date. Through the study of prehispanic cultures Kingsborough hoped to prove that these groups had descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel. Strangely enough however, this is the theory Waldeck most strongly rejects throughout his book. According to Waldeck it was not the Hebrews but the Hindus who had influenced the cultural production of the Mayas – and to this end he proceeded to produce visual evidence of his findings.

A particularly distinctive element in Maya iconography for example, is the representation of the god Chac with a very stylised and curved nose. Waldeck interpreted this shape as

the trunk of an elephant and used it as an argument to prove the influence of Asian cultures in the Maya region. In his own words: “[a]n Asiatic style is easily recognisable in the architecture of these monuments. The symbolic elephant is represented there over the rounded corners of the buildings with its trunk lifted towards the Levant and lowered towards the west” (my translation 1996: 169 [1838]).<sup>15</sup> Waldeck also makes constant comparisons between Hindu and Maya mythologies in order to fundament his theory.

Waldeck’s drawings reveal his inability to view Maya iconography in terms of specific social and environmental determinants which shaped the nature of its form and content; instead the artist forced Maya representations to fit his own beliefs. His sometimes fantastic and unrealistic interpretations of Maya iconography were criticised by his contemporaries including the already mentioned Mexican historian Alfredo Chavero who preferred not to use his drawings for his *Historia antigua y de la conquista* (1886) – the first volume of *México a través de los siglos*. In this book Chavero explained that he preferred to use the drawings of Castañeda because when he met Waldeck in Paris he realised “que era tan fantastico y tan iluso como Brasseur” (1886: 215).<sup>16</sup>

As a result of his belief in a Hindu origin Waldeck argued that Mayan cultures were very old and had therefore developed a long time before the arrival of Europeans. This idea coincided with the mainstream view which assigned a great antiquity to the Mayas. The work of Stephens and Catherwood on the other hand presents an important contrast in relation to the dominant perception of Mayas, and the way in which this influenced the representation of Maya iconography.

Stephens and Catherwood travelled around the Maya region between 1839 and 1842 covering a vast distance and recording many cities for the first time. Stephen’s writings and Catherwood’s drawings became an instant success and they remain two of the most respectable names in the field of Maya archaeology. Before travelling in Central America, Stephens and Catherwood had travelled extensively in Egypt and the near East. Catherwood trained as an artist but he was also an architect which contributed to his skilful recordings of archaeological remains (see Bourbon 1999). His penetrating eye and ample experience drawing architecture and monuments in remote and different places probably contributed to his ability to see things from their own perspective.

Unlike Waldeck, Catherwood shows a much a more objective compromise to engage with unfamiliar representations. Because of this, Catherwood produced an extensive study of Maya art and architecture which is still used as reference to this date. The authority of his drawings stems from his unquestionable skills, but also from a position of objectivity which

granted Maya cultures the ability to speak by themselves. In other words, Catherwood tried to represent what he saw rather than what he thought he saw. This was possible because Maya iconography was no longer attached to some foreign and more ancient civilisation. It is in this point that Stephens and Catherwood present a critical departure from the mainstream views mentioned earlier. As a result of their extensive travels in Central America, Stephens and Catherwood had come to the conclusion that Maya material remains were not as ancient as previous writers had claimed. And it became unquestionably clear for them that those ruins had been left not by a foreign and more ancient civilisation but by the ancestors of the same Maya *indígenas* who inquisitively, and not always very enthusiastically, helped them in their excavations.

In spite of their accuracy, Catherwood's drawings were still surrounded by an aura of romanticism. A tendency towards the 'picturesque' indicates that the work of Catherwood was still influenced by the romantic spirit that characterised the period of travels and explorations (see Robinson 1994). But the added 'sentimentality' of his drawings does not detract from their importance as early examples of documentary material that could be used by scholars in the field. As Robinson has pointed out, the work of Stephens and Catherwood represents the transition from antiquarianism to archaeology (*ibid*). After Catherwood the recording of prehispanic material would be gradually replaced by photography. This new technology would facilitate the institutionalisation of archaeology as a scientific discipline, and would contribute to the professional success of travellers such as Charnay<sup>17</sup> and Maudsley.<sup>18</sup>

The intellectual pursuits of foreign travellers were often attached to economic interest, and many exploited their position to enrich the collections of individuals and museums abroad. In some cases, like Charnay (and possibly Waldeck), their aim was also to provide their governments with information that may facilitate colonising ventures in the country. In any case Imperialism, in the form of active colonisation or passive economic exploitation, was generally behind the altruistic motifs of Euroamerican travellers in Mexico.

It was however, largely due to the interest shown by foreign travellers in the study of prehispanic cultures that the government decided to take control over the regulation, conservation and exploitation of Mexico's prehispanic heritage. It is interesting to note that in spite of the government's efforts to control the study of prehispanic remains the Maya region continued to be the domain of foreign scholars whilst the study of central Mexico was mainly led by Mexican archaeologists. This geographical divide reflects the way in which the cultures of central Mexico continued to symbolize the roots of Mexican nationality whilst Yucatan was relegated to its periphery.

The institutionalisation of archaeology and its role in cementing the foundations of an official nationality was accompanied by the revaluation of prehispanic material in terms of its aesthetic value. The incorporation of this material into a discourse of western aesthetics – defined by the legacies of the Greco Roman world – however, was much more problematic than its appreciation in terms of historical value. Baddeley (1986) has studied the way in which prehispanic art has been classified using western value systems that have reinforced the so-called inferiority of Mesoamerican cultures. She explains that the symbolic nature of Maya and Aztec writing systems was used by Euroamerican scholars in the nineteenth century to legitimise theories that undermined the civilised status of prehispanic cultures. In spite of the unquestionable differences between the formal qualities of European and prehispanic art, however, Baddeley points out that Maya prehispanic remains were more readily accepted as art objects than those made by the Aztecs. It would take a long time for an object like the Coatlicue to be discussed in terms of its aesthetic value.<sup>19</sup>

Even though Aztec material culture could not be easily accommodated into a universalist aesthetics certain works managed to achieve a relative degree of popularity. The 'calendar' stone, Xochicalco and Mitla were some of the most admired examples of prehispanic material culture in the nineteenth century. Of these, the geometric patterns of Mitla became a recurrent feature in the apologetic literature aimed at defending the artistic value of prehispanic material culture. Baddeley explains that the 'decorative' nature of the designs covering the façades of the buildings in Mitla facilitated their appreciation as examples of artistic skill:

[the] geometric stone mosaic façades, offered the European observer the opportunity of admiring the skill of the Mesoamerican stone mason without the intrusion of a 'barbaric' meaning. The fret motifs and diamond shaped stone work seemed to exist solely for the sake of ornamentation and could be evaluated in terms of their decorative qualities, disassociated from discussions of pre-Hispanic religion and social behaviour (1986: 93).

Baddeley's point is particularly important to understand the work of Peñafiel in his *Monumentos del arte mexicano antiguo* (1890). This lavish publication includes a large amount of decorative designs taken from prehispanic ceramic objects such as plates and vases. In most cases these designs are presented independently without the object enhancing their potential as decorative patterns that could be easily transferred into a different setting (see figures 1 and 2). In this way Peñafiel was encouraging their use in the creation of a national style based on the legacies of prehispanic cultures.<sup>20</sup> The debate over the form and content of a Mexican school in art and architecture, and Peñafiel's

desire to promote the incorporation of prehispanic elements, will be the focus of chapters two and six. For now however, we want to centre on the role of archaeology, and perceptions of the prehispanic in the nineteenth century.

Whilst the aesthetic revaluation of prehispanic material presented a conceptual problem for nationalist apologetics eager to promote the cultured and civilised status of Mexico, the protection of this heritage was a more easily achievable goal. Efforts to regulate the study and ownership of prehispanic material remains were not new to the nineteenth century,<sup>21</sup> but the Porfiriato advanced the institutionalisation of archaeology, and secured its allegiance with the interests of the State. The work of Valderrama Zaldivar and Velasco Eizaguirre (1981) has made apparent the cruciality of archaeology in the cultural politics of the Porfiriato. The authors analysed the publication of articles covering issues related to the study of prehispanic cultures in two of the most important newspapers of this period: *El Monitor Republicano* and *El Imparcial* (see also Lombardo de Ruiz 1994). Based on this information, Valderrama and Velasco were able to disclose the complicity between the nascent discipline of archaeology and the State.<sup>23</sup> The outcome of their findings is important because it confirms the use of prehispanic cultures in the construction of national narratives during the Porfiriato. And the way in which a cultural politics, based on the celebration of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje*, began to form the basis of an official Mexicaness that would be later claimed as unique to post-Porfirian Mexico.

During the Porfiriato the State therefore became the zealous guardian of Mexico's prehispanic remains. One of the most effective ways through which the government gained control over the study and conservation of this heritage was with the creation of a governmental post called 'Inspector y conservador de monumentos arqueológicos de la República'.<sup>24</sup> This position was created in 1885 and given over to the leadership of Loepoldo Bartres who would monopolise the field of Mexican archaeology until the end of the Porfiriato. Alongside this, the government also tried to prevent the illegal looting of archaeological material, and its exportation to museums in Europe and the United States by instituting a series of laws that regulated the trade of prehispanic objects.<sup>25</sup> The laws sought to nationalise the material remains of Mexico's prehispanic heritage, but this created a strong opposition amongst individuals who defended the right of private ownership.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the bureaucratic machinery created by the government to institutionalise its control over Mexico's prehispanic heritage, there was an intellectual effort to advance the study and understanding of this material.<sup>27</sup> The government contributed towards the production and dissemination of knowledge through its support of the National Museum,

the publication of scholarly works, and the organisation of two international congresses of Americanists in Mexico (1895 and 1910) –as well as financing the exploration of archaeological sites.

In short, the development of archaeology as an academic discipline was influenced by the rise of empiricism and the gradual secularisation of knowledge. On a background of positivism and rationalism perceptions of the prehispanic became more scientific helping to displace theories about the extraneous origins of Mesoamerican archaeology. The interest of foreign travellers in Mexico was important both to the transition from antiquarianism to archaeology, and to the institutionalisation of archaeology at the end of the nineteenth century. Even though many of their theories undermined the civilised status of Amerindians, their work helped to promote the study of prehispanic cultures, and contributed to the State's decision to control access to Mexico's archaeological heritage.

Changes in perceptions of the prehispanic, and the relationship between the State and the discipline of archaeology are important to contextualise the production of neo-prehispanic representations during the Porfiriato. This thesis will not discuss however, the debates over the aesthetic qualities of prehispanic material nor will it attempt to disclose the archaeological veracity of neo-prehispanic representations. In other words, it will not analyse the visual or documentary sources used for the representation of prehispanic objects and architecture in order to assess whether these images were based on existing objects. As it centres on the relationship between artistic production and the construction of a national identity emphasis will be given instead to the representation of prehispanic history in the academic art of this period. This approach will inform my use of the concept 'authenticity' as a term that relates more to a constructed or mythical past which fulfilled the political and ideological agendas of the Porfirian intelligentsia –rather than to verifiable or empirical experience.<sup>28</sup> The difficulty of using this term arises from its association with the notion of 'truth', and from the fact that it can be applied to both history and artistic production. For the purposes of this work, authenticity is only discussed in relation to the construction of a national identity, and the significance of prehispanic history as the conceptual site where a notion of difference was grounded (chapters five and six). This difference was needed first to legitimise the political independence of Mexico, and later to uphold the essence of a nationality grounded in the cultural legacies of Mexico's prehispanic past. In a study on the appropriation of Revolutionary heroes by the Mexican government after Porfirio Díaz JoAnn Martin makes a very important point in relation to discourses of authenticity:

For the purposes of legitimation, the past has value only insofar as it is understood as 'authentic' representation, unmediated by political concerns. But, the discourse of authenticity that emerges around representations of the past points simultaneously to two seemingly contradictory possibilities: the pure, complete representation of the past and the political manipulation of the past that sets limits to the telling (1993: 442).

This work will explore some of the ways in which these 'limits to the telling' are reflected in the representation of prehispanic cultures in the academic art of this period whilst exposing the significance of this past in discourses of nationhood.

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the term *indigenas* or Amerindians when referring to the indigenous population of Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> "Less known and less appropriately judged in terms of its natural, civil and political character than any other civilised nation on the face of the earth" (my translation).

<sup>3</sup> The relationship between antiquarians, travellers and historians is best exemplified by the explorations of Captain Dupaix (see below) whose findings gave rise to a multitude of publications related to the study of prehispanic cultures. Mexican historians such as Orozco y Berra, Antonio Peñafiel, and Alfredo Chavero referred to his work to complement their studies of prehispanic history. Another important figure was Lorenzo Boturini who collected Spanish and Amerindian manuscripts during the eighteenth century. His work and the manuscripts of his collection became central to an ideology of nationalism developed by Mexican historians at the end of the eighteenth century (see Brading 2002).

<sup>4</sup> One of these expeditions was funded by Napoleon III who created the 'Commission Scientifique du Mexique' in 1864 –the year that France invaded the country and declared Maximilian emperor of Mexico. Brasseur de Bourbourg and Désiré Charnay, both of whom had previously travelled in Mexico and published studies on prehispanic history, were two of the most notable members of the expedition (see Charnay 1862-63, and Brasseur de Bourbourg 1857). For a study on the influence of foreign travellers and scholars in the production of prehispanic historiography see Keen (1990).

<sup>5</sup> For a survey of foreign travellers in Mexico see Iturriaga de la Fuente (1991).

<sup>6</sup> Gemelli Carreri as a jurist from Naples who visited Mexico in 1697 at the end of a five year tour around the world. His experience of the country appeared in his *Giro del mondo* (6 vols) published in Naples in 1700. Apart from descriptions on the customs and traditions observed by Gemelli Carreri during his travels, he also included information on prehispanic history, religion and chronology.

<sup>7</sup> Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci was an Italian traveller who arrived to Mexico in 1736. Whilst in the country Boturini became interested in the tradition of the Virgin of Guadalupe and in the study of prehispanic history. Hoping to prove the Christian origin of prehispanic cultures (see chapter five)

Boturini travelled around the country collecting Spanish and Amerindian manuscripts but his collection was seized by the Spanish authorities in 1743 when he was arrested under suspicion of espionage.

<sup>8</sup> Of all the travellers and scholars who published studies on Mexico Alexander von Humboldt was probably the most influential figure. He was a German nobleman who visited Mexico in 1803 at the end of a long tour around the American continent (1799-1804). Humboldt published a monumental work comprising thirty volumes of geographical, historical, botanical, and political information about Spanish America accompanied by maps and illustrations. His *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne* (1810, first published in Spanish in 1822), and *Vues des cordillères et monuments des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique* (1810) were instrumental in promoting the cultural and natural richness of Mexico abroad.

<sup>9</sup> The region known as the Anáhuac comprised the valley of Mexico and its surroundings where the Toltecs, Chichimecs and Mexicas developed. These three cultures became the heart of the Mexican nation.

<sup>10</sup> For a study on the history of Mexican archaeology see Bernal (1979).

<sup>11</sup> The idea of a common Christian origin will be discussed at length in chapter five.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Keen's *Aztec Image in Western Thought* provides a thorough study of the different theories surrounding the origin of Americans. He also provides an excellent account of the ideas circulating between Europe and America and the influence of these in perceptions of race.

<sup>13</sup> The publication *Anales del Museo Nacional* contains many interesting articles by important Mexican historians which attempt to establish similarities between these languages. See for example Gurmésindo Mendoza 'Estudio comparativo entre el sánscrito, el náhuatl, el griego y el latín' first epoch, tome 1, 1877. See also the work of Francisco Pimentel who was one of the best known Mexican philologists in the nineteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> Baradère managed to negotiate with the Mexican government the publication of Dupaix's manuscript in France (see Keen 1990: 337-38), but Castañeda's drawings had already been included in other publications. The publication of the original drawings made by Castañeda is uncertain because they were mainly reproduced as copies, and noticeable differences can be seen between publications. An interesting book by Alcina Franch traces the location of Castañeda's drawings and provides a useful outline of the publications that reproduced his work, as well as the text by Dupaix (see Alcina 1969).

<sup>15</sup> The book was originally published in French with the title *Voyage pittoresque et archéologique dans la Province d'Yucatan (Amérique centrale) pendant les années 1834 et 1836*. Its first edition in Spanish did not appear until 1930.

<sup>16</sup> "That he was as fantastic and deluded as Brasseur" (unless stated otherwise, all translations are by Matthew Clear). In spite of Chavero's mistrust on the truthfulness of Waldeck's work, he did include a couple of reproductions of his drawings in his book. This confirms the contribution of Waldeck to the developing discipline of Mexican archaeology.

<sup>17</sup> Charnay was a French archaeologist who visited Mexico on three occasions 1857 – 1861, 1864 and 1880 – 1882. His contribution as an archaeologist has been debated because he tried to prove that all Mesoamerican cultures descended from the Toltecs, but he was the first to successfully record the outcome of his explorations with photographs. For a study of Charnay see Davis (1981).

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Percival Maudsley was an English archaeologist who graduated from Cambridge. He is considered the first scholar with whom Mesoamerican archaeology as a scientific discipline begins (see Bernal 1979: 132-153).

<sup>19</sup> The first Mexican scholar to do this was Justino Fernández. His essay on Coatlicue (republished in Fernández 1990) was the first attempt to incorporate Aztec art into the canons of Mexican art history. Fernández reappraisal of Aztec art however came long after the Jesuit Pedro José Márquez (1741-1820) had attempted to promote the aesthetic qualities of prehispanic material in the early nineteenth century. The ideas of José Márquez were extremely unusual for his time since he believed in the relative nature of Beauty.

<sup>20</sup> The influence of Peñafiel's book in the history of the decorative arts in Mexico has not been looked at. It would be interesting for future research to investigate the use of his patterns in the production of arts and crafts and their possible role as models for the creation of national designs.

<sup>21</sup> An interest in the protection of prehispanic heritage began to unfold during the reigns of Charles III and his successor Charles IV who were influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment. Thanks to the more progressive ideas of these two kings when the Coatlicue and the 'Calendar Stone' were found in 1790 both pieces were preserved rather than destroyed (the Coatlicue, however was reburied, see Morales Moreno 1994: 174-177).

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<sup>23</sup> Their study also considers the debate over the aesthetic qualities of prehispanic material, but their conclusions in this respect are limited to stating the difficulty of viewing this material from a background of western aesthetics.

<sup>24</sup> 'Inspector and keeper of the archaeological monuments of the Republic'

<sup>25</sup> An institutionalised effort to protect and preserve archaeological material can be dated back to 1825 when a decree was issued establishing the formation of a National Museum. It was not until 1862, however that the government passed a law designed to protect prehispanic cultural heritage from illegal looting (see Morales Moreno 2002: 72).

<sup>26</sup> For an insight into the kind of ideas which dominated these debates see Díaz de Ovando (1990).

<sup>27</sup> The study of prehispanic cultures benefited from the work of intellectual societies and in particular from the studies presented by the members of the 'Sociedad de geografía y estadística'.

<sup>28</sup> The nature of authenticity as an ideological construct which responds to particular cultural and political contexts has been highlighted by scholars such as Martin (1993); Linnekin (1991); Lee (1997); and Duara (1998). The issue of authenticity has been particularly addressed by scholars working in the field of anthropology whose studies on primitive art, collecting and museums have made apparent the relative nature of authenticity, and the way in which it is informed by the legacy of Western colonialism (see in particular Clifford 1988; Steiner 1994; Errington 1998; Thomas 1991; and Price 2001). One of the most interesting studies in relation to the ideological construction of authenticity has been presented by Phillips and Steiner whose edited volume *Unpacking Culture* (1999) presents a fascinating study on the production of tourist art and the issues this raises in terms of authenticity (see also Shinner 1994).

## WHO, WHERE AND WHEN: LOCATING THE GENRE

A scholarly interest in the artistic production of the nineteenth century was initiated by Justino Fernández in 1937 when his book *El arte moderno en México* was published.<sup>1</sup> Before this work appeared the art of this period had been obscured by the overwhelming success of the 'Mexican renaissance', and post-revolutionary modernist aesthetics. The predecessors of the now famous Mexican artists who developed during and after the Revolution lived as shadows in an art historical narrative that sought to downplay the legacy of the Porfiriato. Only the work of regional and non-academic artists 'discovered' by the critics and artists of the Revolution, and the engravings of José Guadalupe Posada were celebrated as worthy representatives of Mexican art. In spite of Justino Fernández' work, however, a general prejudice towards Porfirian art continued to prevail. Many critics still viewed the art of the Porfiriato as merely imitative of European styles and devoid of any originality.<sup>2</sup> Such is the case for example of Raquel Tibol whose *Historia general del arte mexicano* (1964) barely pays attention to the Academic artists of the Porfiriato in her volume 'Epoca moderna y contemporánea'. In this book Tibol mentions in passing a few important names such as Félix Parra, Leandro Izaguirre and José Jara, but her interest is to focus on those who began to introduce modernist styles like Julio Ruelas and Saturnino Herrán. Her argument is very much in line with an art historical canon which claimed that non-academic regional artists, Posada and José María Velasco were the only important contributions worth highlighting from the second half of the nineteenth century. Apart from overlooking an important generation of artists, the work of Tibol also obscures the fact that the Academy of San Carlos and the government were actively involved in the creation of a national art. Although she mentions a few examples of works based on Mexican history, her study indicates that these were rare, and generally lacking in aesthetic value.

The misconception of Porfirian art as merely imitative neglected for a long time the legacy of this period in the consolidation of a national imagery, and the collaborative work between artists and intellectuals in the construction of national narratives. In his introduction to the collection of Andrés Bastein, Luis Martín Lozano points out that it is necessary to dispel this image of the Porfiriato in order to acknowledge the influence of this generation in the nationalist art of the muralists:

Lejos de seguir considerando el Porfiriato como enclave de una cultura afrancesada se hace necesario utilizar una visión historiográfica de más amplio rango que analice en perspectiva al llamado *Academicismo Nacionalista*, y que lo considere virtual antecedente de algunos contenidos históricos que el muralismo reivindicó como propios.<sup>3</sup>

An important body of work produced by scholars of the 'Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas' in the last forty years has helped to readdress this issue. Apart from the publications of the Institute, the research of Fausto Ramírez,<sup>4</sup> Esther Acevedo (2003),<sup>5</sup> Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (1988, 1997), and Stacie Widdifield (1996, 1990) have greatly contributed to understanding the agency of artistic production from the second half of the nineteenth century within a framework of nationalism, modernity and progress. One of the most important contributions in this respect has been an exhibition held in 2003 at the 'Museo Nacional de Arte' (National Museum of Art henceforth MUNAL) called *La fabricación del Estado 1864-1910*.<sup>6</sup> Using primarily history paintings from this period, the curators explored the role of art in the consolidation of the nation-State, and the way in which these images helped to legitimise an official version of history. This exhibition, and the work of Fausto Ramírez in particular have helped to reevaluate the role of academic painting as a production that tried to respond to a complex socio political milieu, and was therefore actively engaged in the search for a national art. A more objective study of Porfirian art, free from post-revolutionary prejudices, has also helped to acknowledge the influence of prehispanic cultures in the consolidation of a national history during this period; and the way in which this contributed to the legitimisation of an ideology of *mestizaje* after the Revolution. In other words, it has become apparent that post-Porfirian artists were not the first to show an interest in the depiction of prehispanic and indigenous cultures.

In spite of a growing interest in the art of the nineteenth century, the particularities of neo-prehispanic images, and the ideological underpinnings involved in the appropriation of prehispanic cultures into a discourse of nationalism in the arts has not been looked at in detail. There are only a few studies dedicated to the study of neo-prehispanic representations alone, and most of the existing material has been published in the form of articles and essays.<sup>7</sup>

The only book published to date which centres on the study of this topic is Daniel Schávelzon's *La polémica del arte nacional* (1988). His book constitutes a rich source for the study of this particular genre because it contains essential primary and secondary sources in relation to the construction of a national art based on the appropriation of prehispanic cultures.<sup>8</sup> Schávelzon's book is particularly useful because it presents a collection of relevant material which brings together literature, architecture, sculpture and painting, as well as key texts that contribute to an understanding and interpretation of the genre. Schávelzon's main argument is that neo-prehispanic art helped to foster national unity by masking social inequalities and class conflict behind idealising images of cultural *mestizaje*. By highlighting the relation between archaeology and artistic production,

Schávelzon opens an avenue for understanding the influence of scientific expeditions and European travellers in reassessing the status of prehispanic cultures. The main emphasis of the book however, is in sculpture and architecture with some reference to literature, and very little on painting in particular.

Another interesting publication in relation to neo-prehispanic architecture is a volume of *Cuadernos de arquitectura mesoamericana* (1987) dedicated to the influence of prehispanic elements in modern architecture. Under the title: 'Presencia prehispánica en la arquitectura moderna' this publication presents a collection of essays that look at the influence of prehispanic elements in Mexican architecture, and the way in which this reveals an ambiguous attitude towards prehispanic and contemporary *indígenas*. María Estela Eguiarte's 'Consideraciones para un análisis de la presencia prehispánica en la cultura del Porfiriato' for example, provides a general overview of how indigenous cultures were appropriated and manipulated by the State. This issue is dealt with in most of the literature on this subject making apparent the contrast between official celebrations of prehispanic cultures and the continuing exploitation and forced assimilation of living *indígenas*. Particularly relevant to this point is an article by Rodríguez Prampolini 'La figura del indio en la pintura del siglo XIX' (1988) which discusses attitudes towards *indígenas* alongside governmental policies that sought to institutionalise their integration into society.

The work of Casanova, Eguiarte, and Uribe is also important for the study of neo-prehispanic representations because these scholars were involved in a pioneering research project which aimed to provide an account of the social production of art during the nineteenth century. The outcome of their findings was published in the book *Y todo por una nación* published by the 'Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia' (National Institute of Anthropology and History, henceforth INAH) in 1987. The book aims to address a gap in the study of Mexican art from this period which mainly follows traditional art historical approaches that look at art as an independent entity divorced from its social, economic and political contexts. The scholars working in this project hoped to enrich the field of research by concentrating on artistic production, and most specifically on the issue of patronage and consumption. The study therefore follows a similar approach to other studies in the field of social art history. Apart from its highly contextualising analysis, their study is also very much a Marxist reading of art as the essays tend to highlight the relation between class formation and artistic production. From this perspective, art is explained as the result of material and economic determinants which constitute the basis of hegemonic structures of power. Although the book is a very useful reference for the study of patronage and consumption, and the way in which governmental and private institutions

worked alongside the Academy to develop the urban landscape of the city, none of the essays on the Porfiriato look at history paintings in detail.

Stacie Widdifield's *The Embodiment of the National* (1996) on the other hand concentrates on the role of history painting in Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth century. Her study presents a very interesting and illuminating analysis of the way in which prehispanic iconography was used by the liberal faction to construct favourable images of the nation. Her reading of neo-prehispanic images as a means to 'civilise' the barbaric elements attributed to *indígenas* and their world is concordant with my own.<sup>9</sup> But her interpretation of neo-prehispanic representations is based on an ideology of *mestizaje* whilst my reading seeks to displace these images from a binary Spanish vs. Amerindian worldviews. I do this in order to highlight the complexity of their agency, and to question the nature of *mestizaje* as a reductionist discourse which has masked the variegated character of cultural interaction. Widdifield's study is also important however, because it considers the role of Mexican intellectuals in helping to define the parameters of a national art. But chronologically the book only covers the first years of the Porfiriato looking mainly at the period between 1869 and 1881. It was during the 1880s and 1890s that the aims of the liberal government matured and flourished thanks to economic and political stability. These two decades witnessed the most productive and interesting years in regards to the production of neo-prehispanic representations.

Unlike Widdifield's book, Fausto Ramírez' essay 'Vertientes nacionalistas en el modernismo' (1986) does focus on the Porfiriato and places particular emphasis on the artistic production of the 1880s and 1890s. This is one of the few studies which looks in some detail at neo-prehispanic representations and history paintings. Ramírez' article centres on the study of academic art with particular attention to architecture, sculpture and painting in order to explain how official and hegemonic ideas about the nation were materially and visually constructed. In this work the author makes two very important contributions to the study of art from this period. One offers a qualitative reevaluation of artistic production during the Porfiriato, and the other a very useful quantitative insight in terms of its content. In relation to the former, the author presents an engaging argument that hopes to demystify the overt Europeanising character of the Porfiriato. Ramírez' argument is a welcomed and needed reappraisal of a period which in its own way tried to reconcile the colonial and prehispanic roots of Mexican nationality. His study shows that it was here and not after the Revolution that an official and artistic interest in constructing images of the nation based on its racial and cultural *mestizaje* began. The second important contribution made by Ramírez is to provide us with an account of what themes were most favoured in the genre of history painting –as reflected in the Academy's

competitions and exhibitions. To clarify the outcome of his findings Ramírez devised a table which shows how many paintings portrayed scenes based on Mexican history. The table is divided into five distinctive subject matters: 'Prehispanic', 'Conquest', 'Colonial', 'Independence' and 'French Intervention', and shows that both 'Prehispanic' and 'Conquest' themes were by far the most popular during this period. His study reveals the increasing interest given to neo-prehispanic representations during the last two decades of the nineteenth century –a fact which has been confirmed by my own research.

### **The Academy of San Carlos**

Any study of neo-prehispanic representations in the Porfiriato must start from a consideration of the Academy of San Carlos and its interference in the cultural life of Mexico. To understand the significance of the Academy, the artistic production of this period needs to be understood in terms of its social and political function, and viewed within an ideological framework of nationhood. Within this schema, art was seen as a measurement of progress and considered as an important marker of civilisation.

References to these ideas are often found in the art criticism of this period. The general consensus was that art reflected the cultural 'grandeur' of civilisations and examples were often drawn from the 'masterpieces' held in museums in Rome, Paris and Madrid.

Because of this, art was seen to fulfil both an aesthetic and a pragmatic function which, if successfully combined, would contribute to the betterment of society by inciting moral and ethical values. And, in terms of history painting in particular, it would help to foster a sense of national identity through the representation of an acceptable national past. Apart from its pragmatic role, art was also made to respond to aesthetic concerns that attributed a strong value to notions of ideal Beauty, and were hence deeply rooted in the legacy of western European art. As a result, Mexican art was dependent on the stylistic traditions of European academies, and its aesthetic value measured in terms of western standards of taste. In this context the Academy of San Carlos acted both as an agent through which Mexican artists absorbed the principles of western art, and as a regulatory body which helped to survey artistic production through the establishment of parameters that defined the form and content of 'High Art'.

The Academy of San Carlos was officially founded in 1775 but it did not begin to operate until 1781. The life of this institution followed the political and social changes of the country, and was not immune to the ideological battles that permeated the political life of Mexico. Changes in its status for example can be seen reflected in the different names under which it operated. Beginning as the 'Real Academia de San Carlos', it was later renamed 'Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes' (ENBA) after the defeat of Maximilian and the return of Benito Juárez to the presidency in 1867.<sup>10</sup> By the time of the 'República Restaurada' (Restored Republic)<sup>11</sup> the Academy was a well established institution that

had managed to survive a prolonged period of violence marked by political and social instability.

Like any other organization, the Academy went through periods of decline and growth. One of its most important transformations took place in 1843 when new regulations were introduced in order to improve the quality of its education, and the Academy was granted exclusive use of the funds collected from the national Lottery.<sup>12</sup> The allocation of Lottery revenue would allow the Academy to undertake a series of important reforms which included hiring European professors to direct the studies of its leading disciplines. The first two artists to arrive as a result of this were Pelegrín Clavé and Manuel Vilar in 1846. Clavé was put in charge of painting and Vilar of sculpture.<sup>13</sup> These two artists would later be joined by Santiago Bagally in 1847 (engraving), Jorge Agustín Periam in 1854 (engraving), Eugenio Landesio in 1855 (landscape), and Javier Cavallari in 1856 (architecture). After the arrival of Clavé and Vilar, the Academy opened its doors again in 1848 and a new epoch full of enthusiasm and optimism in the future of the arts in Mexico would begin. This rebirth was also accompanied by the introduction of periodical exhibitions and a collecting policy which promoted the acquisition of works by promising students. Thanks to this, and the nationalisation of church property, the Academy would amass an important collection of national and European art.

Through Clavé, Vilar, and Landesio the students at the Academy were able to become familiar with the latest European styles and perfect their craftsmanship thanks to the techniques introduced by them.<sup>14</sup> Under their guiding force an important generation of artists was formed, and some of these artists like José Salomé Pina, Miguel Noreña and José María Velasco would take over the directorships left by their European professors. Unlike the Academy of the 1850s and 60s therefore, during the Porfiriato the Academy was predominantly led by Mexican professors. In spite of this, however, allegiance to European art remained strong as gifted students were sent to European academies to perfect their skills. Even though stylistic trends kept in line with western art, in terms of content Mexican art began to experience an important transformation as it engaged in the representation of more secular and national themes. This transformation was encouraged by the professors at the Academy through the assignment of annual and biennial competitions.

For the period that concerns us, and the subject of history painting in particular two of the most important figures at the Academy are Ramón S. de Lascuráin, and José Salomé Pina. As Fausto Ramírez has pointed out, the climax of an academic nationalism in the arts in the nineteenth century coincided with the directorship of Lascuráin which lasted from 1877 to 1902. During this period the Academy experienced:

[L]a consolidación y el apogeo de las tendencias nacionalistas y del realismo académico, que despuntaban ya en el período de la restauración republicana; más tarde, y a medida que cerraba el siglo, se percibe el inicio del agotamiento de esta orientación estilística, ante las crecientes inquietudes de una vanguardia social, intelectual y artística que buscaría cada vez más la satisfacción de sus exigencias expresivas en la ecléctica variedad del Modernismo.<sup>15</sup>

During this time José Salomé Pina, one of Clive's most cherished disciples, acted as the director of painting. He was assigned this post in 1869 after his return from Europe where he had studied for over ten years.<sup>16</sup> Following the steps of his professor, Pina continued to introduce his students to the artistic techniques of European academies, but unlike his predecessor Pina encouraged his pupils to experiment with the representation of secular and historical themes. Looking at the patronage of history paintings by Sánchez Solís, Sánchez Arteché has uncovered a series of interesting articles written by Felipe Gutiérrez in 1884 (see Sánchez Arteché 1998). Gutiérrez became one of the most respected and admired artists of the Porfiriato, and was one of the first to leave the school of romanticism for a more realist style.<sup>17</sup> He was also a critic and wrote quite extensively on aesthetics and the function of art from a perspective of nationalism and modernity. Due to his relevance to some of the issues discussed in this work, more attention to his ideas will be given in chapters three and four.

Gutiérrez was a disciple of both Clavé and Pina and was actively engaged in the debate over the creation of a national school. Thanks to the articles considered by Sánchez Arteché it has become apparent that it was Pina and not Clavé –as Justino Fernández had claimed– who encouraged the students at the Academy to produce compositions based on Mexican national history (Sánchez Arteché 1998: 21). According to Gutiérrez, Pina's interest in the interpretation of history made him decide to change the periodicity of the Academy's exhibitions from one to two years. This reform was necessary, Gutiérrez explained, in order to conform to the intellectual demands of history paintings which required the study of historical sources to fundament the veracity of the compositions (ibid). What Gutiérrez does not mention however, is the fact that the students of Landésio were already producing historical compositions for the classes of landscape painting. It is not clear whether the themes were specified by Landésio himself, but it is certain that several of his students produced some of the earliest examples of historical landscapes based on prehispanic history. As has been noted by Fausto Ramírez: “[l]andscape artists were the forerunners of the figure painters who would begin to move toward the examination of the Mexican past only with the definitive triumph of the liberal Republican party in 1867” (1990: 504). The compositions produced in the landscape classes of Landésio may therefore be considered amongst the earliest examples of neo-prehispanic paintings made before the Porfiriato –as will be shown in chapter four.

### Who were the artists

As already mentioned, the generation of artists that directed the studies of the Academy during the Porfiriato had been trained with the European professors hired in the 1840s and 1850s. The most important names amongst this generation are José Salomé Pina (1830-1909), Santiago Rebull (1829-1902), Petronilo Monroy (1836-1882), Juan Urruchi (1828-1892), José Obregón (1832-1902), José María Velasco (1840-1912), and, in sculpture, Miguel Noreña (1843-1894). Most of the artists who produced neo-prehispanic paintings were students of these professors, and many of them became teachers of this Institution at the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the most important artists of this generation were: Félix Parra (1845-1919), José María Ibararán (1854-1910), Leandro Izaguirre (1867-1941), Germán Gedovious (1866-1937), Manuel Ocaranza (1843-1885), José Jara (1867-1939), Adrián Unzueta (1865 - ?), Isidro Martínez (1861-1937), and, in sculpture, Gabriel Guerra (1847-1893), and Jesús Contreras (1866-1902).<sup>18</sup>

The three most prolific painters in relation to neo-prehispanic images made at the end of the nineteenth century were Martínez, Izaguirre and Unzueta. There is little information available about Unzueta who appears to have been a very productive artist.<sup>19</sup> According to Pérez de Salazar (1982), his work is well known amongst collectors of late nineteenth century art. Unzueta entered the Academy in the early 1880s and studied with Urruchi, Rebull and Velasco. He became professor of the Academy in 1897. Apart from paintings Unzueta also made a couple of illustrations using prehispanic iconography (see figures 3 and 4). The illustrations were used for one of the publications prepared to accompany the centenary celebrations in 1910.<sup>20</sup> The illustration in figure three is particularly interesting for its combination of ornamentation using Mayan-influenced iconography, with a pictorial representation that follows the language of academic painting. The image depicts an encounter between *Maya indígenas* and Spanish *conquistadores*. Unzueta's work was also used in another official publication published in 1910. This time it had a much more prominent role as it was used for the cover of Peñafiel's *El templo mayor de México antiguo* (figure 5).

The biography of Izaguirre is less obscure probably due to the fact that he became one of the most prominent professors at the Academy during the last two decades of the Porfiriato. Izaguirre begun his studies in 1884, and started teaching in 1892. Unlike other students Izaguirre was not sent to Europe until he had already finished his career. He travelled and studied there between 1902 and 1906 making copies of works and helping to supervise the students who were studying in European academies at the time. Izaguirre was named professor of the Academy upon his return from Europe. He was a very prolific artist, who also worked as an illustrator for the publications *El Mundo Ilustrado* and *Revista Moderna*.

Martínez came from a humble background, and was able to study art thanks to the financial support of the government. With a grant from the state of Mexico, Martínez started his studies in 1880 and remained a student of this Institution until 1898. After he finished, Martínez returned to his place of birth (Toluca), and dedicated the rest of his life to the education of art.

In terms of the social conditions of artists it is important to note that it was extremely difficult for artists to make a living, and that for this reason it was easier for individuals from the middle and upper classes to dedicate their lives to this profession. The writings of critics often highlighted this situation lamenting the fact that many had to abandon their studies because they could not afford to pay for their education, or because they saw no prospects for their careers. Individuals like Martínez were only able to dedicate time to their studies with the help of governmental scholarships, or thanks to the system of 'pensiones' (grants) administered by the Academy to the most promising students. The miserable and hard conditions experienced by most artists was expressed by Landesio who complained about the fact that, unable to sell their work, many artists had to abandon their careers to make a living by other means. Landesio believed that the dedication required from an artistic career could only be afforded by rich individuals but claimed that, since students from any background were admitted into the Academy, the institution should provide adequate financial support to talented students. Landesio's critical comments were also directed to the rich classes who in stead of buying art works preferred to spend their money in other less altruistic matters (1867: 16-18). The inadequacy of the market was also pointed out by Felipe Gutiérrez who wrote about the lack of taste shown by the wealthy classes, and criticised the fact that many individuals would prefer to buy art from European artists –even if these were copies.<sup>21</sup>

Even though writers differed in regards to why artists struggled to make a living –Altamirano for example claimed that it was because they continued to make religious paintings–<sup>22</sup> the reality was that the private sector showed very little interest in the consumption of nationalist art.<sup>23</sup> This explains why most of the neo-prehispanic paintings that exist today became part of the collections of the Academy or were incorporated into the collections of regional museums.

#### **For whom: locating the scope of the genre**

In spite of an increase in the popularity of prehispanic and conquest themes in the academic art of the Porfiriato, the reception of these kinds of representations remained on the whole limited to an elite of art enthusiasts. In most cases the circulation of these images was confined to their display during one of the Academy's exhibitions because the

galleries of this Institution were not open to the general public outside these occasions (figures 6 to 8 show photographs of the galleries in 1895). Access to its collections had to be previously arranged by prospective visitors, and even when the exhibitions took place certain days were reserved for the entry of members only. Aware of this situation, Felipe Gutiérrez regretted that a museum of fine arts did not exist, and complained about the restrictions applied for entry to the galleries of the Academy.<sup>24</sup> On the same lines, Manuel Revilla suggested in 1892 that the galleries of the Academy should be open to the public on certain days of the week in order to educate the public in the appreciation of art.<sup>25</sup>

Since the periodicity of the Academy's exhibitions was irregular between 1881 and 1898,<sup>26</sup> and these were not generally open for longer than one month, most of the works produced during the second half of the nineteenth century were rarely accessible to the general public. There was one important factor however, which was crucial to the dissemination of art during this period: the textual descriptions made by art critics in their reviews of the Academy's exhibitions published in newspapers and magazines. Thanks to their writings more people had access (at least through descriptions) to some of the works that belonged to the permanent collections of the Academy, as well as those which had been selected for their temporary exhibition.

Outside the country, the viewership of history paintings was generally limited to their display at international fairs.<sup>27</sup> The reception of neo-prehispanic paintings by a foreign audience has not been properly studied, but there are some examples that document the interest of some individuals in certain neo-prehispanic works.<sup>28</sup> An article published in 1895 for example claims that the neo-prehispanic paintings on display in the galleries of the Academy were praised by the participants of the International Congress of Americanists during their visit to this establishment.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of their function, the agency of these images was largely circumscribed to an intellectual debate over the particularities of a national art, and its correlation with an official historiography. The limited scope of their function was reinforced by the fact that the production of history paintings was largely limited to the institutional and educational functions of the Academy. Hoping to promote the production of history paintings, Felipe Gutiérrez suggested in 1878 that an open competition should be instituted in order to encourage artists to create works based on national history and contemporary traditions.<sup>30</sup> But the only time that an open competition took place was in 1869 when Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' [50] was awarded the winning prize during the Academy's exhibition celebrated that year. This exhibition is important because the director of the Academy, Ramon Alcaráz, had launched a competition to encourage national artists to

submit a composition based on Mexican history. This event however, was not repeated in spite of Gutiérrez suggestions.

In sum, the majority of neo-prehispanic representations produced during the Porfiriato were limited to the institutional framework of the Academy, and most particularly to the educational practices of its academic training. The relationship between neo-prehispanic paintings, and the Academy's educational curriculum will become apparent in chapter four when we discuss the role of annual and biennial competitions. Apart from a few exceptions, the production of neo-prehispanic representations was therefore the result of collaboration between the Academy and the government in order to promote a hegemonic image of the nation. As explained by Pérez Vejo, on the subject of history painting:

[L]a vida del pintor gira en torno a las exposiciones nacionales, éstas en torno al Estado y el Estado en torno a la creación de una imagen que legitime su propia existencia. Con tales presupuestos, el desarrollo de programas iconográficos que sirvan para explicar y justificar la existencia de una nación de la que el Estado es su representante en la tierra es casi una necesidad lógica (2001: 109).<sup>31</sup>

In spite of the overwhelming role of the State in the production of neo-prehispanic representations not all the works collected for this research were identified as having been made as a result of competitions or governmental commissions. The Academy's exhibition catalogues record the participation of works made by professional artists and ex-students working outside the Academy (see Romero de Terreros 1963). One of the artists who painted neo-prehispanic images outside the Academy was Luis Coto who produced various images of this kind during his professional career. Coto was a landscape artist contemporary of Velasco who had studied with Landesio. In 1881, during the XX exhibition, Coto presented two neo-prehispanic paintings in the gallery reserved for the work of professional artists working outside the Academy: 'La captura de Cuauhtémoc en la laguna de Texcoco' [64] and 'La Noche Triste' [65]. Both of these paintings were placed on sale. Previously Coto had also hoped to sell his 'Nezahualcóyotl salvado por la fidelidad de sus súbditos' [48] during the XIII exhibition in 1865. Coto painted his 'Nezahualcóyotl' whilst still a student of Landesio, but he seems to have made the other two with the idea of selling them. For the XIX (1879), XX (1881), XXII (1891), and XXIII (1898) exhibitions the following works were also presented in the section dedicated to artists working outside the Academy: 'La fundación de Tenochtitlán' [63] by Luis Coto<sup>32</sup> (XIX), a sketch of Nezahualcóyotl by Manuel Islas (XIX), 'Nezahualcóyotl en los jardines de Texcotzingo' [123] by Alberto Zaffira (XX), a portrait of Cuauhtémoc in bronze [117] by Jesús Contreras (XXII), 'Episodio de la conquista' by José E. Domínguez (XXIII), and 'Funerales de un rey azteca' [82] by García Coromina (XXIII).<sup>33</sup>

During the exhibitions it was also common for the professors (many of whom had been students at the Academy) to exhibit their work. Sometimes these had been made in previous years for one of the Academy's competitions, but other times these were presented as original compositions made during their tenure. Such is the case of Adrián Unzueta's 'El Tzompantli' [85] exhibited in 1898 as an original work (figure 9). This painting is extremely interesting due to its unusual composition and will be examined in chapter four.

On the whole, the examples of works made as original compositions by artists working in and outside the Academy are relatively small indicating that the market for these paintings was very limited. In terms of their circulation, however, it is also important to point out that some times neo-prehispanic paintings were chosen for the raffles organised at the end of the exhibitions, and that in this way some paintings came to the possession of individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Fernández' interest in the subject originated when he was invited to give a series of ten lectures at the newly founded 'Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas' (UNAM). His lectures were designed to provide a short history of Mexican art from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see the prologue to his *El arte del siglo XIX en México*, 1983). A series of important studies in the history of Mexican art were developed in the 'Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas' during the 1930s and 1940s such as Salvador Toscano's *Arte precolombino de México y de la América Central* (1944), and Manuel Toussaint's *Arte colonial en México* (1948).

<sup>2</sup> See John Scott (1968) and García Barragan (1986). Both authors provide a useful review of literature on nineteenth century art highlighting the general prejudices of writers in regard to Porfirian art.

<sup>3</sup> "Far from continuing to consider the Porfiriato as an enclave of Gallicized (Francophile) culture, it is necessary to employ a wider historiographic vision that analyses the so-called *Academicismo Nacionalista* and views it as a virtual antecedent of some of the historical themes that the muralists claimed as their own". In *La colección Andrés Bastein: pintura moderna de México* (1997: 61).

<sup>4</sup> Since Ramírez is the most important scholar in relation to the study of history painting, and the academic art of the Porfiriato please refer to the bibliography for references to his work.

<sup>5</sup> Acevedo also participated in the production of an annotated bibliography on nineteenth century art which includes useful references for the fields of architecture, sculpture and graphic art—as well as painting (see Acevedo and Casanova 1978). The scholars also present a useful literature review in the introduction that—in spite of being now out of date—is still a good starting point for situating the state of the discipline on this subject.

<sup>6</sup> The exhibition was part of a cycle called *Pinceles de la Historia* which followed the history of Mexico from the colonial period to the Revolution.

<sup>7</sup> In the special volume on neo-prehispanic architecture of the journal *Cuadernos de arquitectura* (vol. 9, 1987) there is a note on the last page by Juan Antonio Sillar saying that he was working on the influence of prehispanic elements in Mexican art, and that he was hoping to produce a catalogue of this material. The outcome of his findings, however, appear to have remained unfinished since I did not find anything published (or any references of works) by this author.

<sup>8</sup> It must be noted, however, that it contains some mistakes in regard to historical data, and the identification of some material, but it is still very useful as a starting point.

<sup>9</sup> Widdifield deals with the particular issue of the representation of *indígenas* in her essay 'Dispossession, assimilation and the image of the Indian in late nineteenth century Mexican painting' (1990).

<sup>10</sup> In the interim it was also called 'Academia Nacional de San Carlos' after Independence, and 'Academia Imperial de Bellas Artes de San Carlos' during the reign of Maximilian (1864-1867).

<sup>11</sup> This name is used in Mexican historiography to refer to the return of Benito Juárez to the presidency in 1867.

<sup>12</sup> The decree giving the Academy the rights to use the funds of the Lottery was released on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1843. For a reproduction of this document see Romero de Terreros (1963: 45-47).

<sup>13</sup> The reforms taking place at the Academy during the 1840s and 1850s coincided with the political dominance of the Conservatives. The ideological stance of this group determined the selection of Clavé and Vilar and the direction which the artistic disciplines taught at this institution would take. The aesthetic preferences of the conservatives was particularly apparent in the selection of Clavé whose work was primarily concerned with the depiction of religious themes. According to Esther Acevedo Clavé was hired by José Montoya because he was a catholic, spoke Spanish and was influenced by the school of the Nazarens (in Uribe 1987: 102). As will be explained in chapter three, the conservatives viewed Mexico as a country without history and religion as a means by which the country could be presented within a framework of universality. In relation to Vilar, he was a sculptor trained in the 'purist school' which looked at the classical tradition and the Renaissance for inspiration. Vilar's technique and aesthetic ideas would help to form a neoclassical school in Mexico and to replace the Baroque for a new style free from the ideological underpinnings of the Baroque –associated with the colonial period (see chapter six).

<sup>14</sup> See Bargellini and Fuentes (1989), for a study of how the students were taught the principles of drawing by copying plaster casts of European and classical sculptures. The authors also provide a catalogue of the models in the Academy's collection between 1778 and 1916.

<sup>15</sup> "The consolidation and culmination of nationalist tendencies and academic realism which had already begun to appear in the period of the republican restoration; later, as the century drew to a close, one can see this artistic trend eclipsed by the growing disquiet of a social, intellectual and artistic avant-garde that would increasingly seek to meet its expressive needs in the eclectic variety of Modernism" (Ramírez 'Apogeo del nacionalismo académico: el arte entre 1877 y 1900' in *Museo Nacional de Arte. Salas de la colección permanente siglos XVIII al XX*, page 2. This publication is not dated).

<sup>16</sup> According to the *Enciclopedia de México* Pina was the first student of Clavé to have received a scholarship to study in Europe. His award was granted in 1854.

<sup>17</sup> For a study of his life see Caballero Barnard (1973).

<sup>18</sup> The best sources for biographical information on painters of the Porfiriato are: *Enciclopedia de México*, Tovar de Teresa (1995), Carrillo y Gariel (1950), and Pérez de Salazar y Solana (1982). The information provided by Pérez de Salazar is particularly useful because the author had knowledge of works pertaining to private collectors. For studies on particular artists see: Pérez Walters (1990), Caballero Barnard (1977), and Javier Moyssén (1960). For artists born in the state of Mexico (Toluca and its surroundings) see Caballero Barnard (1975). The bibliography on José María Velasco is very extensive, but for a good general study of his life and work see Altamirano Piolle (1993). Apart from Velasco, a lot of the information on his contemporaries is scant and not always reliable since dates sometimes differ between different sources.

<sup>19</sup> According to a document in the catalogue of Báez Macías Unzueta was born in Papasquiario, Durango in 1865, and was professor of drawing from 1897 (1993: 876, doc. 9961/12, vol. 2).

<sup>20</sup> See *Documentos históricos mexicanos. Obra conmemorativa del primer centenario de la independencia de México* (1910).

<sup>21</sup> In all the reviews written by Felipe Gutiérrez the artist denounces the lack of governmental support and the inadequacy of the elites to support the production of a national art. Gutiérrez urged both the private and the public sector to help improve the situation of artists, and claimed that the negative image of Mexico abroad could only be changed through the agency of art. For articles written by Gutiérrez see Rodríguez Prampolini (1997).

<sup>22</sup> See Altamirano 'El salón en 1879-1880' [1880] (in Rodríguez Prampolini 1997: 15-58, vol. 3 henceforth RP). All the articles cited in this work which have been taken from Rodríguez Prampolini will be followed by a date in square brackets to indicate the original date of their publication.

<sup>23</sup> The most important exception to this being the patronage of Sánchez Solís. His role in the production of history paintings will be looked at in later chapters.

<sup>24</sup> See Gutiérrez 'Revista de la exposición de San Carlos' [1878] (in RP 1997: 430-449, vol. 2).

<sup>25</sup> See Revilla's 'Exposición XXII de la Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes' [1892] (in RP 1997: 327-337, vol. 3).

<sup>26</sup> Between 1869 and 1881 the exhibitions were celebrated every two years. After 1881 and until the end of the Porfiriato only three were organised (in 1886, 1891 and 1898).

<sup>27</sup> There is an interesting article in the newspaper *El Siglo XIX* published in 1891 which mentions the existence of a gallery in New York with Mexican art on display. According to the article the gallery exhibits 'cuadros de costumbres y paisajes de aquel país original y hermoso, allí exhibirán

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aquellos pintores delicados sus cuadros bruñidos de cosas indias y escenas de la conquista, sus rincones de calles coloniales y sus mercados característicos, sus fantasías de mujeres y de flores' ('landscape and genre paintings from that original and beautiful country, there those delicate painters will exhibit their burnished paintings with Indian subject matter and scenes of the conquest, their colonial street corners and typical markets, their imaginative scenes of women and flowers'. 'La pintura mexicana en Nueva York' in *El Siglo XIX* 19<sup>th</sup> of December 1891.

<sup>28</sup> According to an article by John Cornyn written in 1910 an English man called Sir Tatton Sykes bought a copy of 'Moctezuma II visita en Chapultepec los retratos de los monarcas, sus antepasados' by Daniel del Valle (see Cornyn 'Los artistas mexicanos' reprinted in *Memoria* 1992). See also a document in the catalogue of Báez Macías which mentions the interest of an American in obtaining a reproduction of 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' by Félix Parra in 1898 (1993: 579, doc. 9047, vol. 2). And Alejandro Casarín's 'Visita de Cortés al templo mayor' in Appendix B (id. Number 56).

<sup>29</sup> See 'Academia de Bellas Artes' [1895] (in RP 1997: 381, vol. 3).

<sup>30</sup> See Gutiérrez' 'Revista' (in RP 1997: 439, vol. 2).

<sup>31</sup> "The life of the painter revolves around national exhibitions, these in turn around the State and the State in turn around the creation of an image which legitimizes its own existence. Upon such premises, the development of iconographic programmes that may serve to explain and justify the existence of a nation whose representative on this earth is the State is almost a logical necessity".

<sup>32</sup> This painting was a copy of his original composition made in 1863 and bought by Maximilian.

<sup>33</sup> All the references have been taken from Romero de Terreros' catalogue (1963).

## NEGOTIATING THE FORM AND CONTENT OF A NATIONAL SCHOOL IN PAINTING

This chapter will consider the relationship between artistic styles and the debates over the characteristics of a national art in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century. Particular attention will be given to the schools of romanticism, realism and naturalism, and the aesthetic debates around them in order to understand the use of these terms in the art criticism of the period. This will be done in an attempt to unravel the eclectic use of terminology, and the complexities involved in the articulation of taste in Mexico. This task was deemed appropriate since most of the literature on the subject does not offer an adequate analysis of how notions of beauty and the specificities of style influenced the art criticism of the Porfiriato. Justino Fernández *Estética del arte mexicano* (1990) for example tries to make sense out of the sheer diversity of opinions, but ends up mainly reproducing the eclecticism that characterised this production. Rodríguez Prampolini *La crítica del arte en México* (1997), on the other hand, provides a more useful ground for understanding the complexities of art criticism, but her study is relatively short being confined mainly to the introduction. The three volumes that comprise this work provide a rich source of primary material, thanks to the reproduction of articles and reviews, but only the introduction deals with their interpretation. An article by Moyssén 'Eugenio Landesio. Teórico y crítico de arte' (1962) reproduces some of the main ideas behind the aesthetic thought of Landesio taken from two of his books, but does not provide an analysis of how his ideas may have been related to the aesthetic debates of the time. A study by Monteforte Toledo *Las piedras vivas escultura y sociedad en México* (1965), provides some useful insights but only in relation to sculpture. Lastly, an article by Jorge Alberto Manrique discusses notions of beauty, and the function of Mexican art within the ideology of the liberal state, but his study is limited to the period 1867-1876 (see Manrique 1967).

Thanks to two articles by Cardiel Reyes (1977, 1978) we gain a clearer sense of the kind of aesthetic ideas that circulated in Mexico at the time. His analysis of Diego Baz and Manuel Sales Cepeda will serve as a platform for understanding the art criticism of this period, and the way in which issues of style influenced the form and content of a 'modern national school'. The subject is complex however, and we can only hope to provide the basis for a topic that may hopefully be developed in the future.

Before looking at the work of Baz and Sales Cepeda, we will consider the aesthetic debates arising from the European artistic milieu in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to understand the influence of western aesthetics in the art criticism of Mexico.

### **The dialogue between style and aesthetics**

Artistic styles are not arbitrary 'languages' but complex representational systems around which philosophical and aesthetical discourses develop. Although a wide variety of schools and styles compose the history of western art, one particular concern seems to have prevailed throughout these periods: the relationship between form and content. It is on this particular point that philosophical enquiry has been paramount in order to explain why the objects and figures represented in art are not simple copies of reality, but creative interpretations which open doors to 'unseen realities'. The authority of art has generally relied on its ability to elevate the mundane into the realm of ideas. This platonic view of art has a long tradition in the history of western thought, and has in many ways defined the parameters of artistic creation and the boundaries between what we think of as art and crafts. Its intrinsic ability to transcend reality and act as the means by which individuals can attain 'true knowledge' was a current assertion in the literature on art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Another characteristic of the period was a concern with form which demanded the combination of meaning and emotion with artistic skill and craftsmanship. Artists to be considered as such were required to master academic techniques, and to be able to interpret forms in order to convey emotions or ideas.

The correct balance between form and meaning, or the emphasis given at a particular time of one over the other, has largely determined changes in style and schools. As such, differences between neoclassicism, romanticism, and realism or naturalism –the dominant styles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries– may be best understood in terms of the debates around the primacy of form over meaning or vice versa. By form we mean the concrete representation of recognisable elements such as bodies, buildings, animals, plants, etc; and by meaning the conceptual ability of art to convey abstract emotions, feelings and ideas. In terms of platonic aesthetics meaning is also related to an idea of 'True Knowledge' which can only be attained via the correct interpretation of form.

The way in which this dialectic relationship operated in the realm of artistic theory (or aesthetics) is best explained through the work of Hegel (1980, 1997 [1835-38]).<sup>1</sup> Hegel, like his contemporaries, followed a platonic view of art which presupposed its intrinsic ability to convey the essence of ideas and knowledge. Through art, the discourse claimed, man can

reach the realm of Ideas, and through aesthetic pleasure leave momentarily the pains and sorrows of worldly subjectivity in order to partake in the universality and objectivity of True Knowledge. Crucial to the platonic view of art was also the concept of 'Ideal Beauty' which was based on classical notions that determined its reliance on 'perfection', 'unity' and 'balance'. Hegel explained the ontological difference between reality and the artistic interpretation of it in terms of beauty. For him artistic beauty was 'higher' than natural beauty because it was mediated through reason. In other words natural beauty (in itself imperfect) was transformed into Ideal Beauty by the artist whose skill allowed him to capture the essence of the 'real thing'. Hegel explained different styles of representation in terms of how what he described as 'Idea' (meaning) and 'Shape' (form) combined in order to produce true works of art.

For him the Idea was not merely metaphysical but also the concrete materialisation of form, and the correct balance between Idea and Shape the ultimate manifestation of artistic beauty. Based on this Hegel divided artistic styles into 'symbolic', 'classical' and 'romantic'. The first stage was characterised by an unresolved attempt to find the correct form for the Idea. As a result the Idea remained abstract and hence artistic production primarily symbolic in nature. This problematic correspondence was overcome in the classical period in which Idea and Shape found their perfect correlation:

The classical form of art is the solution of this double difficulty; it is the free and adequate embodiment of the Idea in the shape that, according to its conception, is peculiarly appropriate to the Idea itself. With it, therefore, the Idea is capable of entering into free and complete accord. Hence, the classical type of art is the first to afford the production and intuition of the completed Ideal, and to establish it as a realized fact (in Caiger and Wood 1998: 67).

But Hegel found this perfection 'too perfect' to satisfy artistic pursuits and like many of his contemporaries turned towards romanticism in order to overcome the 'coldness' of classical unity and balance. In romanticism the perfection of form may be sacrificed for the intensity of feeling and emotion. In other words, the representation of reality and form can be more freely interpreted by the artist in order to convey the essence of Ideas or Ideal Beauty. In this way romanticism may be more associated to symbolic art except that:

In the sphere of the romantic, the Idea, whose effectiveness in the case of the symbol produced the defect of external shape, has to reveal itself in the medium of spirit and feelings as perfected in itself. And it is because of this higher perfection that it withdraws itself from any adequate union with the external element, inasmuch as it

can seek and achieve its true reality and revelation nowhere but in itself (in Caiger and Wood 1998: 69).

By this Hegel is implying that the Idea found its perfect expression through knowledge, a knowledge it did not have during the symbolic period and which has been acquired with time. The Idea is abstract and unworldly, but art is the product of human agency and as such dependent on our ability to acquire knowledge and understanding. Hegel therefore presents us with three easily recognisable stages defined by the dialogue between form and meaning which follow a teleological progression. In the first meaning has primacy over form, in the second form and meaning correlate in perfect unity, and in the third meaning dominates form in order to fulfil the demands of artistic creation –though this time with the necessary knowledge to convey truth. Hegel leaves us with romanticism at the pinnacle of artistic development, but shifts between the primacy of form and meaning continued (and continue) to define the nature of stylistic change. Nowhere has this perhaps been more evident than with the advent of realism and naturalism which gave way to the development of other ‘isms’ during the modernist period. Realism became the dominant style from approximately 1840 to 1880 and was led by the Parisian school with Gustave Courbet (1819-77) as its main representative.<sup>2</sup>

The rise of romanticism problematised the notion of beauty because romantic painters often found inspiration in the drama of literary heroes whose deeds reflected the sorrows of an epic life. To equate beauty with human suffering became an aesthetic problem which was conceptually resolved by the notion of the sublime. Since the philosophical debates around the nature of the sublime are too complex to be undertaken in this work,<sup>3</sup> we will limit ourselves to stating the main differences between beauty and the sublime. While beauty was generally associated with smallness, unity, light, and geometry; the sublime was associated with vastness, obscurity, irregularity and intensity of feeling. As a result, the latter could be overwhelming and perhaps discomforting while the former would more likely incite reflection and clarity. The notion of the sublime was therefore much more appropriate to the romantic style –particularly to the genre of history painting– and better suited to describe the work of Turner and Delacroix, for example.

Realism developed as a reaction against romanticism and its aim was to give attention to form alone. As its name indicates, the artists of this school tried to represent reality as it was stripped of metaphors and idealisms –crude and mundane as they saw it. Unlike neoclassicism, which was also concerned with form, realism sought to divorce form from

notions of Ideal Beauty and hence present reality in a non-idealised and honest way. Realism is also characterised by a temporal dimension which in many ways defined the particularities of its subject matter and style. As Linda Nochlin explains, the phrase *il faut être de son temps* became the motto of the realist movement conceptualising a concern for contemporaneity and the present moment (2002: 89-152). As a result history painting, then considered the highest and most virtuous genre in art, did not have a place in the agenda of realist painters. Artists sought their inspiration instead in the experience of contemporary life, and their themes centred on the depiction of vernacular culture. This implied an interest in the representation of the working classes and the characteristics of rural and urban life. Important contemporary events related to the social and political reality of modern France, for example, were also recorded like the revolt of 1848, and Manet's famous painting depicting the execution of Maximilian in 1867.

The particularities of realism and naturalism *vis-à-vis* romanticism and neoclassicism are interesting because they reveal shifts in contemporary thinking which were linked to the increasing secularisation of western thought. But they also reveal the continuous negotiation between reason and emotion (conceptualised for example in the traditional division between mind and body), and the intellectual and artistic responses to the Enlightenment, capitalism and industrialisation. Hence romanticism arose as a response to the overt rationalism of the Enlightenment –represented by the classical canon– and realism as a response to the overt idealism of romanticism. The romantic canon found its best representatives in artists like David and Delacroix –and in the highly stylised imagery of the Pre-Raphaelites– whilst the realist school was lead by painters who we now think of as 'modernist' like Courbert, Monet, Daumier and Manet.

The artistic sphere of the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe was therefore dominated by the debate between romanticism, idealism, realism and naturalism, and underscored by an aesthetic debate around the nature of beauty and the notion of 'art for art's sake'. These concerns were not the result of capricious vagaries, but the direct response to wider phenomena such as the impact of modernisation. Changes in the social fabric and in the urban landscapes of industrialised economies were changing the way in which art and culture operated within an increasingly materialistic world. The secularisation of intellectual discourse brought about by an almost 'religious' belief in science and positive philosophy, combined with the demands of capitalism, could not be detached from debates around the function of art in a modern society. Consequently, the role of art as either 'art for

art's sake' or an art with social responsibility became a point of contention in the art criticism of this period.

Kantian philosophy was largely responsible for the development of these debates. Although Kant believed in the subjective reading of art he also claimed that art objects possessed an objective value in themselves which made them unique (see Kant 2004 [1790]). This uniqueness implied their detachment from subjective experience and hence also from pragmatic (i.e. utilitarian, moral or ethical) concerns. This position was supported by philosophers such as Hegel and Schiller, and was usually associated with the canon of romanticism due to its emphasis on emotion and content –over form and reason. Critics of romanticism associated 'art for art's sake' with this style claiming that romantic artists were only concerned with sensuous experience and hence could not create an art with social commitment. Realism on the other hand was very much concerned with the specificity of its time, and hence more likely to respond to intellectual and pragmatic concerns.

To understand the complexity of these debates we must focus on the issue of form over meaning, already discussed, and the ontological nature of beauty. In its classical form the notion of beauty is related to a platonic abstraction which grants its absolute value. This view supports the eternal universality of the Ideal and the assumption that it can only be reached through the agency of art. Following the Hegelian model, Ideal Beauty is not explicit to nature and as such needs to be 'decoded' or abstracted by the artist through reason. The notion of *genius* went hand in hand with platonic aesthetics since the artist was considered an enlightened being able to capture the essence of Ideas. This view is particularly clear in the work of Schopenhauer (1788-1860) who stated:

That the Idea comes to us more easily from the work of art than directly from nature and from reality, arises solely from the fact that the artist, who knew only the Idea and not reality, clearly repeated in his work only the Idea, separated out from reality, and omitted all disturbing contingencies. The artist lets us peer into the world through his eyes. That he has eyes, that he knows the essential in things which lies outside all relations, is the gift of genius and is unborn; ... (in Caiger and Wood 1998: 19).

An idea of absolute and universal beauty was very much part of the classical canon and can be seen to underline the essence of romantic aesthetics. The implied universality of beauty however, began to be questioned by the realist movement and 'modernist' philosophers like Baudelaire (1821-1867) and Castagnary (1830-1888). Changes in perception of beauty represented a shift from an absolute and concrete value to a relativistic and subjective one which presupposed the unfixity of meaning. The phrase 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'

became the central tenet of this paradigmatic change displacing the centrality of the object to the agency of the viewer.<sup>4</sup> This relativistic view of beauty helped to justify realist aesthetics by allowing objects and nature to possess value in themselves; and granted significance to the depiction of contemporaneity in the form of every day experience, vernacular culture and landscapes. The logic behind this aesthetic was based on a belief that the perception of beauty was individual and subjective, and that truth could be found in reality itself and not just in the abstract realm of platonic ideas. The realist's concern with the objectification of reality was influenced by positivism and the cruciality of science in the perception of the modern world. For realist painters science helped to strip nature from metaphysical explanations and to present reality as it was. Like the scientists, the realist sought to be impartial and to find truth in nature based on facts and observation (Nochlin 2002: 36-37).

But an over-emphasis on the truthfulness of nature could jeopardise the value of art for what would make of art more worthy than the reality before our eyes. In other words, a desire to depict reality in the most accurate and detailed form was a double edge sword which was often used by their critics to question the validity of realist art. Their representations were often compared to photographs, for example, and though praised for their technical mastery critics claimed they lacked in meaning. The following words by Delacroix are extremely revealing of the clash in aesthetic taste between the romantics and the realists, and reflect the coexistence of artists working on both styles in the artistic milieu of France during the 1840s and 1850s:

I went to see Messonier to his studio to see his drawing of the *Barricade*. His faithfulness in representation is horrible, and though one cannot say that the thing is not exact, perhaps there is lacking that indefinable thing which makes of an *odious object an object of art* (in Caiger and Wood 1998: 360).<sup>5</sup>

The 'indefinable thing' to which Delacroix refers is the ability of art to transform the mundane into an aesthetic experience and hence linked to notions of beauty and the sublime. Even the outmost representative of realism such as Courbet needed to defend the 'je ne sais quoi' that made of his work an 'object d'art' in terms of beauty:

Beauty is in nature, and is there to be found in reality in the most diverse shapes and forms. As soon as it is found, it enters into the realm of art, or rather it belongs to the artist who knows how to find it. As soon as beauty becomes perceptible and visible, it possesses the proper form of artistic expression (ibid: 404).

Beauty was therefore still the essential characteristic of art, but whilst at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was seen as absolute and universal towards the end of the century the nature of beauty became more relative and subjective. The words of Castagnary who in 1863 wrote that beauty 'is an individual or collective concept which varies, in a given society, from age to age, and within a particular age, from man to man' (ibid: 411) are a good example of this change in paradigm.<sup>6</sup>

Up to this point we have discussed beauty as an intrinsic quality of art but have not properly considered the meaning of this word in the literature of this period. This is important in order to understand the centrality of a word which may otherwise appear overused and overstated. In general terms the word beauty was used in relation to truth, knowledge, ideas, veracity, honesty, and Ideal form. Of these, the notion of an Ideal or perfect form is the most familiar association people make nowadays with the word beauty –rather than truth or objective knowledge. But in the nineteenth century more emphasis was given to the moral and ethical value of beauty, and although classical beauty set the parameters of taste it may be best to understand the term in terms of Truth. This is particularly important for understanding art criticism in Mexico during the Porfiriato.

#### **The writings of Baz and Sales Cepeda**

Although much was written about art by the Porfirian intelligentsia only Diego Baz (1840-1928), and Manuel Sales Cepeda (1854-1924) seem to have dedicated attention to the study of aesthetics *par se*. Thanks to the work of Cardiel Reyes (1977, and 1978) the writings of these two important figures have become more easily accessible.<sup>7</sup> Cardiel Reyes explains that according to Samuel Ramos Antonio Caso was the first to introduce the study of aesthetics in Mexico –during the first half of the twentieth century– but that, as Antonio Castro Leal later pointed out, his work was in fact preceded by the writings of Baz and Sales Cepeda (Cardiel Reyes 1977: 59). The book by Baz *La belleza y el arte. Nociones de estética* (published in 1905) received a wider readership than Sales Cepeda's earlier work. Its prologue by Jose Maria Vigil testifies to its relationship with the core of the Porfirian intelligentsia. In the prologue Vigil claims that Baz' book was the first work to dedicate its analysis to the study of aesthetics making evident his unawareness of the book published in 1896 by Manuel Sales Cepeda entitled *Estudios estéticos y entretenimientos literarios* (Cardiel Reyes 1977: 59).<sup>8</sup> In his study of Sales Cepeda, Cardiel Reyes states that both books represent the earliest writings on aesthetics published in Mexico. As such they provide a unique opportunity for understanding aesthetic ideas circulating in Mexico at the time.

Both Baz and Sales Cepeda show a wide knowledge of the main aesthetic debates taking place in Europe, and in particular with the literature arising from the French intellectual school. As a result, their discussion of art centres on the notion of beauty, the role of art (as either pragmatic or detached), and the prevailing styles of romanticism, realism and naturalism. Their writings follow the preoccupations of aesthetic enquiry making profound reflections on the nature of beauty, and the characteristics which make of art a unique and universal human expression. Apart from the issue of beauty, Baz and Sales Cepeda debate the possibility of an art independent from moral and ethical concerns, and hence the notion of 'art for art's sake' *vis-à-vis* the pragmatic or utilitarian function of art. To address this question both writers differentiate between objective and subjective beauty. In the first instance beauty is seen as an intrinsic quality of art objects which is detached from the subjectivity of perception and contextual determinants; and in the second beauty derives meaning from individual experience and is more likely to respond to moral and ethical concerns. In other words, even though their perception of beauty reflects the legacy of platonic aesthetics neither author believe that its meaning derives from an eternal or universal value alone. Their approach shows instead a relativistic understanding of beauty as a concept that can be either subjective or objective. In this respect their work is in many ways both a fusion and a transition between romantic and modernist aesthetics, and can at times seem contradictory.

Sales Cepeda, for example, is adamant about the aim of artistic creation as being primarily concerned with the representation of beauty: " '[!]o esencial en el arte, es la belleza. Lo bello es el alma del arte y el arte del alma... Lo repetimos. Para nosotros si el arte no embellece lo natural, no es arte' "(quoted in Cardiel Reyes 1977: 71).<sup>9</sup> This beauty however, is not fixed and abstract in the platonic sense, but relative and earthly. For Sales Cepeda beauty is enclosed in the realm of nature, and the artist's skill relies on his ability to re-present it in plastic form and to imbue it with emotion. Just as beauty is not absolute neither is aesthetic pleasure according to him: " '[!]o bello para cada quien es lo que agrada o deleite o produce en su alma una emoción simpática. Enhorabuena que no halla eternos arquetipos ni platónicos ideales' " (quoted in *ibid*: 65).<sup>10</sup> His views on beauty and aesthetic pleasure reflect the modernity of his ideas, and represent an interesting stand point in relation to the contemporary art criticism of this period as will be considered later. His position in relation to the role of the artist on the other hand follows the Hegelian tradition presenting a contradiction in relation to his relativistic view of beauty: " '[p]rimero, el artista recibe de la naturaleza la idea de lo bello y luego le devuelve en sus creaciones lo bello de la idea.... Y eso, no más que eso, es el arte. Encarnar en lo tangible real lo intangible ideal' " (quoted in *ibid*: 67).<sup>11</sup>

Apart from discussing the nature of beauty, Sales Cepeda also considers the value of realism and the role of artistic production. In relation to realism his ideas coincide with most of the views expressed by his contemporaries. Realism –mainly understood as veracity in the context we are looking at– was necessary but only to a degree. According to Sales Cepeda the accurate depiction of reality needed to be combined with a degree of idealism in order to avoid the production of images that appeared more similar to a photograph than artistic works. Too much idealism on the other hand would turn the work into a fictitious vagary only able to arouse sensuous and emotional response. Comparing realism with idealism, Sales Cepeda argued that romanticism placed too much emphasis on illusion: ‘[a]sí, quiere que la materia, que el cuerpo, que la forma no exprese más que el espíritu; que el arte no refleje otra cosa que la belleza espiritual, ideal’ ” (quoted in *ibid*: 69).<sup>12</sup> For him a careful balance between realism and idealism held the key to artistic mastery.

In terms of the role of artistic production Sales Cepeda also negotiated between the current mainstream views that advocated either a detached or a committed relationship between art and society. But once again a contradiction appears. Even though he says that: “ [e]l arte por el arte puede ser muy bello, pero el arte por el progreso y por el bien es más bello aún ” (quoted in *ibid*: 72);<sup>13</sup> he later concludes that: “ [e]n resumen creemos una vez más que el arte tiene en sí un fin exclusivo y propio: la realización o representación de lo bello;.. ” (quoted in *ibid*: 73).<sup>14</sup> Sales Cepeda’s debate on the function of art conveys the difficulty of assigning a single purpose to an activity which continues to be the focus of philosophical enquiry.

In short, Sales Cepeda’s work reflects the negotiation between romantic and modernist aesthetics. Beauty is no longer the visualisation of platonic archetypes, but the ‘true’ artist or *genius* will be able to interpret nature and represent it in a way that conveys emotions and ideas. In other words, beauty is in nature but the artist needs to decode it in order to transform it into art. The skill of the artist will also be necessary to portray images that combine realism and idealism, and hence able to convey both truth/veracity, and emotion. A work of art will be noble if it responds to moral and ethical concerns, but artistic production may also be primarily concerned with the depiction of –in this case– objective beauty alone.

Although neither Baz nor Sales Cepeda reject the notion of an ‘art for art’s sake’ or the pragmatic value of art, Sales Cepeda sees objective beauty as a more intrinsic element of art whilst Baz sees it more in relation to context and subjectivity. This difference in perception is

due to the fact that Baz, following the work of Taine, views artistic production in terms of social, environmental and historical determinants. This difference in approach is clearly reflected by the fact that Baz makes explicit use of Mexican as well as European art in his study while references to Mexican art are absent from Sales Cepeda's work. It is interesting to note, for example, that Baz uses the Monument to Cuauhtémoc to describe how a work of art can incite an emotional response in the viewer. According to Baz the composition makes the spectator feel the patriotic fervour of the hero and his rage against the cruelty of Cortés (see Cardiel Reyes 1978: 125-26). The significance of the Monument to Cuauhtémoc and its relationship with Porfirian aesthetics will be discussed in more detail in chapter six.

Like Sales Cepeda, Baz debates the aesthetic implications of romanticism and realism, and also, like Sales Cepeda, argues that the artist must find inspiration in nature but be able to interpret what he sees in order to transform form into art. In other words, idealism and realism must combine to produce images that incite both reason and emotion:

"Transformar lo natural, o mejor dicho, modificar su forma con el intento de mejorarla, es en el hombre una necesidad propia de su índole. No por eso debe entenderse que el artista haya de despreciar la realidad, pues entonces a trueque de evitar el vicio del realismo, caería en un idealismo falso y fantástico.... El arte debe consultar la naturaleza y no perderla ni un momento de vista, si quiere ser verdadero y producir la genuina emoción y el sentimiento de lo bello" (quoted in Cardiel Reyes 1978: 127).<sup>15</sup>

Although beauty –as an idealised version of reality– is still very much at the centre of Baz' aesthetic enquiry his ideas reflect a more modern position with regard to the study of art. Following the innovative work of Taine, Baz believed that art reflected the mentality of its period, and that its study required an effort of contextualisation in order to understand the particularities of its form and content. According to Taine (1960 [1865]) art could not be explained in terms of the artist's genius alone. In other words, art is not produced in isolation and as such it is both a reflection and a response to its particular historical milieu. Baz was very much in favour of these views and argued that art was important for understanding the mentality of a period. One of Taine's most important contributions resides in his claim that social, cultural and environmental factors, rather than simply racial, influenced the form and content of artistic production. A more relativistic approach which gave less emphasis to the primacy of race would provide a better theoretical framework for the study of Mexican art, and a more sympathetic platform from which to explore the particularities of prehispanic material remains. The ground for the development of this approach had already been prepared by the work of writers like Viollet-le-Duc whose work will be considered in chapter six.

In regard to the function of art, Cardiel Reyes explains that Baz supported the Kantian philosophy that assigned an objective and universal value to art objects, but that on the whole he believed that art had a purpose in society:

El arte es un poderoso medio educativo, porque domina a la imaginación y persuade a los hombres fácilmente. Depura el gusto y las ideas morales, por la necesaria interdependencia entre lo verdadero, lo bello y lo bueno. Si los intereses económicos, políticos e ideológicos dividen: el arte en cambio unifica, concilia y aproxima (1978: 134).<sup>16</sup>

In short, Baz divided the study of aesthetics into what he described as objective and subjective beauty, and used this division to discuss the function of art and the nature of artistic production. His work reflects familiarity with the mainstream philosophical debates taking place in Europe. Baz used these sources critically in order to articulate his own views, and to analyse the particularities and the universality of Mexican art. Like Sales Cepeda, Baz settles for a balance between realism and idealism, and argues that art can be both pragmatic or detached. But unlike Sales Cepeda, Baz understood the process of artistic production from a more 'sociological' perspective which undermined the universality of art. Even though Baz argued for the intrinsic quality of art his views were more lenient in regards to the pragmatic function of art.

Apart from differences in taste and theoretical perspectives, one can explain the particular position taken by these authors in terms of their own social context. Baz belonged to an elite of Mexican intellectuals whose allegiances responded to the Porfirian credo. This position is confirmed in the dedicatory address to Porfirio Díaz written by Baz for his book: " 'Al señor Presidente de la República, General de División Don Porfirio Díaz, bajo cuyo sabio gobierno prosperan en México las Ciencias y las Artes y se realiza con vuelo extraordinario nuestro progreso intelectual y material, ...' " (quoted in Cardiel Reyes 1978: 114).<sup>17</sup> Baz was therefore an intellectual concerned with the main precepts of the Porfiriato: nationalism, progress and modernity; and as such more inclined to support the pragmatic value of art, and to view it as a cultural production that needed to respond to the demands of nationhood and progress. Sales Cepeda on the other hand lived and worked in Merida Yucatan far away from the capital in a region which had a long history of independentist struggles.

The aesthetic ideas expressed in the work of Baz and Sales Cepeda provide a useful framework for understanding the art criticism of the time because they reveal the complexities involved in the articulation of taste in Mexico. Both writers reflect the contention between

traditional (romanticism) and modern (realism/naturalism) ideas, and the way in which Mexican writers sought to negotiate between different theories in order to explain their own positions in matters of taste. The most important points so far presented are the primacy of beauty, the demand for the combination of idealism and realism, and the pragmatic function of art *vis-à-vis* the suitability of an 'art for art's sake'. The ideological underpinnings of style, the significance of beauty, and the debate over the nature and function of art are paramount to understanding the characteristics of aesthetic discourse in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century. Being aware of these issues may help us to understand the eclectic and at times conflictive use of concepts and terminology, and the overall concern that writers showed in regards to the consolidation of a national art.

### **The articulation of taste in Porfirian Mexico**

In general terms, the texts of art critics and amateurs published during this period sought to establish the parameters of what constituted a national art, and the standards of taste which should regulate such production. Some of the most important writers in this respect were Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, Manuel Revilla, José Martí, Felipe López López and Felipe Gutiérrez. In order to both 'educate' the public and establish the form and content of a national school writers encouraged the periodic organisation of exhibitions, and urged the government to increment the support of activities related to artistic production. Art was seen in terms of a pragmatic logic which attributed a strong 'utilitarian' value to artistic production. From this perspective art was expected to both educate and be a marker of high culture and civilisation. The increasing 'visibility' of Mexico in international exhibitions (see Tenorio Trillo 1996a) further propelled the need to create a national art, and to encourage artists to produce works of high academic standards.

Another prevailing view found in the art criticism of this period was that Mexican art suffered from the neglect of appropriate funding, and writers often regretted the lack of interest shown by the majority of the population. When interest was there many writers then complained about the spectator's ignorance, in terms of artistic matters, and proceeded to write long articles hoping to share their knowledge. The lack of a more widespread appreciation by the public, and the rarity of governmental commissions meant that artists generally struggled to make a living. To help change this situation critics like José Martí, and Felipe Gutiérrez encouraged artists to paint national scenes which they believed would sell well in Europe and the United States. These writers were quick to realise that the 'exoticism' of Mexico's popular traditions, the particularities of its landscapes, and the overall distinctiveness of Mexico

–which was the result of its indigenous and Hispanic traditions– provided fertile ground for exploitation. Others like Altamirano urged artists to stop painting religious and mythological scenes, and to dedicate their artistic skill to the depiction of Mexican themes. Altamirano believed that artists struggled to sell their work because people were no longer interested in buying religious works, and claimed that by making secular and national paintings artists would find it easier to make a living from their profession.<sup>18</sup> Altamirano was one of Mexico's most influential figures in the Porfiriato. He was a fervent nationalist, and a liberal politician whose work contributed towards the creation of a national literature with novels such as *El Zarco* (1901) and *Navidad en las Montañas* (1871). Apart from his literary and diplomatic work, Altamirano took an active role in the debate over the creation of a national art through his writings in newspapers and magazines.<sup>19</sup> Talking about Coto's 'Fundación de Tenochtitlán' (figure 21), for example, Altamirano wrote that in spite of some shortcomings in its composition:

[H]ay que agradecer al señor Coto el que haya hecho objeto de sus estudios una hermosa leyenda tradicional y una grandiosa escena histórica de nuestra patria, dando así a sus pinturas un carácter de mexicanismo que las hará interesantes, y aumentando el número escasísimo de las pinturas de ese género que pudiéramos llamar nacional.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, critics like Felipe Gutiérrez resented the fact that governmental commissions were often given to European artists in stead of supporting the creativity of Mexican artists. Along the same lines, many writers often urged the government to employ Mexican artists in the creation of monuments and architecture that would enhance the cultural image of the country. Even though the economic situation of painters remained on the whole precarious, an ambitious monumental project did begin in 1877 lead by Vicente Riva Palacio, and Francisco Sosa (see chapter six).

It must be noted that the profession of the art critic did not exist at the time, and that writers engaged in this field from the background of their own professions (many of them were lawyers for example). In some cases the writers were artists themselves like Felipe Gutiérrez, but on the whole these critics were simply lovers of art who perceived this activity as a key cultural production that needed the support of the government, and the public in general. Driven by these concerns art critics wrote their views with a double aim in mind: to encourage the production of high quality art works (that would enhance the cultural and civilised status of Mexico), and to educate the general public in order to provide a social network that would

propitiate the production of art. As already mentioned, art critics complained that rich individuals did not generally invest in the acquisition of art, and that in the rare occasions when they did it was frequently of European origin.

Critics believed that artistic production and artistic appreciation needed to develop in tandem in order to promote the cultural development of Mexico. Public, as well as governmental support was required to encourage artists to create better works and hence contribute to the artistic aggrandisement of the nation. Art critics therefore sought to impart knowledge whilst providing guidance to artists in terms of what they felt should constitute the form and content of a Mexican school. A desire to elevate the artistic knowledge of the public, combined with contemporary scholarly traditions which equated knowledge with an encyclopaedic collection of facts, meant that art critics often wrote long dissertations that encapsulated the author's familiarity with 'universal' art and history. Evidence of this knowledge gave authority to their views and respectability to their opinions.

Another characteristic of this literary production was the critics' assertion that their views were objective and impartial. But this claim often contrasted with the author's opinions which reflected clear political and personal allegiances. Although the boundaries between liberal and conservative writers often overlapped, certain general trends can be discerned in matters of taste. Religious, mythological and classical works, for example, were generally preferred by conservative writers whilst a liberal critic would more likely urge artists to draw their inspiration from Mexico.

The rivalry that arose between Pelegrin Clavé and Juan Cordero (1822- 1884) is probably the best example of how political discrepancies could influence the artistic preferences of intellectuals. As has been mentioned, Clavé was a Catalan artist who went to Mexico to direct the Academy of San Carlos in 1846. Clavé was influenced by the work of the Nazarenes, and favoured the depiction of religious and mythological themes. Cordero, on the other hand, was a Mexican artist who showed an interest in the depiction of national and secular themes. A contemporary of Clavé, Cordero spent many years in Europe supported by the Academy studying and perfecting his skills. Whilst studying in Rome Cordero painted a composition entitled 'Cristóbal Colón en la corte de los Reyes Católicos' (1850) (figure 10). The painting was exhibited during the Academy's exhibition in 1850 and was praised for its unusual subject matter. Cordero's composition was remarkable for its time because it portrayed a secular episode related to the history of America which included the depiction of indigenous peoples. As Stacie Widdifield points out, Cordero's painting "is arguably the first

secular history painting produced by an academic artist, standing in contrast to the plenitude of religious and mythological subjects encouraged by Pelegrin Clavé ..." (1996: 85).

The rivalry between Clavé and Cordero erupted when, upon his return from Europe, Cordero and his supporters urged the authorities of the Academy to remove Clavé from his position and name Cordero as his successor. This created an ideological battle between the supporters of Clavé (accused of being antipatriotic and conservative), and those of Cordero who viewed themselves as patriotic and liberal.<sup>21</sup> Cordero's most enthusiastic supporter was the critic Felipe López López. Outraged by an article written by José Martí, criticising the work Cordero, López López wrote in 1876: "el que se ensaña contra Cordero en apreciaciones tan injustas, no puede ser su compatriota".<sup>22</sup> Cordero's participation in the creation of a modern Mexican school is also confirmed by his mural for the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* with the theme *Triunfos de la ciencia y el trabajo sobre la envidia y la ignorancia* (1874).<sup>23</sup> Cordero painted this mural as a result of his friendship with Gabino Barreda who was responsible for the introduction of positivism in Mexico, and the educational reforms which transformed the pedagogical system in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Another example of disagreement based on matters of taste, but influenced by ideological differences was the debate between Altamirano and Eugenio Landesio in 1874 (see Moyssén 1962). The confrontation arose when the Academy decided to replace Landesio with Gerardo Murillo –who had been one of Landesio's most accomplished disciples. The news was welcomed by many liberal intellectuals including Altamirano who took a personal interest in the work of Murillo. The decision to replace Landesio with Murillo was taken as a result of Landesio's refusal to comply with the regulations of the 'Leyes de Reforma' which constituted the credo of the liberal government. Landesio was a royalist who made no efforts to conceal his conservative views and his career suffered the consequences of this. To make things worse, Landesio disagreed with the Academy's decision to name Murillo as his successor arguing that Velasco was a more talented and gifted artist. Altamirano responded to this accusing Landesio of favouritism and claiming that his friendship with Velasco obscured his ability to recognise Murillo's talents. The future decline of Murillo's career and Velasco's development as one of Mexico's most famous artists would later confirm Landesio's correct judgment in this respect. Apart from political discrepancies, the confrontation between Altamirano and Landesio was made worse by the fact that Landesio believed that only artists had the right to discuss and give their opinion about art (see Landesio 1876: iv-v).

Even though Velasco's landscapes became the most fitting representatives of a national sentiment, and his work was celebrated by his contemporaries for its stylistic and thematic content, Altamirano remained sceptical of Velasco's work throughout his professional career. His personal animosity towards Velasco, as a result of his friendship with Landesio, obstructed Altamirano's ability to recognise in Velasco's work the qualities that he demanded from a national art school.

#### The emergence of Mexican art

Art critics did not engage too much with what they perceived to be the development of Mexican art, but the general feeling upheld by the liberals was that proper Mexican art, like the country itself, began after Independence. Writers like Altamirano for example, opposed the use of the term 'Mexican school' to describe colonial art arguing that it did not reflect the national sentiment.<sup>25</sup> Altamirano had pretty strong views with regard to this subject and downplayed the legacy of this period by stating that only religious paintings had been produced. Altamirano presents a 'gloomy' and depressing view of *Nueva España* as a period of 'darkness' dominated by religious orthodoxy and fanaticism:

[A]quí fue engendrada esa pintura tristísima, huesosa, macilenta, sombría que se ha llamado por algunos críticos Escuela Mexicana, ¡cómo si llevara el reflejo de la naturaleza mexicana! Esa pintura es subjetiva, y distingue una época, enhorabuena, pero no es nacional.<sup>26</sup>

Altamirano accused colonial artists of not having sought inspiration in the vibrant colours and diversity of the Mexican soil. He was obviously unaware of the beautiful representations depicting the particularities of *Nueva España* that artists had left in folding screens as well as canvases.<sup>27</sup> Felipe Gutiérrez, on the other hand, described colonial art as Mexican, and praised the artistic mastery of colonial painters such as Miguel Cabrera and Cristóbal de Villalpando. He claimed that people like Altamirano were wrong to claim that a proper Mexican school did not exist in *Nueva España* (see Gutiérrez 1895: 263-65). In his *Tratado del dibujo y la pintura* (1895), Gutiérrez divides his chronology into 'Escuela Mexicana' (Mexican School), and 'Escuela Moderna Mexicana' (Mexican Modern School) to differentiate between the artistic production before and after the creation of the Academy. Like most of his contemporaries Gutiérrez did not follow a rigid teleological view of artistic production and wrote about its history in terms of periods of flourishing followed by periods of decadence. In this history, after Cabrera and Villalpando Mexican art declined until the 1840s and 50s when artistic production was reinvigorated again thanks to the influence of European professors hired to improve the academic training of art students. Pina, Rebull, Noreña,

Obregón, Parra, Urruchi and Monroy are some of the artists that represent this 'renaissance' in the arts. After them however, most writers felt that Mexican art had fallen once more into a state of stagnation and decline.

In terms of prehispanic art opinions varied. Sculpture and architecture were generally viewed as relatively advanced, but painting was seen as mainly symbolic and hence rather primitive. This view was expressed by Bernardo Couto who wrote one of the first general overviews of Mexican art (see Couto 1995 [1860-61]).<sup>28</sup> A concern with meaning rather than form meant that prehispanic painting was seen in terms of the aesthetic hierarchy established by Hegel. According to Couto after the arrival of the Spanish *indígenas* lost their ability to create original works, but proved to be skilful copyists. Manuel Revilla's book *El arte en México en la época antigua y durante el gobierno virreinal* (1893) reinforced these kind of views. After its publication an article by Cálamo Currente appeared in the newspaper *El Partido Liberal* questioning the validity of Revilla's views. The author criticised Revilla's biased attitudes towards the prehispanic and accused him of being more 'hispanophile' than 'americanist'.<sup>29</sup> Currente also complained about the fact that Revilla only dedicated eleven out of the hundred and ten pages to the study of prehispanic art.

A quick overview of Mexican painting from the perspective of the nineteenth century may hence be summarised as follows: the first stage was a primitive period characterised by the symbolic nature of prehispanic representations. This stage was followed by a period of transculturation and the gradual implantation of European schools that would flourish in the work of creole artists like Cabrera, and Villalpando. After them came a period of decline until about the 1840s when neoclassicism (represented by Tolsá), romanticism (represented by Clavé), and a new generation of European artists helped to regenerate the Academy. Academic excellence and creative talent would then combine in a new generation of Mexican artists who would become worthy representatives of a modern Mexican school. After this however, and as the nineteenth century came to a close, Mexican art was heading once more towards its decline.

### **Romantic realism: a style for all**

The work of Justino Fernández (1990) and Rodríguez Prampolini (1997) are important points of departure in the study of art criticism in Mexico during the nineteenth century, but neither author provide a thorough analysis of the relationship between aesthetic debates and style. Approaching the subject from this perspective may help bring coherence to a seemingly

chaotic scene characterised by a diversity of opinions, and the fact that authors sometimes contradicted their position or changed their mind in the course of their writings.

In his *Estética del arte mexicano* (1990) Fernández bravely attempts to organise the material by grouping writers in terms of opinions and chronology, but confusion persists since he summarises his findings with conclusions such as these:

Podemos resumir diciendo: que la estética académica a mediados del siglo es idealista, clasicista, tradicionalista con sentido religioso y que aspira a la pintura mural; ... A medida que el tiempo corre, la estética moderna, realista, antitradicional, naturalista e historicista se define y se afirma ante el ideal del progreso.... Se logra superar el romanticismo no sin fatigas, la tradición clásica y religiosa, el hombre se entrega a la historia, el progreso al conocimiento positivo, a la patria,... (1990: 417)<sup>30</sup>

And then continues by saying that at the end of the nineteenth century:

El espectáculo que presenta la conciencia estética finisecular es caótico; ciertamente no es conformista, pues mira en torno, en lo más propio y en lo universal, buscando soluciones. Estas son, en pintura y escultura, el realismo y la pintura de género; se pide una pintura con ideas, sin saber exactamente cuales; en la arquitectura se sugiere un retorno al arte clásico. En general puede decirse que las diferentes ideas finiseculares no solo no superan al romanticismo sino que son su última expresión (ibid: 433).<sup>31</sup>

According to Fernández, whilst romanticism is left for a more realistic and naturalistic style in the middle of the nineteenth century it then returns in a more definite way at the end of the century. Debatable as this may be, the main difficulty in following Fernández study is his exchangeable use of the terms realism, romanticism, idealism, and naturalism which he combines in different ways to coincide with notions of progress, spirituality, nationalism and modernity. Talking about the aesthetics of liberal intellectuals for example, Fernández says: “[e]l grupo de críticos liberales considerados querían, pues, entre unos y otros, un arte: realista, espiritualista, idealista, liberal, progresivo y democrático” (1990: 411).<sup>32</sup> And about Velasco whom he sees as the artist *par excellence* of the nineteenth century he describes as “básicamente clasicista, ‘realista’ e idealista, monumental, historicista, costumbrista, actual y romántico; ...” (ibid: 465).<sup>33</sup> Based on the analysis presented above a realist and an idealist art would not only be incompatible in terms of style, but also antagonistic in terms of the values they sought to emulate. It is a fact however, that critics often asked for an ‘idealised realism’ what remains unclear is why and how these terms were used. What Fernández does is reproduce the eclecticism that permeates the art criticism of this period without providing a clear analysis of how this eclecticism relates to the aesthetic debates of the time.

In her study of art criticism Rodríguez Prampolini provides a useful analysis of how subject matter reflected the changes taking place in the aesthetic thought of the time. She explains that after independence religious themes prevailed because the country was perceived as lacking a national history:

Estableciendo la fe católica como la máxima inspiradora de las artes, como la única capaz de llevar a los artistas a planos sublimes y universales, México ya puede formar parte del conglomerado de países civilizados.... La historia del cristianismo viene a llenar el vacío de la Historia de México (1997: 28, vol. 1).<sup>34</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century however, writers began to ask for more secular paintings, and in particular for history and vernacular images based in Mexican themes. In spite of its endemic eclecticism, Rodríguez Prampolini explains that a demand for a national school began to bring more coherence to the art criticism of this period. The author points out that a series of articles, published in the magazine *El Artista* in 1874, represent the beginning of a consensus that focused on the need to consolidate the characteristics of a national school. The articles were written by leading Porfirian intellectuals who advocated the need to align artistic production with the demands of nationhood and progress –so dear to the core of liberal ideologies. More secular and national themes therefore began to appear as a response to the demands of art critics who on the whole tried to encourage creativity by urging artist to find inspiration in Mexican soil. Rodríguez Prampolini makes an important point when she explains that changes in subject matter represent a reversal of values from seeking recognition through the universal to making universal the specific:

Ya no son los valores universales los que se intenta mexicanizar, sino los valores mexicanos, firmes y tan válidos como cualesquiera otros los que se intenta destacar y universalizar (1997: 158, vol. 1).<sup>35</sup>

This idea is important in order to understand the particularities of neo-prehispanic representations within a framework of universality. In terms of art the universal was grounded at this point, at least in Mexico, in the legacy of classicism and notions of Hellenic beauty. The process of 'civilising the prehispanic', taking place in the artistic production of the time, was very much an attempt to universalise the specific via the language of accepted academic styles –the main point being to 'cleanse' unwanted elements through the idealisation of form and the representation of ideal beauty.

Even though writers picked and mixed styles in some times indiscriminate ways to describe their personal taste, certain commonalities can be ascertained such as an increasing demand for secular (i.e. national) themes, a general opposition to the notion of an 'art for art's sake', and an overwhelming emphasis on the notion of ideal beauty as the most intrinsic element of art. In terms of ideology, common ground can also be established by the predominance of positivism and its relation to notions of progress and modernity.<sup>36</sup> During the inauguration of the mural painted by Cordero for the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* in 1874, Gabino Barreda spoke eloquently about the necessary relationship between art and science.<sup>37</sup> According to Barreda art, like science, should contribute towards the cultural and material advancement of the country. But as Rodríguez Prampolini accurately points out Barreda never talked about style. He only referred to its content which indicates that positivist aesthetics were mainly concerned with subject matter rather than with the specificities of style (1997: 132, vol. 1). This point is also important to understand the particularities of neo-prehispanic representations because experimentation was mainly expressed in terms of content rather than style.

As Fernández explains, most critics (liberals and conservatives) believed that artistic production should respond to the interests of the nation. The modernity of these thinkers, Fernández argues, was based in a belief that art had an agency within the national agenda, and could hence contribute to the development of Mexico. The role of positivism as the dominant ideology of this period contributed to the idea that art should serve a purpose within the grand narratives of nation-building projects. The most prevailing view in the dominant art criticism of this period was therefore a demand for a national art based on Mexican history, its people and its landscapes. In the words of Fernández:

A medida que el tiempo corre, la estética moderna, realista, antitradicional, naturalista e historicista se define y se afirma ante el ideal del progreso. Para entonces se rechaza la pintura religiosa, idealista y clasicista, y se exige un arte nacional, con temas y espíritu laicos, que tenga influencia moral y que contribuya al progreso (1990: 417).<sup>38</sup>

A national school should then be based on objective realism and have a pragmatic –one may say utilitarian– purpose. Pragmatic and objective only to a degree however, since critics were also keen to ask for 'beauty'. The modernity of these thinkers was still trapped in a traditional European legacy that defined art in terms of beauty and beauty in terms of classical traditions (i.e. the Greco-Roman world). The artist's skill relied on his ability to interpret reality and to transform the mundane into art –that is into beautiful objects– and the veracity or truthfulness

of his work depended on its ability to convey notions or ideas about nationhood. In other words, a 'modern' art would respond to the demands of progress by being part of nation-building projects, and would help to emphasise the cultural and artistic achievements of Mexico.

In terms of style however, writers did seem to ask for incompatible things such as the idealised realism which Fernández identifies. Rodríguez Prampolini makes this point clear when she states:

En toda la crítica de fin de siglo vamos a encontrar, mas o menos sugerida o dicha claramente, una dualidad irreconciliable: por una parte se pide que la pintura exprese la realidad tal y como es, pero por otra parte se le rechaza si no esta ennoblecida por un asunto digno (1997: 155, vol. 1).<sup>39</sup>

Fernández is also right to say that a romantic attitude endured in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century and that it coexisted with realism and naturalism. It was a time of transition which would give way to the adoption of more modernist styles at the beginning of the twentieth century. But according to Fernández only Velasco was able to present a synthesis of all these different currents, and to produce an art through which Mexico 'could be itself whilst being like Europe' ('ser sí mismo siendo como Europa' Fernández 1990: 466).

The unquestionable ambiguity of writers in relation to style may be explained by an unclear distinction between realism and naturalism, veracity and truth; and with whether this truth was understood objectively (as ideal beauty) or subjectively (as in nature itself). The confusion is further complicated by the fact that Mexican writers perceived realism as 'disinterested' and therefore unable to respond to moral and ethical concerns.

As has been discussed, realism and naturalism relate to the depiction of the factual rather than the imaginary or spiritual. Naturalism is associated with seventeenth century Dutch painting but also with the work of Constable, Turner and in literature with Zola; and realism with Courbert, Millet and in literature with Flaubert. The main difference between realist and naturalist painters was their position in terms of the social function of art. The advocates of naturalism in Europe saw their work as independent from any social or political commitment and believed in the value of art *par se*. The work of the realists on the other hand, often served to emphasise social inequalities, and conveyed a clearer pragmatic function. The political undertones of realism were celebrated by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) who was a very close friend of Courbert and one of his most faithful admirers. Proudhon was a

socialist writer who believed that artistic production had to respond to the social demands of its time. His ideas in this respect were probably influenced by his friendship with Auguste Comte whom he met in 1847. Allegedly quoting Courbert Proudhon says that the goal of the realist school is:

'...to lead us to a better knowledge of ourselves, by the revelation of all our thoughts, even the most secret, of all our tendencies, our virtues, our vices, our affectations, and thus to contribute to the development of our dignity, to the perfection of our being. It is not in our power to be nourished by chimeras, to intoxicate ourselves with illusion, to lead ourselves astray with mirages, as do the classics, the Romantics and all those who pursue a vain ideal: but to deliver ourselves from pernicious illusions by denouncing them' (in Caiger and Wood 1998: 407).

Proudhon's opposition to the Romantic school, because of its idealism and inability to incite a moral response, reflects the parallel and often overlapping significance writers assigned to the notion of truth. As noted earlier, for the romantics truth was found in the platonic realm of ideas while for the realists truth was found in nature. Proudhon describes Courbert's paintings as 'mirrors of truth' (ibid: 408), and argues that their faithfulness to reality is precisely what allows them to convey higher values. Both realist and romantic painters however, claimed that their art was not 'disinterested' and that it conveyed moral and ethical values.

This point is very important in relation to Mexican aesthetics because writers strongly opposed the 'vulgarity' of realism claiming that the new school was detached from moral or ethical concerns. In other words, Mexican critics linked realism with 'art for art's sake' and viewed romanticism as an art with social commitment. This is not dissimilar to the debate around the social function of art which supporters of romanticism and realism were expressing back in Europe. Their view of realism, for example, is very much in line with the criticism that Delacroix voiced against Messonier when he visited him in his studio. The main difference between Mexico and Europe was that European artists began to break from the conventions of an academic art determined by notions of classical beauty at an earlier date.

Mexican critics therefore claimed that realism produced skilful 'copies' of reality which lacked the ability to convey emotions and ideas. Talking about realism Revilla wrote in 1878 that the realm of ideas was not less real than the realm of nature, and that even though a certain degree of realism was necessary the artist was obliged to interpret forms in order to present an idealised version of reality.<sup>40</sup>

La teoría del realismo es insostenible. Ciertamente le asiste razón al afirmar que el arte no es enemigo de la verdad, y que el artista debe inspirarse en lo real, y al combatir en el arte lo sobrenatural, lo arbitrario, y lo meramente fantástico; pero yerra en reducir el arte a la imitación y reproducción fiel de la realidad, .... El reproducir la realidad ha de descubrir el artista la idea que en ella existe oculta; ha de corregir sus imperfecciones y límites; ha de depurarlas; ha de elegir en ella lo que es bello y dejar en la sombra lo mezquino y defectuoso, viviéndose como criterio del concepto de belleza, del arquetipo ideal que en su razón se da y que le sirve para determinar, *a priori*, el grado de belleza de la realidad exterior.<sup>41</sup>

It is worth quoting Revilla at length because his words encapsulate the overall consensus in respect to realism, and the way in which writers viewed ideal beauty as a necessary tool for 'cleansing' the imperfections of reality. Furthermore, Revilla believed that art should combine realism, idealism, and rationalism. The demand for these three qualities represents the parameters of taste that characterise the art criticism of the Porfiriato. Even Felipe Gutiérrez who may be considered the most enthusiastic supporter of realism asked for a degree of idealism in art (see Gutiérrez 1895). The ambiguity of styles was further complicated in Mexico by a demand for history painting since this genre was theoretically incompatible with the principles of realism (in the European setting), and more linked in fact with the precepts of the romantic school. So even though art critics began to favour an engagement with contemporaneity in the form of *pintura costumbrista*<sup>42</sup> the demand for history painting contradicted the underlying principles of the realist school.

In many instances by realism writers meant the depiction of genre, and history paintings (as supposed to religious) based on Mexican themes; and by veracity the representation of these based on reality. In other words in real 'types' (*indígenas, mestizos*, etc), real landscapes, and –in terms of history– based on textual sources and facts. They however, did not want to see reality represented exactly as it was in a way that a photograph would do. In his essay 'La pintura histórica en México' (1874), Altamirano argued for example that following the legacies of the Renaissance was not an obstacle for the creation of a national school:

Ahora bien: estas escuelas en su afán de volver a la fuente pura, a la belleza antigua, afán que no excluye de ningún modo el sentimiento patriótico, ni la idea filosófica moderna, ni aun el carácter local y moral de un país, por que los eternos principios de lo bello se adaptan a todas partes y revisten todas las formas, han logrado las más de las veces formar una escuela nacional (clasificadas) más o menos perfecta pero esencialmente propia.<sup>43</sup>

An increase in secular painting in the form of genre painting, and *pintura costumbrista* in Mexico may therefore be seen as a response to the influence of realism, and as a reaction against the school of Clavé which mainly produced religious and mythological scenes –and

which was generally associated with the canons of romanticism. But the central tenets of romanticism were still very much part of Mexican aesthetic thought at the end of the nineteenth century. The national school which critics seemed to be asking for was a combination between realism and romanticism or what we may describe as a kind of *romantic realism*. Since considering all the writers who published articles in newspapers and periodicals would be impossible, we will mention a few of the reviews which reflect this demand for an idealised realism with particular attention to neo-prehispanic representations.

Some of the paintings which received most attention and appraisal were Parra's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' [59] (1875) (figure 11) and 'Episodios de la conquista. La matanza de Cholula' [62] (1877) (figure 12); and Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' (1869) (figure 13). Together with Rodrigo Gutiérrez' 'El senado de Tlaxcala' [58] (1875) (figure 14), these paintings came to be accepted as masterpieces in the collections of the Academy, and were often used as examples to show how a national style might be successfully achieved. Altamirano included Parra's and Obregón's paintings in his 'Primer almanaque histórico', and spoke about them with great praise. About Parra's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' Altamirano wrote that within it 'todo es verdad y todo es bello'.<sup>44</sup> The most interesting aspect about his comments on Parra's painting is the emphasis he gives to the historical accuracy of its content, and the way in which it conveys a complex historical narrative into a single powerful image:

No hay en él más que tres personajes, un altar, un ídolo, algunas flores, un trozo de la arquitectura azteca; los asesinos ni aun se ven, y sin embargo se conoce en él toda una época, encierra una noción histórica más elocuente que cien libros, y da a conocer el carácter de los hombres del tiempo de la conquista mejor que podrían hacerlo las páginas de los cronistas.<sup>45</sup>

In spite of some objections and criticisms, regarding its artistic and historical accuracy, the two paintings by Parra were readily accepted into the canons of Mexican art history. Their privileged status was partly due to the fact that they fulfilled the requirements of a national school, but also because their theme reflected the negative view of the conquest upheld by liberal intellectuals. The violence of the conquest however, is suggested by the drama of its aftermath rather than by the moment of the killing itself (the way in which academic artists resolved the depiction of violence by choosing specific temporal frames will be studied in the following chapter). One cannot deny that there is veracity in the depiction of the figures and their surroundings, but its realism is controlled. The figures have been idealised by showing

pain without the distortionate expressions of despair and sorrow. Talking about Parra's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' Felipe López López for example criticised this lack of veracity in the figure of Fray Bartolomé saying that Parra had represented him too old, and too neat. He looks 'natural' López López claimed, but "le falta sublimidad".<sup>46</sup> In spite of its deficiencies, López López then says that the painting "sí satisface en lo general por su verdad".<sup>47</sup> Along similar lines, Felipe Gutiérrez –who favoured the veracity of realism– asked Parra to leave what he described as 'el estilo bonito' (the 'pretty style') for more accurate and faithful representations. And that "que si se tratara de imitar a algunos maestros, prefiera a Velázquez, que es el que ha imitado mejor la naturaleza, con sus bellezas, sus defectos y los accidentes que la constituyen".<sup>48</sup>

Similarly to Parra's the painting by Obregón was praised for its choice of subject matter and generally approved as a worthy representative of the national school, but his interpretation was seen to lack veracity. In his 'Primer almanaque histórico' Altamirano says that some critics complained about the light colour skin of Xóchitl which made her appear more as a *mestiza* than an *indígena*,<sup>49</sup> but that in spite of this misconception he believed that the figure was 'un bello ideal' ('a beautiful ideal').<sup>50</sup> Although Altamirano agreed that Obregón's interpretation was conventional and lacking in archaeological and ethnographical accuracy, he argued that the painting deserved to be praised for being one of the few paintings that ventured to represent an event from Mexican history.

The compositions presented by Izaguirre [69], Jara [70] and Ramírez [71] for the academy's biennial competition in 1889 (figures 15 to 17), on the other hand, provoked a series of interesting responses in relation to their veracity and realism. The paintings represent the moment in which Tenoch and his followers encounter the sign which indicated the location where they should build their city: an eagle devouring a serpent on top of a cactus.<sup>51</sup> In the guidelines prepared for the students one of the specifications indicates that the historical nature of the theme allows for a certain degree of idealisation: "[t]éngase presente que ésta es una leyenda histórica y que por consiguiente se presta el asunto al idealismo que no excluye el naturalismo" (reproduced in Acevedo and Camacho 2002: 359).<sup>52</sup>

In his review of the XXII Academy's exhibition (held during the winter of 1891) Revilla wrote about Izaguirre's painting (figure 16) that his figures could had been more idealised: "[e]n asuntos de la elevación del que nos ocupa cabe muy bien la idealización, y púdose, por consiguiente, haber dado a los indios, sin desnaturalizar los rasgos distintivos de la raza, formas más bellas y carnes menos atezadas".<sup>53</sup> But he then criticised Jara's painting (figure

17) for lacking in historical accuracy. Revilla thought that Jara should not have included the idol positioned in front of the group on the right, and that his decision to include a woman with child was misleading because it was unlikely that any woman would have been present at the time. He also claimed that the head of the child was too big.<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to note that Revilla does not object to the physiognomy of the *indígenas* considering that they are more realistic than Izaguirre's.

Another review of the same exhibition, this time written by Eduardo Gibbons, did pick up on this fact criticising Jara's representation of *indígenas*. In a disdainful tone Gibbons wrote that they appeared "ser zulús más bien que descendientes de aquella raza pura indígena, atlética en formas, altiva y valerosa cual los hijos de Esparta. Pero aquí en este cuadro se nota el modelo de la raza conquistada, del indio subyugado".<sup>55</sup> Gibbons' claim about the lack of dignity and majesty of the figures indicates that he would have preferred a more idealised representation –something perhaps more on the lines of Noreña's and Guerra's compositions for the Monument to Cuauhtémoc which will be considered in chapter six. Gibbons also felt that Jara had not given enough importance to the symbol of the eagle and the cactus, and he especially disliked the dark tonalities of the composition. In the mind of Gibbons a scene with the historical significance of 'The Foundation' deserved a grandeur and a magnificence which Jara's composition lacked. He preferred the tonality of Izaguirre's painting and his historical interpretation, but neither compositions satisfied him completely.

It is interesting to note that Jara's composition was the winner of the competition even though its style shows a clearer influence of realism. There is certainly more 'truth' in Jara's representation of *indígenas*, and in the depiction of the landscape than in any other of the paintings portraying prehispanic scenes considered in this work. The Academy proved in this case to be more forward looking and modern than its critics.

In short, Mexican art critics asked for a combination of idealism and realism in order to portray images that would transform the local into the universal. This was done through the interpretation of national themes via academic styles that were embedded in the legacy of European traditions. Veracity was required to construct accurate depictions, but form had to be idealised to present worthy images of the prehispanic. Within projects of nationhood art needed to present favourable images of the nation, and to incite higher values rather than condemn the social inequalities of capitalism which the realist painters were trying to denounce. In other words, the ultimate goal of artistic production in Mexico was nationalism, and for that reason it needed to find a balance between representing the factual and

idealising the unwanted. Mexican critics did not want to see the ugly reality of the working classes or the miserable state of contemporary *indígenas*. They wanted an idealised past which they could feel proud of, a present full of glory, and a future filled with hope.

#### Characterising a national art

Just as the critical interpretation and adoption of European racial theories became a necessary process in the articulation of theories that explained the historical development of Mexico (see chapter five), art critics used and adapted aesthetic theories to fundament the nature of their thinking. In relation to art, aesthetic debates centred on the styles of romanticism, realism and naturalism, and gave particular attention to the notion of 'ideal beauty'. Critics combined these in order to construct their arguments concerning what they believed should constitute the form and content of a national school. Their writings show an awareness of the aesthetic debates taking place in Europe, but there is some misconception in regard to realism. In his review of the XXII Academy's exhibition, for example, Manuel Revilla made the following remarks about Leandro Izaguirre's painting *El borracho*:

Lo feo y lo vulgar, digan lo que quieran M Delacroix y sus legítimos sucesores los de la escuela realista, sólo deben tener cabida en el arte a condición de ser empleados con parsimonia, y no por si mismos, sino como medio de hacer resaltar lo bello; ...<sup>56</sup>

It is not very clear why Revilla is talking about Delacroix as a predecessor of the realists, but he appears to be objecting to the dramatic undertones of romanticism and equating them with the school of realism. There was also confusion and debate regarding the pragmatic function of realism *vis-à-vis* romanticism, but the same was the case in Europe. The main issue in this respect was with regard to notions of truth and beauty, and with whether beauty was considered to be subjective or objective. The emphasis on nationalism in Mexico pressed the need to promote the production of an art with social commitment making the notion of 'disinterested' art a thorny issue in aesthetic debates. The general consensus shows that critics viewed art as a cultural production that was paramount to the consolidation of the nation, and which was necessary to enhance the cultural and civilised status of Mexico. In other words through art Mexico could show the world that it was not the barbaric and underdeveloped place that foreign (and sometimes national) voices claimed.

In terms of style, a midpoint was found between realism and romanticism. It shared with realism a preoccupation with contemporary history and vernacular culture, and with romanticism the Hegelian notion of Ideal Beauty. Critics therefore asked for a style that we may describe as 'romantic realism', and which is useful for understanding the particularities of

neo-prehispanic representations. Romantic realism allowed Mexico to turn the local into the universal, and to portray civilised representations of the prehispanic. The paintings which succeeded in becoming part of the canon were seen to convey the notions of 'Truth, Beauty and Utility' which became central to the aesthetics of Porfirian art. The way in which these notions operated within a framework of nationalism in the arts will be further considered in relation to monuments and architecture in chapter six. Furthermore, the national school was more concerned with content than with the particularities of style, and its modernity may therefore be understood in terms of experimentation with content rather than style. A modern school in Mexico would then be based on the depiction of secular and national themes rather than with the experimentation of modernist styles.

It is not the place here to argue whether art changes society or society changes art, but it is interesting to note that the break from notions of classical beauty in Europe implied a relativisation of values which granted more freedom to art (and the gradual acceptance of other artistic traditions and cultures). This shift in attitude facilitated the creative interpretation of 'primitive' art by artists like Picasso for example, and the same could be said of Mexico if we put in contrast the work of Porfirian and post-Porfirian artists. As the art criticism from the Porfiriato testifies the artists from this period were still very much constrained by the conventions of classical beauty. This is particularly apparent in the writings of some critics who asked painters to embellish the physiognomy of *indígenas*. At the beginning of the twentieth century however, artists began to move away from the conventions of academic art and classical beauty, and this shift coincided with the consolidation of *mestizaje* and a more fruitful reconciliation with our indigenous heritage.

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<sup>1</sup> The quotes I use in this work have been taken from Caiger and Harrison (1998) because I preferred to use their translations rather than attempting to translate the quotes myself.

<sup>2</sup> One of the best studies about realism has been presented by Linda Nochlin whose book *Realism* (2002) explores the philosophical and aesthetic discourses of this particular style.

<sup>3</sup> Two of the most important works published on this subject were written by Edmund Burke A *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756); and Immanuel Kant *Observation on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764).

<sup>4</sup> This idea is linked to an ongoing aesthetic debate which questions whether art objects have an intrinsic value in themselves or if meaning relies on the subjectivity of the viewer. The debates have been influenced by studies in anthropology, semiotics and photography, and by the philosophical enquiry of writers like Lyotard (see for example Carroll 1987).

<sup>5</sup> From his diaries (dated 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 1849).

<sup>6</sup> The implication of this shift in the history of western aesthetics was particularly relevant to form because it freed the representation of objects and bodies from classical conceptions of beauty facilitating the development of cubism and abstract art.

<sup>7</sup> As Cardiel Reyes points out, neither the book by Baz or Sales Cepeda are easily accessible. I was unable to find them in the libraries I visited in Mexico so I can only relate my study to the quotes reproduced in the articles by Cardiel Reyes.

<sup>8</sup> Cardiel Reyes found this book thanks to a personal acquaintance with Carlos Canto López who possessed a copy. He says that it was published in Merida Yucatan by the 'Imprenta Loret de Mola' (1977: 60). Although the book is not readily available two articles by Sales Cepeda: '¿Qué es el decadentismo?' published in *El Universal* in 1899; and 'Juan Gamboa Guzmán' published in *Revista Moderna* the same year can be found in RP (1997 vol. 3).

<sup>9</sup> "The essential element in art is beauty. Beauty is the soul of art and the art of the soul... We reiterate that for us if art does not beautify nature, it is not art".

<sup>10</sup> "For every individual, beauty is what pleases or delights or produces a positive emotion in the soul. Thank heavens eternal archetypes or platonic ideals do not exist".

<sup>11</sup> "First, the artist receives the idea of beauty from nature and then in his creations he transforms it into the beauty of the idea... This, and no more than this, is art: representing in a real and tangible form the intangible ideal".

<sup>12</sup> "Thus, it wants the material, the body, the form to express nothing more than the spirit; that art does not reflect anything other than ideal, spiritual beauty".

<sup>13</sup> "Art for art's sake can be very beautiful, but art for the sake of progress and the common good is even more beautiful".

<sup>14</sup> "In short, we believe ever more firmly that art *par se* has its own exclusive purpose: the realisation or representation of beauty".

<sup>15</sup> "Transforming the natural world, or rather modifying its form with the aim of improving it, is a need intrinsic to man's nature. But one should not take this to mean that the artist should spurn reality, because then at the cost of avoiding the vice of realism, he would fall into the trap of a false, fantastical idealism... Art should draw from nature and not lose sight of it for a moment, if it wishes to be true and produce the genuine emotion and feeling of beauty".

<sup>16</sup> "Art is a powerful means of education because it holds sway over the imagination and convinces men easily. It purifies taste and moral ideas, because of its necessary interdependence of truth, beauty and good. If economic, political and ideological interests divide people: art on the other hand unifies, reconciles and brings them together".

<sup>17</sup> "To the President of the Republic, General of the Division, Don Porfirio Diaz, under whose wise governance the Sciences and Arts prosper in Mexico and we make swift intellectual and material progress,...".

<sup>18</sup> See Altamirano 'El salón en 1879-1880. Impresiones de un aficionado' [1880] (in RP 1997: 15-58, vol. 3).

<sup>19</sup> See in particular 'La pintura histórica en México' [1874] (in RP 1997: 196-199, vol. 2); and 'El salón en 1879-1880' (in *ibid*).

<sup>20</sup> [O]ne must appreciate the fact that Coto chose as one of his studies a beautiful traditional legend and a grandiose historical event from our *patria*, giving to his paintings a character of mexicaness that will make them interesting and will add to the scarce amount of paintings corresponding to a genre that we may call national (my translation). Altamirano 'El salón en 1879-1881' (in RP 1997: 36, vol. 3).

<sup>21</sup> The nationalist connotations of Cordero's work contributed to his acceptance into the canon of Mexican art history established by post-Revolutionary art critics. Cordero was one of the few academic artists from the nineteenth century to receive a favourable press after the Porfiriato. His recognition into the canon was confirmed by an exhibition of his work in *El Palacio de Bellas Artes* in 1945 (see Scott 1968).

<sup>22</sup> "He who delights in tormenting Cordero with such unjust appraisal, cannot be his fellow countryman". López López 'Exposición de la Academia Nacional de San Carlos' [1876] (in RP 1997: 359, vol. 2).

<sup>23</sup> 'Triumph of science and labour over envy and ignorance'. The mural was inaugurated on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1874 but it no longer exists.

<sup>24</sup> For a study of this mural and its relationship with the ideology of Barrera see Fernández (1983: 72-73).

<sup>25</sup> See Altamirano 'Primer almanaque histórico, artístico y monumental de la República Mexicana' [1883-83] (in RP 1997, vol. 3). In this article Altamirano gives a general overview of the artistic

development of Mexico and provides a good account of his own views in relation to what he considered to be a national school. This article was originally published by Manuel Caballero in a book of the same name (see Manuel Caballero 1883-84). The book includes reproductions of Mexican archaeological sites, and views of Mexico, but also some artistic works such as Parra's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas', and Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque'.

<sup>26</sup> "This sad, bony, gaunt, and gloomy art, which some critics have labelled Mexican School as if it were a reflection of Mexican nature, was created here. Those paintings [referring to colonial art] are subjective and mark an epoch, all well and good, but it is not national". Altamirano 'Primer almanaque histórico' (in RP 1997: 147, vol. 3).

<sup>27</sup> Many secular paintings were in fact painted during the colonial period including the extremely interesting genre of *casta* paintings. See for example *Pintura y Vida Cotidiana en México 1650-1950*, and Katzew (1996).

<sup>28</sup> Couto was an intellectual of conservative views who directed the Academy in the 1850s and was therefore involved in the reforms taking place during that period. Couto's book was structured in the form of a dialogue between himself, Pelegrin Clavé, and José Joaquín Pesado.

<sup>29</sup> See Cálamo Current 'Bibliografía' [1893] (in RP 1997, vol. 3).

<sup>30</sup> "We can summarise by saying that the academic aesthetic around the middle of the century is idealist, classicist, traditionalist in the religious sense, and that it aspires to mural painting; ... As time passes, the modern, realist, anti-traditional, naturalist, historicist aesthetic becomes more defined and secure with regards to the ideal of progress... It manages, not without great hardship, to surpass romanticism, the classical and religious tradition: man surrenders himself to history, progress towards positive knowledge, his homeland".

<sup>31</sup> "The spectacle that *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic conscience presents is chaotic; certainly, it is not conformist, since it looks around, at the most characteristic and the universal, seeking solutions. These are, in painting and sculpture, realism and genre painting; a painting with ideas is demanded, without knowing exactly which ideas; in architecture a return to classical art has been mooted. In general, one can say that the different *fin-de-siècle* ideas do not simply surpass romanticism but are also its final expression".

<sup>32</sup> "The group of liberal critics in question wanted, then, amongst other things, a realist, spiritual, idealist, liberal, progressive, democratic art".

<sup>33</sup> "Basically, classicist, 'realist' and idealist, monumental, historicist, with a strong regional flavour, current and romantic; ...".

<sup>34</sup> "By establishing the Catholic faith as the greatest inspiration in the arts, as the only thing capable of lifting artists to sublime, universal planes, Mexico can already form part of the club of civilized countries... The history of Christianity comes to fill the vacuum of Mexican history".

<sup>35</sup> "It is no longer universal values that we attempt to mexicanize, but rather Mexican values, as strong and valid as any other, that we attempt to bring to the fore and universalize".

<sup>36</sup> These last factors were in fact responsible for the gradual rapprochement between liberals and conservatives which historians like Charles Hale (2002) have identified.

<sup>37</sup> See Barreda 'Discurso pronunciado por el señor Gabino Barreda' (in RP 1997: 263-266, vol. 2). See also Porfirio Parra (1899).

<sup>38</sup> "As time goes by, the modern aesthetic, realistic, anti-traditional, naturalist and historicist is defined and confirmed in relation to the aims of progress. At this point religious painting is dismissed as idealistic and classicist, and a national art is demanded instead which will be lay in nature and convey moral values that will contribute to ideals of progress".

<sup>39</sup> "In all *fin-de-siècle* criticism we will find, more or less hinted at or stated directly, an irreconcilable duality: on the one hand they want painting to express reality just as it is, however on the other they reject it if it is not ennobled by dignified subject matter".

<sup>40</sup> See Revilla's 'El realismo en el arte contemporáneo' [1878] (in RP 1997: 463-65, vol.2).

<sup>41</sup> "The theory of realism is untenable. Certainly, reason is on its side when it affirms that art is not the enemy of truth and that the artist should draw his inspiration from reality, and when it fights against the supernatural, the arbitrary and the purely imaginary in art; but it is mistaken when it reduces art to the imitation and faithful reproduction of reality, ... When reproducing reality, the artist must discover the idea that lies hidden within; must correct its imperfections and limitations; must cleanse it of them; must choose from reality what is beautiful and leave what is tawdry and defective in the shadows. He must use as his criterion the concept of beauty, the ideal archetype that is found in his reason and that serves him to determine *a priori* the degree of beauty in external reality" (ibid: 464-65).

<sup>42</sup> There is no adequate translation for this term in English. In Spanish it is used to describe paintings that depict customs and traditions. In other words subjects that represent the experience of every day life and vernacular culture. A good example of *pintura costumbrista*, for example, would be the paintings of Agustín Arrieta.

<sup>43</sup> "All well and good: these schools in their urge to return to the pure source, to ancient beauty (an urge which does not in any way exclude patriotic sentiment, or the modern philosophical idea, or even the local character and morals of a country, because the eternal principles of beauty adapt themselves to every place and take on all forms) have for the most part succeeded in forming a national school (classified) which is to a greater or lesser degree essentially individual" (in RP 1997:198, vol. 2.). Altamirano's interest in the Renaissance is also reflected in the magazine which he directed in 1869 called *El Renacimiento*. See also Bargellini (1988) who argues that intellectuals took from the Renaissance the ideas of progress, classical beauty and an emphasis on knowledge and reason.

<sup>44</sup> "every thing is truth and beauty" (my translation) (in RP 1997: 153, vol. 3).

<sup>45</sup> "There are only three figures in the composition, an altar, an idol, some flowers, a fragment of Aztec architecture; the killers can no longer be seen, yet we can grasp from it the essence of an epoch, it encapsulates a historical notion much more eloquently than one hundred books, and it brings out the character of the men that lived during the conquest much better than the written pages of the *cronistas* would have done" (my translation) (in *ibid*).

<sup>46</sup> "he lacks sublimity". López López 'Exposición de la Academia Nacional de San Carlos' [1876] (in RP 1997: 364, vol. 2).

<sup>47</sup> "does generally satisfy with its truthfulness" (*ibid*: 365).

<sup>48</sup> "That if one were trying to imitate some old master, Velásquez would be preferable, as he is the one who has best imitated nature, with its beauty, its defects and the chance accidents which form it". Gutiérrez 'La exposición de Bellas Artes en 1876' [1876] (in RP 1997: 394, vol. 2).

<sup>49</sup> Stacy Widdifield (1996) provides an interesting discussion of the way in which skin colour continued to operate as a marker of racial differences in Mexico after Independence. Although she associates the representation of costume and skin colour with a demand for more realism in the arts, her analysis centres on the ongoing ambiguity between contemporary and prehispanic *indigenas*; and the attitudes of liberal intellectuals like Altamirano, Sánchez Solís and Ignacio Ramírez in relation to issues of assimilation.

<sup>50</sup> Altamirano 'Primer almanaque' (in RP 1997: 154, vol. 3).

<sup>51</sup> It must be noted that at the time when the paintings were made there was no official consensus regarding the importance of the eagle, the cactus and the serpent as one of the main symbols of nationality. As Esther Acevedo explains, this symbol was not yet the foundational archetype that we now associate with the image of Mexico (see Esther Acevedo's insightful study of these paintings in the *Catálogo comentado del Museo Nacional de Arte* pages 357-366).

<sup>52</sup> "Bear in mind that this is a historic legend and for this reason the subject lends itself to idealism, whilst not excluding naturalism".

<sup>53</sup> "In matters as lofty as those we are dealing with idealisation has its rightful place, and consequently one could have given the Indians more beautiful forms and less swarthy complexions without denaturalizing [altering] the distinctive traits of their race". Revilla 'Exposición XXII de la Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes' [1892] (in RP 1997: 331, vol. 3).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*: 331.

<sup>55</sup> "Be Zulus rather than descendents of that pure, indigenous race, athletic in form, as proud and valiant as the sons of Sparta. But here, in this picture, the model of the conquered race, the subjugated Indian, is evident". Gibbons 'Reflexiones sobre el arte nacional' [1892] (in RP 1997: 353, vol. 3).

<sup>56</sup> "Ugliness and vulgarity, whatever M. Delacroix and his legitimate heirs, those of the realist school, may wish to say, should only have a place in art as long as they are employed sparingly, and not in their own right but rather as a means to make that which is beautiful stand out". Revilla 'Exposición XXII' (in RP 1997: 332, vol. 3).

## NATIONAL HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY PAINTING

Parting from a conception of the nineteenth century as the 'historical' period *par excellence* the following study will analyse the relationship between historiography, and the production of history painting in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century. The prominence of history in the construction of national narratives, and its intrinsic role in the consolidation of the State will be looked at in relation to the historical themes depicted in the academic art of this period. It will therefore concentrate on the production of history painting, and its role within the context of Porfirian Mexico emphasising the discursive and didactic characteristics of the genre. Rather than focusing on the formal and stylistic qualities of history painting attention will be given primarily to their function in order to understand the agency of images in vindicating certain national narratives. To explore these issues the study will consider the relationship between historical texts and images, and the ability of certain paintings to act as historical documents in themselves. This will help us understand the correlation between history painting competitions and an official historiography; and the way in which certain neo-prehispanic representations disseminated images for the nation thanks to their display in exhibitions, and their reproduction in the printing press.

### **Historiography and the discourse of the nation**

In his seminal work *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson has traced the birth of European nation-States to the gradual replacement of 'truth-languages' –traditionally related to structures of power such as Latin, Greek and Hebrew– by vernacular languages which were eventually associated to particular nationalities. Anderson links this to an increase in publications, and argues that the entrance of vernacular languages into the printing press, and its combination with the 'age of mechanical reproduction' was generating communities whose internal unity was threatening the central authority of medieval dynasties (Anderson 2002).

In the case of America during the nineteenth century, the concept of nationhood may be best understood as a mirage that presupposes the political and cultural allegiance of individuals that have been made to share a large geographical space. In Mexico for example, a sense of belonging was made to coexist with local identities which were not always sympathetic to the needs of their fellow 'citizens'. The clashes between local and national interests was caused by political differences, led by economic forces, but also by the cultural diversity of the country.

Against a background of prehispanic multi-ethnicity –homogenised during the colonial period under the generic term *indígenas* (see Klor de Alva 1995: 248)– colonialism brought further racial diversity. Taxonomic paintings from the colonial period known as ‘casta paintings’ show the way in which the various possible combinations between Europeans, blacks and native *indígenas* were classified and named (see for example Katzew 1996). Hence as Octavio Paz has accurately noted, a defining characteristic of the country which parts from its colonial and prehispanic past is the fact that in Mexico a series of parallel histories conflate (Octavio Paz 1993). The result of varying temporalities is what gives the country its image as an ‘exotic’ ethnic mosaic, but it is also what has complexified the success of nationalist agendas. For the state the main problem lies in the ambivalent temporalities identified by Bhabha: “[t]he problematic boundaries of modernity are enacted in these ambivalent temporalities of the nation-space. The language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past” (2000:142). Bhabha’s useful notion of a ‘dialectic of various temporalities’ (Ibid.: 152) explains the complexity of nationalist discourses operating in state narratives. But it is also useful for situating the significance of historical narratives in the nineteenth century which were precisely attempting to consolidate the form and content of an acceptable national past. This past was needed in order to explain the present and to legitimise the future that the government was seeking to promote.

In Mexico the ongoing relationship between the nation and its history is therefore marked by a complex set of negotiations which need to address the cultural and ethnic diversity of society. But while in the twentieth century multiculturalism became an issue that could no longer be disguised under a mask of nationalist rhetoric, in the nineteenth century homogenisation was the guiding force behind many governmental policies. The urgency to promote unity after Independence sought to erase the racial hierarchies on which colonial society rested in order to shift the emphasis from an identity based on ethnicity to an identity based on nationality.<sup>1</sup> The first concerted effort to foster homogenisation was achieved through changes in the legal status of individuals who became free citizens of a nation that came to be known as Mexico. Being called Mexican however, was no precondition to feeling Mexican and intellectuals were quick to realise that a sense of belonging could only be promoted on the basis of a shared history. A nation with no history would be like a shrine with no relic or a life with no meaning, hence the overwhelming significance of history in the consolidation of nation-States, and in the cultural life of the nineteenth century. The development of historiography and a concern with history is therefore one of the most defining characteristics of the nineteenth century, and it can indeed be seen to dominate the cultural life of Mexico.

In spite of a presumed objectivity that claimed the pursuit of positivist knowledge, history became a political tool tied to structures of power that fought to institutionalise particular views of history. The face of the nation would depend on the way in which hegemonic groups manipulated history to produce images that satisfied their interests. The study of historiography in this period must be done keeping in mind the political undertones that characterised such production. This is particularly poignant with regard to the historical production from the first part of the nineteenth century (see Guedea 2001). Attempts to follow a more scientific approach became more dominant towards the end of the century. This new historiography would be led by a generation of historians who –influenced by the work of José Fernando Ramírez (1804-1871)– would help to consolidate the basis of an official historiography (see Pi-Suñers Llorens 2001).

To the work of historians must also be added the contribution that archaeology –in spite of its incipient professionalism– was making to the study of prehispanic cultures. Historians and antiquarians (the term archaeologist was not yet in use) joined hands to produce a body of work reliable enough to support the still fragile skeleton of the nation. In this context the role of the National Museum was essential to this end.<sup>2</sup> Under the government of Porfirio Díaz the Museum received unprecedented financial support which allowed it to enrich the contents of its collections. Academically it contributed with the production of significant scholarly works which were published in its *Anales* (the first volume appeared in 1877). Many well known historians and intellectuals worked directly or indirectly for the Museum making this institution a haven for the exchange and production of knowledge.

Apart from the influence of archaeology, the study of prehispanic cultures benefited greatly from the publication and edition of early colonial manuscripts; and the contribution of foreign scholars like William Prescott whose *History of the Conquest* (1843)<sup>3</sup> became a standard reference for the study of Mexican history. The authority of historical writing in the later part of the nineteenth century was further legitimised by the influence of positivism and rationalism as a theoretical framework to which all scholars had to comply. The clearest example of a history that was both official and reconciliatory is *México a través de los siglos* which became the historical text *par excellence* in the later part of the nineteenth century. Edited by Vicente Riva Palacio, *México a través de los siglos* would become the embodiment of the national sentiment and the epitome of liberal ideologies. This work represented the institutionalisation of a national history in a way that had no precedents, and therefore constitutes an obligatory reference for the study of national identity at the end of the nineteenth century. Its version of history begins to consolidate the basis of an ideology of *mestizaje* which would become the prototype of Mexican nationality, but attention to this point will be given in chapter five.

The vast production of historical works, and the government's interest in promoting the study of the past are both important to situate the role of history painting in the Porfiriato. But before we move into this it is important to delineate the main ideas that shaped the direction of this period's historical enquiry.

After Independence most liberal intellectuals viewed Mexico as country with no national history. The newness of the nation was related to the negation of colonial legacies and the colonial period which was perceived as a shadow in the history of Mexico. Liberal historians sought to link Mexico's prehispanic and postcolonial periods by building a conceptual bridge over New Spain. From this perspective, the history of nationality began with the precolonial period, but it was not until after Independence when this nationality was finally allowed to flourish. It became popular, for example, to associate prehispanic and postcolonial heroes, like Cuauhtémoc and Benito Juárez, after the final victory of the liberal faction in 1867. Conservative intellectuals on the other hand, viewed the legacy of New Spain as the source of Mexican nationality and generally held scornful views in regards to Mexico's prehispanic past. For Lucas Alamán, for example, Cortés was the father of the nation, and not Hidalgo as his liberal counterparts would claim.<sup>4</sup>

The political, and for a long time violent, clashes between liberals and conservatives began to diminish after the defeat of Maximilian and the return of Juárez to the presidency in 1867. This implied a gradual rapprochement in terms of historical perspectives, and the consolidation of an official history during the Porfiriato. Its success was propitiated by a policy of reconciliation which allowed a more fruitful dialogue between liberal and conservative historians. This does not mean however, that discrepancy of opinions were no longer voiced or that conservative vs. liberal views ceased to exist. On the whole difference of opinions with regard to prehispanic and colonial histories continued to permeate the work of liberal and conservative writers. What brought unity instead was the fact that the liberal version of history became the official rhetoric of the State. As a result, prehispanic and postcolonial histories were given prime of place in the construction of national narratives. This is particularly apparent in the production of history painting which concentrated on the depiction of images related to the independence period, contemporary history and prehispanic themes.

The official history consolidated during the Porfiriato therefore helped to homogenise the country by reconciling conservative and liberal perspectives, but it remained on the whole dominated by the views of liberal historians. According to this version, the nation was based on the legacy of prehispanic cultures, and was perceived as relatively young

having begun with the proclamation of Independence from Spain in 1821. The role of historians would be hence to provide the nation with a history and to replace a sphere once occupied by religion for the new 'religión de la patria'.<sup>5</sup> But the nation also needed an imagery through which the official version of history could be propagated to all its citizens and absorbed by the generations to come.

### The historical genre

According to Stephen Bann the Romantic period saw the proliferation of a historical awareness which came to dominate every aspect of cultural production:

No one has ever doubted that one of the most potent causes, and one of the most widespread effects, of Romanticism was a remarkable enhancement of the consciousness of history. From being a literary genre whose 'borders' were open to other forms of literature, history became over half a century or so the paradigmatic form of knowledge to which all others aspired (1995: 4).

He describes this as 'the rise of history' and explains that a historical genre spread across cultural practices such as literature and art.

History painting developed in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century, and became the most virtuous and highly regarded genre throughout the whole of the eighteenth century. Even though in vogue across the continent, history painting responded best to the historical milieu of France. The impact of the French revolution and the rise of the bourgeoisie provided fertile ground for the creativity of history painters such as David who soon became the most respected artist of his time. As Green and Seddon explain, the gradual ascendancy of the bourgeoisie helped to foster the development of this genre because it helped to visualise their views:

Through the discursive practices of art, and the genre of history painting especially, the emergent bourgeois classes found a means to articulate their hegemonic vision of the new Enlightenment principles of liberty and equality. The elevation of history painting lay with its suitability as a voice through which the very idea of the public could be spoken of and spoken for (2000: 9).

In terms of content, the particularities of the genre are therefore closely related to wider social phenomena which provided the basis of its *raison d'être* and infused it with a particular function within that particular milieu. Another characteristic of the genre is its close relationship with the life of art academies, and with the legacy of classicism as taught within these academic institutions. Because of this, its style was determined by notions of Ideal form and classical beauty, and by the stylistic language of romanticism. History paintings were generally very large in size. Their dimensions conformed to the exhibitionary spaces appropriated to their function such as public buildings and the

Academies' Salons. In the hierarchical scale of artistic genres, history painting occupied the highest position because artists had to master the ability to represent figures as well as landscapes. Apart from this, historical accuracy (in terms of costumes and contextual settings) was also required which meant that artists had to study textual sources in order to construct their narratives. An over concern with historical accuracy however, contributed to the gradual discredit of the genre since critics began to claim that they were merely illustrations of historical events that lacked the ability to incite aesthetic pleasure (Green and Seddon 2000:10).

Rather than the formal characteristics of the genre we would like to draw attention here to the function of history painting, and its relationship with the production of historical narratives. Our interest in the subject centres on the narrative and didactic elements of the genre identified by Green and Seddon:

History painting displays not only narrativity but a second characteristic as part of its ambition, that of didactic intent. History painting, in other words, had an ethical and moral dimension in which viewers would in some sense perceive virtue, a virtue both relevant to their own time and one of a universal timeless kind (ibid: 7).

The local and universal qualities conveyed in the selection of subject matter, as well as the 'didactic intent' of history painting, are crucial to an understanding of this genre in the context of Mexico during the Porfiriato.

### **Making history**

Since the development of history painting corresponds to specific cultural and historical circumstances it is not surprising that the adoption of this genre in Mexico did not occur until the later part of the nineteenth century. Before this time the country was dominated by political turmoil, and did not have a centralised government able to concentrate on shaping an image for the nation. This was necessary for the development of the genre since, as explained by Pérez Vejo, the State profitted from the agency of history painting:

El Estado utilizará la pintura de historia como un sistema de coerción ideológica que le permitirá crear consenso social en torno a la existencia de una nación que legitima el ejercicio del poder estatal sobre el conjunto del territorio nacional (2001: 97).<sup>6</sup>

The study of Pérez Vejo centres on the relationship between the State and the production of history painting, and argues that the most intrinsic quality of the genre is its concern with providing images for the nation. His views in this respect are very appropriate for understanding the agency of history painting in the Porfiriato which was indeed helping to construct visual narratives of the nation. Pérez Vejo regrets the fact that the study of

modern nation-States has not properly considered the function of history painting which, he believes, would shed light into the process of their formation. For him the new political system, represented by the centrality of the nation-State, and the agency of history painting cannot be detached:

En el nuevo sistema de legitimación del poder político sin nación no hay Estado, y de ahí ese enorme esfuerzo propagandístico de la pintura de historia decimonónica empeñada tanto en representar a la nación como en representar un tipo de nación determinada;... (ibid: 104).<sup>7</sup>

The particular 'type of nation' sought by the State in Mexico was determined by the liberal version of history earlier explained. This implied the predominance of prehispanic and postcolonial history, but attention here will be given to the representation of prehispanic and conquest themes alone. Following Green and Seddon, and Pérez Vejo we may describe the pragmatic character of the genre as being both didactic –in an ethical and moral sense– and propagandistic in terms of its alliance with the interests of the State. In other words, the new secular State needed an image of the nation to fundament its existence, and history painting fulfilled this role by producing favourable images of the nation that were suitable to this end. The discursive qualities of the genre allowed for a didactic function which was used by the State –just as the Church had used religious paintings to spread the Christian faith– and this in its turn propitiated the gradual abandonment of religious paintings for more secular and national themes.

The difficult task of narrating the history of Mexico through images was to fall upon artists working within the Academy of San Carlos, or bounded by its principles and regulations.<sup>8</sup> As has been noted, the very reason for its being (i.e. the depiction of a national history) implied a symbiotic relationship with the interests of the State. This relationship was beneficial to both parties as long as the artists complied to the official narrative, and the State fulfilled its role as patron. The production of history painting in Mexico during the later part of the nineteenth century was hence characterised by a triple alliance between the Academy, the State and the artists –all of which combined to define the form and content of a national imagery.

The civic character of history painting made the artists reliant on the patronage of the State but its support was often insufficient making it difficult for artists to engage in the production of historical themes. But the artists were not the only ones interested in the success of the genre. Many intellectuals sieged the opportunity to materialise their nationalistic aims through the 'narrativity' and 'didactic intent' that history painting allowed. As a result, many critics reviewing the Academy's Salons urged the government to provide financial support (via the Academy), and to adopt a cultural policy which would

made necessary the demand of commissions. This cultural policy was adopted during the Porfiriato but mainly in regards to monuments and architecture, and did not contribute in a substantial way to ameliorate the situation of academic painters.

To help improve their situation in 1878 Felipe Gutiérrez suggested the creation of a national gallery which would display paintings depicting the history of Mexico its customs and traditions.<sup>9</sup> Gutiérrez' idea is very interesting in relation to history painting because it claimed the authority of the genre to serve as visual documentation, and hence contribute to the production of historical knowledge that could be used by later generations. He regretted, for example, that artists did not have reliable visual references for the creation of history paintings (particularly ancient history i.e. prehispanic), and believed that the depiction of contemporary history, customs and traditions would help future artists wishing to portray events from the nineteenth century. The aim of the gallery would hence be twofold: to preserve the present for future generations, and to provide artists with work. The gallery suggested by Gutiérrez would be filled by sculpture and paintings alone since it did not contemplate the inclusion of objects or any other material remains. This exclusion hints to the self-referentiality of the genre, and illustrates the belief (held by many intellectuals) that art could serve as a tool for the recording of history. In other words, history painting could be illustrative of past events whilst also being actively engaged in the process of 'making history'. Its ability to both convey and produce historical knowledge is one of the most important characteristics of the genre in the context of Porfirian Mexico, and the aspect which infused it with a special agency within the schemes of nation building projects.

### **The textual authority of images**

The ability of the genre to act as a reference source that could be used to complement historical texts is best exemplified by the project for a Mexican pavilion presented by the architects Salazar, Reyes and Alva in 1888. The design of the pavilion was planned to represent Mexico in the Paris International Exhibition of 1889, but it was never built because another project presented by Peñafiel and Anza was given preference over it. The formal characteristics of these two pavilions responded to the government's desire to promote the creation of a national architecture, but detailed attention to this will be given in chapter six.

The unrealised pavilion had three different façades, all of which were based in prehispanic architecture, and it presented a very eclectic fusion of styles taken from the Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Mexica regions (see Godoy 1890: 69-73).<sup>10</sup> The description provided by Salazar gives an extensive account of the sources used by the three architects, and indicates the use of two neo-prehispanic paintings for the composition of the façade

designed by Alva [93] (figure 18). According to this source Alva copied from Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' the shape for the design of the walls in the ground floor in between the trapezoidal windows (Salazar in Godoy 1890: 69-70). The form follows the system of a sloping 'almoadillado'<sup>11</sup> that is indeed present in some prehispanic architecture, but the author decided to copy it from Obregón's. The structure of Alva's wall can be seen in the painting (figure13) through the trapezoidal door behind the large idol on the left. The architectural design of Obregón was also used to compose the doors on the first floor which present an even more clear influence of his work. These doors, like the windows below, are shaped in a trapezoidal form and have, on this level, been crowned with the design that Obregón used to decorate the top of the *icpalli* (Aztec throne) on which Tecpancaltzin sits (ibid: 71). The second painting used by Alva is José María Ibararán's 'El juego de pelota entre los antiguos Mexicanos' [68] (figure19) from which the small step-shaped mouldings decorating the top of the walls have been used for the cornice of the façade (ibid: 71).

References to these two paintings in the description provided by Salazar intermingle with references to other historical sources of renowned prestige such as Kingsborough, Dupaix, Charnay, Waldeck, and Chavero. The book *México a través de los siglos* is also widely cited though only the first volume written by Alfredo Chavero was used. Chavero's book *Historia antigua y de la conquista* (1886) became a standard reference for the study of prehispanic cultures. Apart from providing a thorough and comprehensive study of the subject, Chavero included a considerable amount of illustrations taken from various sources including the ones mentioned above. The paintings by Obregón and Ibararán figure amongst the illustrations of this book, and are the only two neo-prehispanic paintings included in his study. The presence of these two paintings in Chavero's book, and Alva's use of them in his design indicates a dialectical action in the process of making history. On the one hand they act as illustrations of particular historical events (in this case one related to an episode of Toltec history, and the other to a cultural practice found amongst many prehispanic groups), and on the other they have attained the autonomy to act as historical documents in themselves. We may also argue however, that in this case their authority is derived from the fact that they appear in Chavero's book, and that this may have justified Alva's use of the paintings for his design. This is particularly relevant if we consider that Chavero was very critical of his use of visual material. He questioned the veracity of sources, and claimed to have only included images that were trustworthy. His use of images was left clear at the end of the book where he wrote:

He procurado acompañar al texto ilustración auténtica que diese idea perfecta y complementaria del relato, prefiriendo siempre los jeroglíficos y fotografías de

objetos y monumentos y desechando cuanto haya sido obra de la imaginación ó del desengaño (Chavero 1886: n.p).<sup>12</sup>

Chavero's statement served to justify his judgment in the selection of the images used to illustrate his work, and as a by product helped to establish the historical value of Obregón's and Ibararán's paintings. Their inclusion in Chavero's first volume for *México a través de los siglos* integrated these images into the canon of an official national history allowing them to become documentary evidence in themselves. Before they got to this stage however, their acceptance into the canon had already been validated by the Academy of San Carlos. As previously mentioned, Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' was presented for the first history painting competition organized by the Academy of San Carlos in 1869 and honoured with the first prize.

Ibararán's painting was also awarded a prize though in his case it was for one of the history painting competitions which were then established as part of the student's curricula at the Academy.<sup>13</sup> Without the previous recognition of their merit by the Academy it is unlikely that the images would have been included in such an important historical text. This point is important to highlight the complicity between the State, the Academy, and the intellectuals working to legitimise the structure of a national history.

Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' can also help us to consider the way in which history was some times manipulated in order to present a favourable image of the prehispanic. Of all the neo-prehispanic representations produced during the second half of the nineteenth century Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' became one of the most popular and celebrated images. After its acclaimed participation in the XIV Academy's Exhibition in 1869 it became part of the collection being formed by Sánchez Solís, and was later bought by the Academy after his death in 1887. Sánchez Solís is the only individual known to date to have bought or commissioned neo-prehispanic paintings in Mexico. Apart from his artistic patronage Sánchez Solís was also a collector of prehispanic material remains (see Sánchez Arteché 1997, 1998). The point we want to draw attention to however, is not the painting's relationship with the collecting practices of Sánchez Solís, but the official recognition attained by the painting within an institutionalised framework; and the fact that his painting acquired historical validity even though Obregón presented a highly idealised version of the story which does not fully correspond with historical documentation on this event.

Sánchez Arteché (1997, 1998), and Stacie Widdifield (1996) have already presented very interesting interpretations of this composition in relation to the collecting programme of Sánchez Solís. Apart from its relationship with the personal aspirations of Sánchez Solís

however, the study of the painting is interesting because it represents a romantic view of the prehispanic which satisfied a general taste for historical compositions in the Porfiriato. Following our analysis of 'romantic realism', we can see that the classicist undertones of its style were very much in line with the romantic school that dominated artistic production and taste in Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The subject matter of Obregón's composition is based on an event in Toltec history during which Xóchitl is said to have presented the king Tecpancaltzin with a drink known as *pulque*. The entry in Romero de Terrero's catalogue provides the following description: "La joven Xóchitl conducida por sus padres ofrece al rey de Tula, Tecpancaltzin, la primera jícara de pulque descubierto por ella; el príncipe prendado por su belleza la toma por esposa" (1963: 410, entry no. 6).<sup>14</sup> According to Toltec history, this event took place when the Toltecs were at the height of their cultural development, but the events that followed it were in fact responsible for their decline. The incongruence of the image in regards to contemporary historical accounts –like Roa Bárcena's *Ensayo de una Historia Anecdótica* (1862a)–<sup>15</sup> has already been noted by Fausto Ramírez. As Ramírez points out, one of the interesting things about Obregón's painting "es el hecho de soslayar toda referencia a las facetas perturbadoras de esta leyenda" (2003a: 70).<sup>16</sup> The disturbing aspect of the story to which Ramírez refers is that, according to Roa Bárcena, rather than taking her for his wife Tecpancaltzin kidnaps Xóchitl, and an illegitimate son called Meconetzin is born from their illicit union. In Roa Bárcena's account Tecpancaltzin's shameful actions brought disgrace to his kingdom, and marked the beginning of its unstoppable decline. To close the circle of these tragic events, Meconetzin –renamed Topiltzin by Tecpancaltzin when he choose him as his successor– would be the last emperor under whose reign the Toltec empire would finally perish (see Roa Bárcena 1862a: 107-114).

Linked to this story and more truthful to the events is another composition by Isidro Martínez which shows the encounter between Xóchitl and her father Papatzin [18] (figure 20). In this image Xóchitl is not the beautiful princess we see in Obregón's but the mother of an illicit child who has been forced to hide in Tecpancaltzin's palace. This tale is also narrated by Roa Bárcena who recounts how, after learning about Xóchitl's unfortunate situation, Papatzin decides to sneak into Tecpancaltzin's palace dressed up like a beggar in search of his daughter (1862a: 113).<sup>17</sup> Unlike Obregón's painting this image does not present a romantic version of the story narrated by Roa Bárcena. The encounter between Xóchitl and Tecpancaltzin was not the beginning of a love story as 'El descubrimiento del pulque' suggests but rather the catalyst of a series of unfortunate events that contributed to the decline of the Toltec empire. Martínez composition is therefore more 'truthful' in the

sense that it does not portray an idealised version of the prehispanic but rather the shameful results of Tecpancaltzin's illicit affair. Martínez' composition was made for one of the Academy's history painting competitions in 1889,<sup>18</sup> and for that reason it is not a painting but a study or sketch which (as will shall see) was the usual format presented for these occasions. Martínez' and Obregón's compositions therefore portray two events from the same story, but one is positive and romantic whilst the other one is crude and denunciatory. Obregón's interpretation portrays the Toltecs as a virtuous race participating in a universal discourse of love and romance, and excludes any references to the wicked intentions of Tecpancaltzin and the future decline of his empire. Martínez' composition on the other hand presents the drama of its consequences as Papatzin discovers his daughter with an illegitimate son.

So why did Chavero, admittedly concerned with the veracity of his visual material, decide to include Obregón's painting knowing himself that it only presented a partial depiction of the events? The answer to this may be found in the 'romantic cult of history' which Stephen Bann (1995) identifies as a general characteristic of nineteenth century historiography. Bann's study is useful to consider the attitudes and approaches of nineteenth century historians in relation to the mechanisms involved in the process of making history through texts and images. But it also useful for understanding the unclear boundaries between fact and fiction which characterised much of the historical production from this period. Bann explains that nineteenth century historians believed that a certain degree of literary fiction could complement historical narratives without detracting from the veracity of the facts being presented (1995: 22). This attitude is particularly evident in Mexican historiography from the early nineteenth century –especially in the work of Carlos María de Bustamante for example– but a romantic attitude can be seen to prevail even when positivism had taken hold of all disciplinary forms of knowledge. Such an approach can be attributed to the narrative strategies employed by historians whereby 'raw data' is transformed into a succession of progressive events. In the particular case of Mexico these narrative strategies were employed to construct a teleological version of history which gave form and meaning to the image of the nation. Hence although it would indeed be misleading to describe Chavero as a romantic historian his methodological approach is very much in line with what Prosper de Barante wrote in 1828 in his essay 'On history':

" [T]he writers of the 19th century explain and comment on the works which have been left to us by the generations of yesteryear; they seek to discover what circumstances, what state of things exercised an influence on their ideas, on their opinions and on their taste. They enquire not so much into the errors and defects as into the causes which have rendered necessary these errors and defects. In all things it is progression which interests us. We seek in the past for motives which

will give us confidence in the future and we wish to endow the historian with the high mission of the prophet" (quoted in Bann 1995: 26).

Obregón's painting is in many ways an image which incites 'confidence in the future'. By portraying a favourable image of the prehispanic his painting may be said to foresee the gradual progression of Mexico as an independent and modern nation. We must not forget that at the time when Chavero's book was published Mexico was experiencing an unprecedented period of material and economic progress. And that according to the liberal version of history –then adopted as official– the roots of Mexican nationality were grounded in the legacy of prehispanic cultures. In this context, the success of Porfirian Mexico was hence explained as the logical progression of certain prehispanic legacies which were carefully chosen to act as foundational myths for the Mexican nation. In spite of his rigorous scientificism, Chavero's work could not detach itself from a discourse of nationhood and progress which needed the agency of favourable images, and hence a certain degree of creative reinvention.

### History painting in Mexico

The 'rise of history' studied by Bann during the romantic period was very much part of the cultural life of Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth century. Apart from its manifestation in the artistic and intellectual spheres, history would become inseparable from the educational policies adopted by the liberal government. A great deal of time and resources would be spent in order to make obligatory the education of national history in both primary and secondary levels.<sup>19</sup> The education of history became crucial to fostering a sense of collective belonging, and was seen as intrinsic to securing the material and cultural progress of Mexico. Its centrality infused it with a moral and ethical role previously fulfilled by religion. It was now the turn of intellectuals and the State to secure the well-being of the nation by forming future generations of responsible and law abiding citizens. The programme instituted by Gabino Barreda in 1867 through the 'Ley Orgánica de Instrucción', and the inauguration of the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* would become one of the most successful attempts in establishing a homogenous educational system. Barreda's role in consolidating the structure of a national education was reinforced by the institutionalisation of history as an obligatory subject in the national curriculum. By the time Chavero's *Historia antigua* was published in 1886, there was a unified educational system with history as one of the main subjects in its core.

The primacy of history in Mexico's educational system was also reflected in the academic training of the Academy. As part of their artistic training students were asked to submit compositions for the annual and biennial competitions many of which were based on the interpretation of historical themes. In the 1880s and 90s the incidence of prehispanic

themes presented for these competitions increased indicating the Academy's compliance with the official historiography of the Porfiriato. But before we analyse the relationship between the Academy's history painting competitions and official historiography it is necessary to situate the genealogy of neo-prehispanic representation in order to understand the development of the genre.

### **The genealogy of neo-prehispanic representations**

In the field of academic painting an interest in the depiction of prehispanic history began to be expressed first in the discipline of landscape painting. As already mentioned, Landesio's students presented some of the earliest neo-prehispanic compositions known to date before Pina began to request similar themes from his students in the classes of figure painting.

Thanks to the Academy's exhibition catalogues (see Romero de Terreros 1963) and Landesio's book *La Pintura General o de Paisaje* (1867) we know that the following historical landscapes were made by Luis Coto and José María Velasco during Landesio's tenure at the Academy: Coto 'La fundación de Tenochtitlán' (1863) (figure 21), 'Nezahualcóyotl salvado por la fidelidad de sus súbditos' (ca. 1865) (figure 22), and 'Moctezuma II con su sequito' [47] (ca 1867). Velasco: 'Xochitzin propone a Huactli para jefe de los chichimecas' [49] (ca. 1865),<sup>20</sup> and 'La caza de los antiguos aztecas' [46] (1865) (figure 23).<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to note that the creation of many of these compositions coincided with the period of Maximilian's reign (1864-67). This suggests that Landesio may have encouraged his students to paint historical landscapes in response to Maximilian's distinctive cultural politics. During his reign Maximilian took a great interest in Mexican history, and supported the study and preservation of prehispanic heritage (as well as trying to ameliorate the situation of contemporary *indígenas*). Maximilian was also interested in art and he commissioned Mexican artists to paint the portraits of important historical figures.<sup>22</sup> Maximilian's interest in Mexican paintings portraying national themes is also confirmed by his acquisition of Coto's 'La fundación de Tenochtitlán'.<sup>23</sup>

The earliest precursor of the genre however, was Manuel Vilar who made three sculptures of prehispanic figures in the 1850s: 'La Malinche' (1852) (figure 24), 'Tlahuicole' (1852) (figure 25), and 'Moctezuma' (1850) (figure 26).<sup>24</sup> Vilar's sculptures are marked by a strong classicism. In his Tlahuicole, for example, Vilar used the subject to display his ability to create a 'perfect' body following the classical notions of Ideal Beauty. Tlahuicole looks more like a Greek or Roman god than a Tlaxcaltecan warrior.<sup>25</sup> For his Moctezuma and Malinche Vilar turned his attention from the study of anatomy to the interpretation of

historical characters through dress. The combination between their physiognomies (particularly that of Malinche) and Vilar's interpretation of prehispanic dress are a perfect example of the classical tradition characterised by the precepts of 'unity and balance'.

Another example of sculpture made before the Porfiriato is Miguel Noreña's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas convirtiendo a una familia azteca' from 1865 (figure 27). Noreña's composition is a proud representative of the neoclassical school taught at the Academy under the direction of Manuel Vilar, and one of the clearest examples of how prehispanic themes were translated into academic styles. Noreña's bass relief may be described as western aesthetics with an indigenous slant showing how, as discussed in the previous chapter, experimentation was mainly expressed in relation to content rather than style. Comparing Noreña's interpretation of Fray Bartolomé with Parra's produced a decade later can help us trace the influence of realism in the academic art of Mexico. Even though neo-prehispanic representations continued to centre on the experimentation of content rather than style, the schools of realism and naturalism began to facilitate the interpretation of Amerindian physiognomies as Parra's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' and Jara's 'La fundación de Tenochtitlán' testify.

In the context of the Academy of San Carlos the origins of the genre can therefore be found in the work of Vilar –in the field of sculpture– and later in the compositions made for the classes of landscape painting directed by Landesio. The shift from landscape painting to figure painting at the end of the nineteenth century would allow history painters to concentrate on the depiction of important historical figures like Cortés, Moctezuma II, and Cuauhtémoc as well as placing emphasis on the relevance of particular historical events. The centrality of the figure in history painting would prove a better medium to consolidate the nationalistic projects of the Porfiriato which placed a great emphasis on the romantic cult of heroes.

Outside the Academy, Fausto Ramírez has pointed out that Gerardo Suárez presented a painting entitled 'Cuauhtémoc en presencia de Cortés' [45] for the exhibition of the *Sociedad Jalisciense de Bellas Artes* in 1861 (1985: 75).<sup>26</sup> According to Ramírez an interest in the depiction of national history was publicly manifested first during the exhibitions organized by the *Sociedad Jalisciense* between 1857 and 1865. Ramírez explains that: "los artistas tapatíos se adelantaron a los capitalinos en el tratamiento de asuntos históricos nacionales" (2001: 104).<sup>27</sup>

Also outside the Academy and prior to the compositions produced in this institution during the 1880s and 1890s we also need to mention the works commissioned by Sánchez Solís

in the 1870s. Sánchez Solís asked some of the most prestigious artists of his time to make the following paintings: Luis Coto 'Reinado de Xolotl en Texcoco' [52] (1870s), Velasco 'La ceremonia del fuego nuevo' [55] (1870s), Santiago Rebull 'La rendición de Cuauhtémoc' [54] (1870s), José Salomé Pina 'Banquete de Nezahualcóyotl' [53] (1870s), and Rodrigo Gutiérrez 'El senado de Tlaxcala' (1875).<sup>28</sup> The painting 'El descubrimiento del pulque' (1869) by José Obregón is also believed to have been commissioned by Sánchez Solís.<sup>29</sup> Of these, however, only Gutiérrez' painting was finished.<sup>30</sup> Sánchez Solís commissioned these paintings to complement his collection of prehispanic objects, and with the aim of opening a gallery in 1877 which would be open to the general public, but as a result of political differences with Porfirio Díaz the gallery remained a project (Sánchez Arteché 1998: 29).

Taking into consideration the paintings commissioned by Sánchez Solís we can see that a considerable amount of works were made in the 1870s by artists working in and outside the Academy. Some of the artists who produced neo-prehispanic representations in this period were Alejandro Casarín, Pablo Valdés, Félix Parra and Petronilo Monroy (see appendix B). It is worth noting that some of these paintings were small which was unusual for the genre as history paintings tended to be large. Differences in size indicates that some of these works were probably made with the intention of being sold to private individuals; and hence that a market, albeit small, may have existed for these kinds of representations.

Amongst the works produced before the Porfiriato one painting in particular has been accepted as the forebear of the genre: José Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' (1869). In the words of Ramírez the painting of Obregón: "inaugura en la academia capitalina el interés de los pintores de figura por tematizar antiguos episodios nacionales" (1985: 75).<sup>31</sup> Alongside Obregón's painting, we must also place Félix Parra's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas', and Rodrigo Gutiérrez 'El senado de Tlaxcala' (1875). Together these three paintings constitute the supporting pillars of the genre.

### **Annual and biennial competitions**

In spite of the previous examples, the years between 1880 and 1900 were by far the most productive in terms of the production of neo-prehispanic representations. One of the most important points to highlight in relation to their production is the fact that during this period these images were mainly produced as a result of annual and biennial competitions.<sup>32</sup> The competitions were part of the student's artistic training at the Academy and were therefore not open to artists working outside this institution. The practice of annual competitions was established in 1843 when the new reforms were drafted (Uribe 1987: 87), and the biennial competitions were introduced in 1879 by Román S. de Lascuráin.<sup>33</sup>

Annual competitions seem to have been mainly used as exercises to help the students develop their interpretative skills, whilst the main objective of biennial competitions was to assess the level of advanced students in order to determine whether they could be granted a professional degree.<sup>34</sup> In other words, they acted as professional exams and were used by the professors of the Academy to examine the level of creativity and craftsmanship achieved by their students. There is insufficient information in regard to the exact procedures involved in the participation of students in biennial competitions, but some general characteristics can be ascertained from the existing documentation.<sup>35</sup> In order to participate the students had to have been invited to take part. Having chosen the participants the professor of each discipline prepared a document containing information on the subject matter to be developed. This document was often complemented by historical references in order to help the student situate the contextual elements of his interpretation.<sup>36</sup> On the day selected for this event the participants were given this information and were assigned five hours<sup>37</sup> to produce a sketch based on the thematic subject stipulated by their tutors. This sketch was made without the help of any supplementary documentation and was followed by the production of a colour sketch on the next day. With these two studies the board of professors involved in the selection process would determine who was capable of proceeding to the next stage. The successful candidates were then given a five month period to work on the creation of a *cartón*, and its subsequent realization on canvas:

Durante los cinco meses que la ley concede, el ejecutante desarrolla el tema en cartón, con modelos que la Academia le proporciona; luego emprende la obra definitiva en lienzo.<sup>38</sup>

With the finished version on canvas the judges would decide who had achieved the necessary level to begin their professional careers. The Academy reserved the right to acquire the winning compositions which explains why many of the award winning paintings are today in the collections of the MUNAL.<sup>39</sup> In regard to their periodicity annual competitions took place in the months of July, August and September; and biennial ones in odd numbered years (i.e. 1889, 1891, 1893, etc).

Unfortunately, the documentation available containing information on the thematic content of competitions is scarce.<sup>40</sup> What there is has been recorded in the catalogues of Báez Macías thanks to whom we know about some of the themes that were selected for these occasions. Also apparent in the documentation registered by Báez is the fact that José Salomé Pina stipulated most of the subjects given to the students in the classes of figure painting, and that José María Velasco did the same for the classes of landscape painting. Based on this information it is possible to date and identify some of the competition

themes that were taken from prehispanic history, and to establish what neo-prehispanic compositions were made for the classes of sculpture, painting and engraving. An important point to note in this respect is that the incidence of these are noticeably more recurrent in the discipline of figure painting.

### **Prehispanic themes in history painting competitions**

Without going too deeply into the history of education during the Porfiriato, which would detract from the present study, I want to consider the role of history painting competitions in the Academy as part of this growth in historical consciousness. And analyse the kind of prehispanic subjects that were chosen for these events in order to explore the relationship between their stories and the national history which the government was trying to promote.

For the sake of clarity and space I will only consider the most recurrent themes, and the topics for which I have reliable information (please refer to Appendix A for further information on competition themes, dates, and historical sources). To facilitate the analysis I have divided the subjects into three broad areas: conquest, premonitions, and prehispanic history (see Table 1). The last category includes traditions, religion, and myths.

Starting with prehispanic history we can find clear analogies between the themes selected here and late nineteenth century prehispanic historiography. One of the most obvious correspondences is the emphasis given to the Nahua/Toltec, Chichimec, and Aztec/Mexica histories. These three groups were considered as the 'founding fathers' of the Mexican nation, and official historiography tended to expand more on their histories compared to that of other prehispanic cultures.<sup>41</sup> This approach reflected the increasing centralisation of the State, and its attempts to foster unification by concentrating the essence of nationality in the cultures of central Mexico. The centrality of these three cultures is in fact more evident in history painting competitions than official historiography since there are no other prehispanic groups represented in their studies. In terms of the genre as a whole we can also notice the predominance of themes related to the prehispanic cultures of central Mexico.

Looking more closely we can also see that their chronology (this timescale does not correspond with the dates when the studies were presented) begins with one of the foundational myths associated with the Nahuas, and follows the events that led to the establishment of the Aztec empire. This chronology is also concordant with prehispanic historiography. The extermination of the giants or *quiname* refers to the final establishment of the Nahua in the central region,<sup>42</sup> and their consequent cultural influence

in the history of the Toltec empire. The Nahuatl were generally perceived as one of the most advanced and civilised groups, and believed to be the direct ancestors of the Toltecs. Chavero for example wrote that the "Nahoas fueron una raza inteligente que llegó a gran adelanto" (1886: 91).<sup>43</sup> And he later refers to the Toltecs as 'pure nahoas' describing them as "[p]ueblo privilegiado en todo, [que] llegó al sumo poderío y á la más envidiable grandeza" (ibid: 360-61).<sup>44</sup>

Table 1. Prehispanic and conquest themes

Conquest	<p>'Moctezuma recibe noticias de la llegada de los españoles' [16, 73, 75].</p> <p>'La visita de Cortés a Moctezuma' [66].</p> <p>'Un grupo de españoles visitan el mercado de Tlatelolco' [13].</p> <p>'Cortes acompañado del emperador Moctezuma ve la ciudad desde el templo de Tlatelolco'.</p> <p>'Hernán Cortés libera a Moctezuma' [7, 15].</p> <p>'Captura de Cortés en Xochimilco' [6].</p> <p>'El asedio de Tenochtitlán' [8].</p> <p>'Mexicas abandonan su ciudad después de la rendición' [17].</p>
Premonitions	<p>'Presagio Azteca: Un pájaro con cabeza de hombre' [24].</p> <p>'Moctezuma escucha anuncios de malos augurios' [26].</p> <p>'Moctezuma II visita en Chapultepec los retratos de los monarcas, sus antepasados' [31, 33, 35, 79, 80].</p> <p>'Entrevista de Moctezuma y Nezahualpilli' [10].</p>
Prehispanic	<p>'Los Nahuas exterminan a los gigantes' [21].</p> <p>'Quetzalcóatl descubre el maíz' [11].</p> <p>'Quetzalcóatl llora sentado sobre una peña' [30].</p> <p>'Papatzin se introduce en palacio' [18, 86].</p> <p>'Huemantzin pinta en un libro la historia de sus antepasados' [22].</p> <p>'Elección de un caudillo Chichimeca' [19, 20].</p> <p>'La fundación de Tenochtitlán' [25, 63, 69-71].</p> <p>'El rey de Texcoco enfrentadose a los soldados de Tezozomoc pide a su hijo Nezahualcóyotl se oculte en la copa de un capulín'</p> <p>'El baño de Nezahualcóyotl'</p> <p>'Celebración a las deidades de la agricultura Tzinteotl y Chicomecoatl' [29].</p> <p>'El sacrificio de un joven en el mes Toxatl' [27].</p> <p>'El mensajero del Sol' [9].</p> <p>'El sacrificio gladiatorio, el combate de Tlahuicole'</p>

The Toltecs were generally considered as the forbearers of a cultural tradition which would allow later cultures (namely the Chichimecs and Mexicas) to flourish. They were the first to build an empire and uphold a cultural supremacy over the native groups of the 'Anáhuac' (the Valley of Mexico and its surroundings). Due to their centrality in the development of central Mexico the Toltec empire was one of the most celebrated cultures in nineteenth century historiography, and was generally portrayed as an agent of high culture and civilisation. From the themes stated above 'Quetzalcóatl descubre el maíz', 'Quetzalcóatl llora sentado sobre una peña', 'Papatzin se introduce en palacio', and 'Huemantzin pinta en un libro la historia de sus antepasados' (figure 28) are related to Toltec history. The figure of Quetzalcóatl will be discussed at length in chapter five due to his centrality in the history of Mexico, and the history of Papatzin has already been dealt with so we will just briefly mention the significance of Huemantzin. Huemantzin was the priest that guided the Toltecs to their cultural supremacy thanks to his wisdom and divinatory skills. Foreseeing the end of the empire Huemantzin decided to make a book or *teoamoxtli* to record the history of the Toltecs. His book contained past events but also predictions on its decline and the eventual arrival of Europeans (see Roa Bárcena 1862a: 75-77). One of these predictions was that the empire would perish under the reign of Topiltzin (son of Xóchitl and Tecpancaltzin) which means that both stories are in a sense related. The important point about the story of Huemantzin however, is the notion of a 'historical book' being made in this period.

The idea that prehispanic cultures had no history because they lacked a phonetic scripture and hence 'books' in the 'proper' (occidental) sense, contributed to their discredit as barbaric or 'uncivilised'. Mexican historians were trying to counteract this misconception by studying prehispanic codices and languages, and disentangling colonial manuscripts in order to show the cultural advancement of certain prehispanic groups based on their ability to record their own history. Talking about Bustamante's *Mañanas de la Alameda de México* (1835) for example, Guy Rozat explains that his appraisal of the Toltecs was very much based on the fact that they had managed to leave a record of their history:

La posibilidad de transmitir la historia propia se vuelve en esa primera mitad del siglo XIX como el acto eminente que muestra el grado de civilización alcanzado por una sociedad, lo que confirma la importancia ideológica de la constitución de ese nuevo saber en la historia cultural del siglo XIX (2001: 53).<sup>45</sup>

It is also interesting to note that Chavero divided his *Historia antigua* into two main periods: 'Prehistoric' and 'Ancient history'; and that the beginning of his ancient history is

dominated by the history of the Toltecs. According to Chavero the 'historical' period begins with the study of cultures:

[C]on cuyo estudio comienzan las historias hasta ahora escritas; por que principian á deslindarse las razas y á determinarse la geografía; por que ya hay series de hechos que á naciones determinadas ó á personalidades conocidas se relacionan, y sobre todo, por que empezamos á tener una cronología... (1886: 238).<sup>46</sup>

Orozco y Berra follows a similar approach by separating the Toltecs from previous cultures which he includes under the heading 'Pueblos Oscuros. Pueblos sin Historia' (1880 vol. 3). The 'proper' history of Mexico therefore begins with the history of the Nahua/Toltec empire with Huemantzin as its first 'historian', and his book may be seen to represent the conceptual point at which prehispanic and nineteenth century historiographies meet.

The decline of the Toltec empire was followed by the predominance of the Chichimecs in the area known as 'Anáhuac'. Their history is complex due to a complicated set of alliances with the groups already established in the region. Briefly summarised the Chichimecs established themselves in what had once been Toltec territory taking over some of their history and traditions; and had a strong cultural and political influence in the kingdoms of Tlaxcala, Texcoco and Atzacapozalco. Their success was achieved thanks to the wise leadership of Xolotl who managed to expand his empire through a complex web of alliances and intermarriages (see Orozco y Berra 1880 vol. 3, and Chavero 1886). The image 'Elección de un caudillo chichimeca' (figure 29) refers to the beginning of the Chichimec empire when the sorcerer Xochitzin suggest that they take Huactli as their leader. According to Roa Bárcena, from which the source was taken, Xochitzin's advice helped to secure the dominance of the Chichimecs in the Anáhuac.<sup>47</sup>

The kingdoms that developed from the political and military networks established by the Chichimecs were those which the Aztecs would confront upon their arrival in the valley of Mexico. Although from a different ethnic background, as their military and political power grew the Mexica empire would encompass much of what had once been Chichimec territory. This takes us to the foundation of Tenochtitlán and to the eventual supremacy of the Mexicas who would in turn appropriate the cultural legacies of the Toltecs.

'The foundation of Tenochtitlán' is followed by two episodes from the history of Texcoco which make reference to the kingdom of Nezahualcóyotl. For nineteenth century historiography both Texcoco and Nezahualcóyotl stood for notions of high culture and civilisation (see chapter five), and Texcoco was sometimes referred to as the 'Athens' of

the Anáhuac. Nezahualcóyotl was a recurrent figure in the nationalist literature of the late nineteenth century. The virtuous character of this king was inherited from his father Ixtlilxóchitl and was also a quality of his son Nezahualpilli who would succeed him in the throne. The existence of these two sketches is hence concordant with an official historiography which sought to celebrate the figure of Nezahualcóyotl as a king (or dynasty if we include his father and son) whose reign contrasted with the more violent and idolatrous practices of the Mexicas. In other words, the history of Texcoco helped to counterbalance the despotic and militaristic qualities of the Mexicas, and to provide a more positive image of the prehispanic. The celebration of Texcoco and its kings was also a way of highlighting the cultural advancement of the Mexica empire in general because they formed part of the triple alliance between Tlacopan, Tenochtitlán and Texcoco.

The last four sketches do not refer to historical events as such (except for the one depicting Tlahuicole), but to cultural practices linked to prehispanic religions.

'Celebración a las deidades de la agricultura Tzintēotl y Chicomecoatl' (figure 30) and, 'El sacrificio de un joven en el mes Toxatl' (figure 31) relate to the practice of rituals during two months of the Aztec calendar known as *Tonalamatl*. The first is linked to the third month *Tozoztontli* during which the agricultural goddesses Tzintēotl and Chicomecoatl were revered; and the second to the fifth month *toxcatl* which was one of the most important celebrations in the Aztec calendar. According to the source used for the theme on the agricultural goddesses this was the only ritual in their calendar that did not involve human sacrifice (see Pi y Margall 1892: 175). Only offerings of flowers and agricultural products were used, and its function was to secure the production of corn (the main crop in their diet).<sup>48</sup> The festivity during the month of *Toxatl* however was quite the opposite. It was meant to celebrate the god Tezcatlipoca who was one of the most important gods in Aztec religion. For this occasion a young man was chosen to be Tezcatlipoca's representative on earth, and during one year he enjoyed a life of luxurious pleasures. At the end of this period his privileged existence was brought to an end by the sacrificial knife of a priest in the temple of Tezcatlipoca. After the sacrifice, his head was cut and placed in the *Tzompantli* and parts of his body eaten by selected members of society. As part of the celebrations a small clay flute was played at the beginning of the month by a priest who dressed up like Tezcatlipoca. At the sound of this instrument everyone would kneel on the ground and eat earth whilst showing repent (if a guilty conscience) or asking for future favours (see Clavijero 2003: 258 [1781], and Chavero 1886: 691-92).

The remaining two 'El mensajero del sol' (figure 32), and 'El sacrificio gladiatorio, el combate de Tlahuicole' are also about sacrificial practices, but in this case the sacrifice was linked to the sphere of military action and war. In the first instance a prisoner was

chosen to act as a 'messenger', and made to climb to the top of the sun's temple carrying a votive prayer to the god. Once at the top the prisoner would ask the god to secure future victories for the Mexica warriors, and was then sacrificed after delivering his plea. The cult to the sun god was associated with war, and this rite took place in the main temple of the 'sun warriors' clan (see Clavijero 2003 [1781], and Chavero 1886).<sup>49</sup> For 'El sacrificio gladiatorio' prisoners were tied to a cylindrical stone called *Temalácatl* and given feeble arms to defend themselves. In the case of Tlahuicole the story is significant because he was a celebrated Tlaxcaltecan warrior who was captured by the Aztecs and forced to fight on their side. Since the Tlaxcaltecs were one of their main rivals, Tlahuicole refused to fight against his own people and asked to die whilst fighting in the gladiatory contest (see for example Chavero 1886: 821).

But how could the depiction of sacrifice be accommodated in the sphere of academic art in the nineteenth century? We should perhaps begin by stating that historians such as Chavero, and Orozco y Berra included detailed accounts of sacrificial practices in their *Historias*. And that, although severely condemned, the reality of sacrifice as an essential part of prehispanic religions was never hidden from view in prehispanic historiography. Any one wishing to know about sacrificial practices had access to long and detailed descriptions of these in both colonial and contemporary sources. Visual references however, were a lot less common. There are only a few academic paintings related to sacrificial practices made before the 1880s. Two of these are 'El sacrificio de una princesa Acolhua' [60] (ca. 1875) by Petronilo Monroy (figure 33), and 'La piedra del sacrificio' [57] (ca. 1873) by Alejandro Casarín. Unfortunately Casarín's painting has not been located<sup>50</sup> so we do not know the characteristics of the composition, but Monroy's 'El sacrificio de una princesa Acolhua' is relatively well known thanks to its inclusion in the collections of the Academy. His painting relates to an event in Mexica history when the Aztecs sacrificed the daughter of an Acolhua king in retaliation for his animosity and disrespectful mockery (see for example Chavero 1886: 503). The image shows the moment in which the king enters the dimly lit room where the princess has been sacrificed, and realises that the figure lying on the sacrificial stone is his daughter.

The problematic depiction of a prehispanic practice which, although part of our history, most Mexicans felt ashamed of was resolved by Monroy by choosing the moment after the sacrifice had taken place. Even though the painting refers to a gruesome event this is tamed by the fact that the actual moment of the sacrifice is not shown, and we are only left with the tragic consequences of its aftermath. A similar tactic was employed by Carlos Rivera in his sketch 'El mensjero del Sol', and the sketches for 'El sacrificio de un joven en el mes Toxatl'.<sup>51</sup> In the first instance (figure 32) the image shows the prisoner standing

on top of a round stone, probably delivering his speech to the god, before he is offered in sacrifice. And in the second (figure 31), a figure in prehispanic dress can be seen walking whilst various other figures kneel on the ground. Rather than depicting the moment when the youth representing Tezcatlipoca was killed in sacrifice the students chose a different temporal frame which made reference to the event without showing it. The only painting which depicts the actual moment of sacrifice and expands on the depiction of violence is Adrián Unzueta's 'El Tzompantli' (figure 9). The rarity of its subject matter and formal qualities makes it extremely interesting, but since it does not correspond to the topic of history painting competitions here addressed attention will be given to it later.

As we can see, sacrifice and references to dubious ritual practices were not excluded from official historiography or pictorial art but, unlike textual documents, the visual representation of sacrifice tended to focus on the events prior or subsequent to the sacrificial act. By doing so, art could follow prehispanic historiography without risking to betray the qualities which differentiated this practice from other forms of cultural representation. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the function of art in Mexico during this period hoped to incite moral values by interpreting reality, and not by portraying the 'vulgarity' or crudeness of experience.

Returning to the two remaining categories, 'conquest' and 'premonitions', we can also see that their themes correspond with nineteenth century historiography. Rather than referring to two different historical periods they both relate to the encompassing event of conquest and colonisation, but they have been separated in order to highlight the amount of themes related to omens and premonitions. The main point to draw attention to in relation to these is their association with the personality of Moctezuma II. It is obvious that the premonitions would have taken place during his reign, but what historians often emphasised was the way in which these omens had obscured Moctezuma's ability to make rational decisions. The monarch was often portrayed as an arrogant leader, who driven by religious fanaticism, had contributed to the decline of his empire. In nineteenth century historiography Moctezuma II was presented as a weak king who instead of fighting relented to the omens predicting the end of his empire. The sketches of premonitions are hence about events that occurred prior to the collapse of the Mexica empire, but they are also about Moctezuma's fatalistic outlook and his eventual disposition to help Cortés. Although not a premonition in itself, the theme 'Moctezuma II visita en Chapultepec los retratos de los monarcas, sus antepasados' has been included in this section because the story is related to this topic. According to historical records, Moctezuma II asked to have his portrait carved in the cliffs of Chapultepec next to those of his predecessors because a series of omens had predicted the fall of his empire.<sup>52</sup> As

explained by Fausto Ramírez "este episodio forma parte de los presagios que precedieron a la conquista de México, un asunto que suscitó el mayor interés entre los pintores de finales del siglo XIX".<sup>53</sup>

Finally, in relation to the themes chosen for events related to the conquest it is interesting to note the variety of their subject matter. Following a chronological order we may begin with the moment in which Moctezuma is shown the arrival of the Spanish in the painted scrolls that one of his vassals had made depicting their ships and soldiers. Then we leap forward to one of the encounters between Moctezuma and Cortés. The historical significance of this event goes without saying but the point to notice here is the fact that this was not their first encounter. Their first meeting was at the entrance to the city when Cortés first arrived to Tenochtitlán, and this was followed by a second encounter when Moctezuma is said to have visited Cortés in the quarters which he had assigned for the visiting spaniards. The encounter chosen for the Academy's (biennial) competition however, was when Cortés accompanied by 'la malinche' and some of his men went to the palace of Moctezuma in order to explain to the king the purpose of his presence (figure 34). Rather than choosing the moment when these two figures first met, the image shows a court-like scene (reminiscent of European regal imagery) where Cortés and Moctezuma are trying to establish the future nature of their relationship.

The following two themes 'Un grupo de españoles visitan el mercado de Tlatelolco', and 'Cortés acompañado del emperador Moctezuma ve la ciudad desde el templo de Tlatelolco', make reference to some of the impressions that Tenochtitlán left in the memory of *conquistadores*. According to historical records after their second encounter Cortés asked Moctezuma to allow him and his soldiers to visit the city (see for example Chavero 1886). Agreeing to his request, Cortés was then escorted to the market of Tlatelolco and to the temple of the same name. Bernal Díaz del Castillo who was one of his soldiers, and from whom the information was taken for the competition, wrote a long description about this experience. His text emphasises the variety and exoticism of the market, and the beauty of the city as seen from the top of the Temple.<sup>54</sup> These images are about the richness and magnificence of Tenochtitlán as a mythical city that has remained dear in the memory of all Mexicans.

Following this we have the episode in which Cortés removes the shackles from Moctezuma's feet and apologises for his actions. This event refers to Cortés' decision to take Moctezuma prisoner in order to prevent the possibility of attacks in retaliation for their presence in Tenochtitlán. Once again the selection of this episode is significant because it depicts Cortés in the act of releasing Moctezuma rather than taking him prisoner. We may

interpret this in terms of an image of Cortés as having been at times brutal, but also noble and brave. This image corresponds with most nineteenth century historiography which both condemned and celebrated the figure of Cortés. Although there was no consensus as to whether he was the 'father of the nation' (for the liberals it was Hidalgo and for the conservatives Cortés) Cortés was generally presented as a skilful leader who managed to accomplish an amazing deed.

Finally we have two themes connected with the brave resistance presented by the Mexicas against the Spanish *conquistadores* and their allies: 'Captura de Cortés en Xochimilco', and 'El asedio de Tenochtitlán'. And the final defeat of their forces as they abandon their city in 'Mexicas abandonan su ciudad despues de la rendicion'.

In short, the competition themes here exposed follow the history of central Mexico from the arrival of the Toltecs to the raise and fall of the Aztec empire, and as we have seen these follow the narratives of an official historiography. The histories told by them may be seen to sustain the creation of foundational myths which were intrinsic to an ideology of nationhood. The selection of prehispanic themes assigned for the Academy of San Carlos' history painting competitions can help us to understand particular attitudes towards the prehispanic, and the way in which their history was appropriated by an official historiography. The production of these sketches must therefore be placed in a context when historiography was more than a source of knowledge about the past, and the education of history considered paramount to the liberal aims of the Porfirian government. Unlike historical texts which provided detailed accounts of historical events however, the art students at the Academy and their teachers could choose temporal frames for their representations that may avoid or highlight certain qualities about those events. In other words, whilst the aim of textual narratives was to provide a record of the 'full story' images could choose to freeze a particular moment, and were as a result more effective at portraying favourable images of the prehispanic.

### **Images with an agency<sup>55</sup>**

The Academy's competitions mainly operated at the level of educational practices since most of them were only made as sketches and, if at all, exhibited for a brief time during one of the Academy's exhibitions. So it would be misleading to pretend that on the whole the images produced for the history painting competitions would have had an active role in the visual construction of a national imagery. The analysis presented above was carried out in order to understand why certain themes were chosen for the Academy's competitions and for this reason all the subjects were considered together regardless of whether they were made for the annual or biennial competitions. But we must now consider those images which had a more active role thanks to their display in exhibitions

in the country or abroad, and their reproduction in the printing press. For this reason the following analysis will not be limited to those which were specifically made for history painting competitions.

One way of assessing what kind of images the Academy and the government sought to promote may be gained by looking at the paintings which were sent to represent Mexico at international exhibitions. The Chicago international fair of 1893 presents a good case in point because the government sent a considerable amount of neo-prehispanic representations for this occasion. To understand the agency of these images in the context of the Chicago international fair we must highlight the fact that the exhibition was organised to commemorate the arrival of Columbus to the Americas. The significance of this event was also marked in Spain with an international exhibition in Madrid the previous year, but the bulk of the material sent for this occasion appears to have been mainly archaeological (see Del Paso y Troncoso 1892). The emphasis given to the field of artistic production in the Chicago fair is confirmed by the fact that two paintings were specially commissioned in the Academy for this event: 'La tortura de Cuauhtémoc' [72] by Leandro Izaguirre (figure 35), and 'La rendición de Cuauhtémoc' [74] by Joaquín Ramírez (figure 36). The thematic choice for these two large canvasses is telling of how much certain prehispanic elements had become essential to discourses of nationhood.

Apart from these two canvases the following neo-prehispanic images were displayed: 'El descubrimiento del pulque' by José Obregón, 'La deliberación del senado de Tlaxcala' by Rodrigo Gutiérrez, 'Los nahuas exterminan a los gigantes' by Isidro Martínez,<sup>58</sup> 'El letargo de la princesa Papatzin' [76] by Isidro Martínez, 'El bautismo en tiempo de los aztecas' [77] by Manuel Ramírez Díaz, 'Moctezuma II en el templo recibe el nombramiento de monarca' [78] by Adrián Unzueta, and 'La fundación de Tenochtitlán' by Leandro Izaguirre and José Jara.

Without going into an in depth analysis of the stories to which they refer, we can discern certain elements that may explain why those images were chosen. The most obvious point is that they all portrayed favourable images of the prehispanic. And they all combined –with various degrees of success– aesthetic (style) and symbolic (content) qualities which made them worthy representatives of Mexican modern art. Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque', and Gutiérrez' 'La deliberación del senado de Tlaxcala' for example had already been accepted into the canon of Mexican art. Similarly to Obregón, Gutiérrez helped to immortalise an event in prehispanic history by translating it into an Occidentalising discourse which determined the nature of its form and content. In this case the event was related to Tlaxcaltecan history, and its transformation consisted on

framing a dispute between Xicotencatl the Young, and his people,<sup>57</sup> in terms of a democratic debate where the participants behave in a civilised and ordered manner. The word 'senate' in its title gives clear indication of the democratic and political notions it was seeking to convey.<sup>58</sup>

In the case of 'El letargo de la princesa Papatzin' and 'El bautismo en tiempo de los Aztecas', the prehispanic is redeemed within a framework of Christianity because they both relate to an idea of prehispanic evangelisation. The relationship between *patriotismo criollo* (creole patriotism) and the possibility of a prehispanic evangelisation will be discussed at length in chapter five. For now it will suffice to say that the similarities between certain prehispanic rituals, like 'baptism', were used to fundament theories about a common Christian origin. The story of princess Papatzin belongs to tales of pre-conquest premonitions but it is also about conversion to Christianity. According to Clavijero and Roa Bárcena, princess Papatzin was a sister of Moctezuma II who died and was resurrected in order to foretell the arrival of Spaniards. Papatzin was found by a little girl whom she asked to send notice of her resurrection. Once in the presence of Moctezuma II Papatzin narrated the visions of her lethargy in which a figure, described as an apostle, showed her the true religion of Christianity and the inescapable reality of conquest. In the painting by Isidro Martínez (figure 37) only female figures appear. Martínez represented the moment in which Papatzin is found by one her servants and the little girl. Horrified by the vision, Papatzin's servant lies on the ground covering her face whilst the little girl runs to call her mother.

In regard to the remaining three paintings ('Los nahuas exterminan a los gigantes', 'La fundación de Tenochtitlán', and 'Moctezuma II en el templo recibe el nombramiento de monarca'), their symbolism is more easily grasped since they all operate at the level of foundational myths.

The two large images depicting scenes from the life of Cuauhtémoc are the only ones which present a comment on the experience of conquest and colonisation. The image of Cuauhtémoc as one of Mexico's most celebrated heroes had been gathering force for many years, and was by then a national icon of far reaching significance (see chapter six). The painting by Ramírez (figure 36) depicts the apprehension of Cuauhtémoc when he is said to have asked Cortés to kill him, and Cortés replied that he would be respected and treated like the brave leader he had proved to be. In contrast to Ramírez', Izaguirre's composition (figure 35) shows a different side of Cortés since he allowed his men to torture him in order to find out the location of Moctezuma's treasure. As Fausto Ramírez has pointed out, the paintings by Izaguirre and Ramírez copy the thematic content of the

bass-reliefs that were made for the monument to Cuauhtémoc in *Paseo de la Reforma* (2003b). These bass-reliefs and the monument will be analysed in more detail in the following chapter. The point to consider here is the thematic content of these images which need to be considered in tandem in order to understand their agency in the context of the Porfiriato.

Ramírez explains that the depiction of Cuauhtémoc's apprehension had a long history because it marked the end of the Aztec empire, and was therefore also represented during the colonial period; but that the scene of his torture was a 'graphic invention of the nineteenth century' (Ramírez 2003b: 130). According to Ramírez the depiction of Cuauhtémoc's torture helped to discredit the image of Cortés:

No por azar el episodio complementario, el del tormento infligido al monarca derrotado, entraña una contradicción flagrante con las promesas hechas por Cortés, y ha constituido una de las manchas más tenaces que empañan la fama que éste mereciera (ibid: 130).<sup>59</sup>

Undermining the historical significance of Cortés was one of the defining characteristics of the liberal version of history. As such these monumental paintings were fitting representatives of an official historiography.

The paintings sent to represent Mexico in Chicago may therefore be seen to act as a civilising mechanism which helped to insert the prehispanic into a universalising discourse defined by the legacy of western cultures. This mechanism operated thanks to the particularities of their form and content. In terms of content, their agency consisted in translating certain prehispanic events/practices into occidental notions such as love, democracy, heroism, and Christianity. And in terms of form, it relied on the visualisation of these themes via the language of academic styles which infused them with an aura of universalism. Furthermore, these paintings helped Mexico to legitimise its status as an independent nation by displaying images that portrayed foundational myths, as well as scenes that celebrated resistance against foreign domination. The pragmatic function of history painting has here one of its most visible effects.

Probably the most effective way of assessing the agency of certain images is in terms of their reproduction. In spite of limited documentary evidence that may help us assess this in depth, we can gain an idea of which images were reproduced most from the information available.

Of all the paintings so far mentioned, Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' is possibly the image which was reproduced most. Illustrations of his painting appeared in newspapers and magazines such as *El Artista* and *El Hogar*,<sup>60</sup> and in important publications like *Primer almanaque histórico artístico y monumental* (1883-84). Apart from its reproduction in the printing press a considerable amount of copies were made after Obregón's painting.<sup>61</sup> One of the most interesting ones is a composition by Aurelio Jáuregui [67] who made a copy of it using the technique of 'emplumado' (feathers) in 1886 (figure 38). Another example is a composition made by Aurelio García in 1895 [81] painted on a plate (figure 39). García's composition complemented the original by adding a frame with an elaborate ornamentation using prehispanic motifs. In the Academy of San Carlos, Miguel Portillo, Agustín Ocampo and Jacinto Enciso presented a copy of Obregón's painting for the Academy's exhibition in 1875 (Romero de Terreros 1963: 466). It was displayed as an engraving on a wooden plate with a print. Furthermore, in 1892 the student Manuel Márquez requested permission to make a copy of this painting.<sup>62</sup>

Apart from Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' other paintings were also reproduced in the printing press. In 1895, for example, the newspaper *El Mundo* published three history paintings based on prehispanic themes: José Jara's 'La fundación de Tenochtitlán',<sup>63</sup> Izaguirre's 'La tortura de Cuauhtémoc',<sup>64</sup> and Ramírez 'La elección de un caudillo chichimeca'.<sup>65</sup> In 1892 the editor Rafael Ortega asked the Academy to allow him to photograph the paintings 'El descubrimiento del pulque', 'La deliberación del senado de Tlaxcala' and 'La visita de Cortés a Moctezuma' in order to 'reproduce and popularise them'.<sup>66</sup> Izaguirre's 'La tortura de Cuauhtémoc' was also copied at the Academy by one of the students and exhibited in 1902 when a special exhibition was organized at the Academy to help the victims of a recent earthquake.<sup>67</sup>

But perhaps more interesting than their reproduction in newspapers, books or magazines was the fact that some of them were used in cartoons to make ironic comments on current topics or on the function of artistic production itself. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1899, shortly after the XXIII Academy's exhibition, the newspaper *El Mundo* published two caricatures of neo-prehispanic paintings. One is based on Izaguirre's 'La tortura de Cuauhtémoc' and was published with the title 'Patitas asadas' (figure 40).<sup>68</sup> The other one is called 'El nuevo rastro' ('The new slaughter house'), and it is based on Unzueta's 'El Tzompantli' (figure 41). It is probably not by chance that the author of these cartoons would have chosen two paintings that depict cruel or brutal acts by either Spanish against *indígenas* (in the case of Izaguirre's), or *indígenas* against the Spaniards (in the case of Unzueta). In both cases the author used them to present an image that denotes cruelty, and their irony is based on associating this cruelty with food or nourishment. 'Barbecued' feet or freshly

slaughtered animals are the primary outcomes of their explicit violence. By substituting their original signification as comments on the act of conquest and colonisation by one of more mundane consequences, the author may have been criticising the 'anti-artistic' character of the paintings. As has been argued, according to the aesthetic ideas of the time the role of art was to combine the right amount of realism with idealism in order to incite moral values. To differentiate itself from other forms of cultural representations art needed to be based on the notions of ideal beauty, and avoid the depiction of brutal or violent scenes, or if the theme required it should present it by association rather than focusing on the moment of violence itself. This is why the depiction of sacrifice was so problematic and the reason why, as discussed above, it was often avoided by showing the moments prior or after the sacrifice took place. What the cartoons emphasise therefore is the brutal characteristics of the paintings which made them no more than simple images of cruelty.

As already mentioned Unzueta's painting is the only one which shows without remorse the cruelty that *indígenas* were capable of, and it is hence an image which was problematic in the extreme (see figure 9). One of the interesting things about Unzueta's painting, apart from its composition, is the fact that it was exhibited in spite of the fact that it showed *indígenas* in the act of slaughtering spaniards, and especially that it was displayed during the XXIII Academy's exhibition in 1898. This exhibition was important in many ways: firstly it was the last one to take place during the Porfiriato; secondly it included the exhibition of many neo-prehispanic representations; and thirdly it was the first time that foreign artists were invited to participate. To begin this new trend the Academy decided to organise a gallery of modern Spanish art.

Unzueta's painting was therefore not only allowed to participate, but also made to share a space where Spain was being represented through the work of Spanish artists.

Another interesting thing about Unzueta's painting is the fact that it was made at all since it does not appear to correspond with any of the Academy's history painting competitions. Furthermore, unlike the compositions of Casarín or Monroy relating to sacrificial practices Unzueta's painting is very large. This means that if Unzueta made it hoping to sell it privately its dimensions would have made it more difficult to sell. This may explain why it remained in the possession of his family until it was sold to the *Museo de Historia* in 1937.<sup>69</sup> It may also explain the existence of an interesting painting, probably also painted by Unzueta, which reproduces the compositional arrangement on the left (figure 42) but without any references to violence or sacrifice (figure 43). It is possible that Unzueta may have chosen to use part of the compositional elements of his 'Tzompantli' to create this more aesthetically pleasing composition in order to rescue at least part of his work.

The content of Unzueta's 'El Tzompantli' however, acquires a more significant historical value if we contextualise it in relation to the political position of Spain in the 1890s. The Spanish-American war of 1898, and Spain's decline as a colonial power unleashed a vicious debate in regards to the racial superiority of the Anglo Saxon race *vis-à-vis* the latin race (see Rojas 2000). Unzueta's image may hence be interpreted as a comment on the waning position of Spain, and as a metaphor of what was happening to their colonial enterprise. At the time however, Unzueta's painting was interpreted as 'anti-nationalist' by the newspaper *El Hijo del Ahuizote* –one of Mexico's most militant publications against the government of Porfirio Díaz. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1899 this newspaper published a cartoon based on Unzueta's painting not long after the XXIII exhibition had finished. The cartoon (figure 44) juxtaposed two images: one has the inscription 'Lo que pintó el joven Unzueta' (what Unzueta painted) and shows *indígenas* dismembering spaniards; and the other 'Lo que debió pintar un artista Americano' (what an American artist should have painted) and shows Cortés on horse back branding a huge sword and slaughtering *indígenas*. In other words, Unzueta's painting was viewed as pro-hispanist, and anti-nationalist because it depicted the cruelty of *indígenas* against Spaniards instead of the violence of Spaniards against *indígenas* (see Bonilla 2003). It is interesting to note that the only painting which depicted the act of killing *conquistadores* was perceived as antipatriotic when most of the liberal historiography emphasised the cruelty of the Spanish *conquistadores*.<sup>70</sup> And that images of cruelty from the part of Spaniards like Félix Parra's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' or 'Episodio de la conquista' were in stead praised for their nationalistic connotations. This may be explained as yet another mechanism for 'cleansing' the barbaric elements of Mexico's prehispanic history by carefully selecting the images that could act as representatives of this past.

Going back to *El Hijo del Ahuizote*, earlier that month the newspaper had also published another cartoon based on a neo-prehispanic painting displayed during the last Academy's exhibition. This time it used Ortega's painting 'La visita de Cortés a Moctezuma' to construct a direct criticism of the Academy (see figure 45).<sup>71</sup> The author of this illustration used the participation of Spanish painters in the last exhibition as an excuse to make a comment on Mexico's condescending attitude towards Spain. As explained by Bonilla "el semanario criticó el conservadurismo y supuesto prohispanismo de la escuela, que, decía, daba preferencia a los cuadros de pintores españoles traídos para dicha exposición;..." (2003: 207).<sup>72</sup> To visualise this criticism the author of the cartoon brings to life the characters of Moctezuma and Cortés, and shows Moctezuma brutally hitting Cortés (so presumably it was OK to hit them but not OK to cut them in half). This act of revengeful violence implied that the Academy should not be welcoming Spanish artists

just as Moctezuma should have not welcomed their conquering ancestors; and that Mexico should defend its cultural and artistic sovereignty. In the words of Bonilla: “[l]a caricatura afirmaba que no existía más la sujeción, y no era posible tolerar que se humillara a los Mexicanos; la Academia debía defender el arte nacional, y no lo hacía” (ibid: 207).<sup>73</sup>

Bonilla also points out that *El Hijo del Ahuizote* made recurrent criticisms of the Academy of San Carlos because it viewed it as an institution that was driven by the interests of the conservatives. According to this newspaper the Academy was doing very little to encourage the creation of a national school, and when it acknowledged the existence of history paintings it was in negative terms:

“Los asuntos son elogiables; pero las reconstrucciones de hechos pasados requieren un pincel maestro, un dominio completo de la composición y un vasto caudal de conocimientos en historia, en indumentaria, en arqueología, etc., etc., y esto no lo tienen todavía los alumnos ni los ex alumnos de Bellas Artes. Es mucho asunto para tan poco pincel” (quoted in Bonilla 2003: 208).<sup>74</sup>

This comment is useful to bring back some of the points discussed at the beginning of this chapter in regard to a demand for the historical accuracy of paintings, and the role of history painting as a discursive genre infused with a particular didactic and moral intent. We have seen how some of these images participated in a more effective way in discourses of nationhood due to their display in exhibitions, or through their reproduction as either copies, photographs, illustrations or cartoons. We have also considered how the themes of history painting competitions corresponded to the internal narratives of an official historiography.

With regard to their historical accuracy it must be pointed out that painters did make use of historical sources for their compositions,<sup>75</sup> and that certain prehispanic objects were introduced as mechanisms for making them ‘real’.<sup>76</sup> On the whole however, their depiction of prehispanic spaces, physiognomies and stories were more often than not idealised representations of a mythical past. Xavier Moyssén has pointed out that the spacious interiors depicted in paintings like Obregón’s ‘El descubrimiento del pulque’, and Martínez’ ‘Moctezuma recibe noticias de la llegada de los españoles’ [73] (figure 46) were nineteenth century inventions. The author explains that, unlike these paintings, prehispanic buildings had small interiors because all the public ceremonies and important rituals were performed in the open air, and argues that:

Este tipo de reconstrucciones pictóricas deben considerarse como un producto de la fantasía arqueológica decimonónica misma que se brincaba los limitados conocimientos que en la época se poseían; tal hecho se repitió en las obras de arquitectura inspiradas en lo prehispánico" (Moysén 1986: 113).<sup>77</sup>

Because of this neo-prehispanic paintings must not be seen as 'illustrations' of the past, but as creative reinventions of a past that needed to be redeemed in order to be effectively incorporated into discourses of nationhood. In order to assess the veracity or truthfulness of these paintings we would need an in depth investigation of the visual or documentary material artists may have used, but such an undertaking transcends the limits of this work. What we would like to highlight here however, is the way in which a notion of veracity or truth was not always related to positivist or empirical knowledge. As has been discussed, even positivist historians like Chavero allowed Obregón's 'El descubrimiento del pulque' to complement his study even when his painting presented an idealised version of Toltec history. Furthermore, when art critics asked for veracity this veracity did not imply the exact depiction of reality. As the study in art criticism showed a demand for 'romantic realism' required the interpretation of certain elements in order to present 'beautiful' images that would pay tribute to grandiose events (like the Foundation of Tenochtitlán). It should also be noted that by truthfulness we are only referring here to the paintings ability to represent what the Porfirian elites wanted to see. In other words, the truthfulness or veracity of these paintings was assessed in terms of mainstream ideas, beliefs and preconceptions, and should hence be understood in relation to Porfirian historiography, and cultural conventions.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a study on the relationship between nationhood and ethnic belonging see Smith (1999).

<sup>2</sup> For an insightful study on the representation of prehispanic cultures in Mexico through a museological discourse see Shelton (1995), and for the relationship between the National Museum and concepts of nationhood see Morales Moreno (1994).

<sup>3</sup> Prescott's *History of the Conquest* was first published in Mexico in 1844 when two simultaneous editions appeared. A recent publication by Porrúa (from 2000) includes the comments that both Lucas Alamán and José Fernando Ramírez wrote about his work.

<sup>4</sup> The figure of Hidalgo as *padre de la Patria* however, was not properly instituted until relatively late in the nineteenth century because his movement fostered a wave of violence against *criollos* and *peninsulares* which left bitter memories amongst the upper and middle classes. Before he became the central figure of the Independent struggle Iturbide was celebrated in the nationalist propaganda of Mexican intellectuals.

<sup>5</sup> This expression was widely used by nationalist intellectuals like Altamirano who believed that the influence of the Church and religion (associated with the colonial period) had to be replaced by the secular guiding force of the nation. 'Religión de la patria' therefore refers to fostering a sense of belonging through the love of one's nation and fellow citizens, and the gradual displacement of religious precepts by civic values. Its translation into English is difficult because the word *patria* does not exist and the word fatherland does not properly encapsulate its meaning which is best understood in terms of patriotism.

<sup>6</sup> "The State will use history painting as a system of ideological coercion that allows it to create a social consensus around the existence of a nation which legitimises the exercising of state power over the entirety of the national territory".

<sup>7</sup> "Under the new system of legitimisation of political power without nation, there is no State, and for this reason we see this enormous propaganda effort in nineteenth century history painting, concerned as much with representing the nation as with representing a particular type of nation".

<sup>8</sup> See Dawn Ades (1989c) for a study of the development of history painting within the institutional framework of art Academies in Latin America.

<sup>9</sup> See Gutiérrez 'Galería nacional de Bellas Artes' [1878] (in RP 1997: 466-69, vol. 2).

<sup>10</sup> Godoy's book does not actually specify who is the author of each façade, but Peñafiel's *Monumentos del Arte Antiguo* (vol. 2) reproduced these designs providing an indication of their corresponding authorship.

<sup>11</sup> The use of horizontal slabs positioned with a small degree of inclination in order to form a sloping succession of lines.

<sup>12</sup> "I have attempted to accompany the text with authentic illustrations which give a perfect, complimentary idea of the story, always preferring hieroglyphics and photographs of objects and monuments, rejecting whatever is the fruit of the imagination or disillusion".

<sup>13</sup> In spite of lack of documentation to prove that Ibararán's painting was presented for one of the Academy's competitions I believe this to be the case (see Appendix B [68]). The inscription under the image in Chavero's book reads: 'Estudio histórico presentado a la Academia Nacional por el Sr Ibararán' ('Historical study presented to the National Academy by Mr. Ibararán').

<sup>14</sup> "The young Xóchitl, accompanied by her parents, offers the king of Tula, Tecpancaltzin, the first gourd of pulque, discovered by her; the prince, enchanted by her beauty, takes her as his wife".

<sup>15</sup> Roa Bárcena also published this story in his *Leyendas Mexicanas* (1862) in the form of verse.

<sup>16</sup> "Is the fact that it avoids all reference to the disturbing facets of this legend". Sánchez Arteché has also pointed out that the episode of the 'Discovery of the *pulque*' was a misinterpretation of early colonial manuscripts by Carlos María de Bustamante. According to early colonial records Xóchitl presented the king with sweets made out of the liquid extracted from the *maguay* and not with *pulque* (see Sánchez Arteché 1998: 9-12).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Dávila painted a composition based on the same theme but it is not certain whether his sketch was made for the competition in 1889. His study is much more finished than those presented by the other students. It now belongs to the collection of Ignacio Dávila in Puebla (see appendix B [86]).

<sup>18</sup> A document in Báez Macías' catalogue specifies that this theme was set for the annual competition held in September 1889, and that Isidro Martínez, Carlos Herrera and Manuel Ramírez took part (1993: 336 doc: 7944, vol. 1). For further information on this composition please refer to appendix B [18].

<sup>19</sup> There are many good studies devoted to the history of education during the second half of the nineteenth century. For a general study on the relationship between education and nationalism see Josefina Vázquez (2000), and Pi-Suñer Llorens (1996). For an analysis of the historical interpretation of prehispanic cultures as portrayed in text books see Patricia Escandón (1988), and Eugenia Roldán Vera (2001). For more specific studies on Mexican intellectuals writing the history of Mexico see Josefina Vázquez (1994), and Guy Rozat (2001).

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that this theme was used again later for the annual competition established by Pina in August 1890 (see appendix A).

<sup>21</sup> For a description of these paintings see Landesio (1867: 14-16).

<sup>22</sup> For a study of his artistic patronage see, for example, Acevedo (2003).

<sup>23</sup> According to Landesio Maximilian bought this painting which explains why the original belongs to the collections of the 'Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand Museum' of the Arstetten Castle in Austria (see Landesio 1867: 14). Coto made a copy of it in 1879 and this version can be seen today in the Velasco Museum in Toluca (see appendix B [63]).

<sup>24</sup> These sculptures belong to the collections of the MUNAL.

<sup>25</sup> Tlahuicole was a Tlaxcaltecan warrior who died in gladiatorial combat fighting against the Aztecs. He was the subject of a history painting competition in 1894 as we shall see in the study below. For the story of Tlahuicole see Chavero (1886: 821).

<sup>26</sup> This painting has not been located.

<sup>27</sup> "The artists of Guadalajara addressed national historical themes before those in the capital".

<sup>28</sup> Of these we only know the location of Gutiérrez' composition (see appendix B [58]).

<sup>29</sup> Most of the literature on this painting associates Obregón's composition with the collecting project of Sánchez Solís, but there is no archival documentation to prove that the painting was commissioned by him prior to its exhibition in 1869. It is possible that Obregón could have made it as a direct response to the history painting competition summoned by Alcaráz, rather than to

satisfy the personal interests of Sánchez Solís. If this was the case however, one would have to question Obregón's choice of subject matter from a different perspective. Two of the authors who believe that the painting was commissioned by Sánchez Solís are Stacie Widdfield (1996), and Sánchez Arteche (1998). The only contemporary source I found which supports this assumption is Alvarez (1917).

<sup>30</sup> Coto's 'Reinado de Xolotl' was exhibited unfinished during the XVI Academy's exhibition in 1873, but we do not know whether he finished it or its present location (see appendix B [52]).

<sup>31</sup> "Heralds the interest of figure painters in the academy of the capital in depicting episodes from ancient national history".

<sup>32</sup> The competitions took place in all the disciplines regulated by the Academy: painting (both landscape and figurative), architecture, sculpture and engraving.

<sup>33</sup> See Sánchez Arreola's catalogue for a reproduction of the regulations established for the annual and biennial competitions (1996: 50, box 3, exp. 49).

<sup>34</sup> In one of his reviews of the Academy's exhibitions Manuel Revilla criticised the system of competitions saying that it forced the students to work quickly on sketches without the appropriate guidance of their tutors. According to Revilla this system was contributing to a decline in the artistic standards of the Academy (see Revilla 'Exposición XXII' in Rodríguez Prampolini 1997: 327, vol. 3, pages 327-337).

<sup>35</sup> See for example Esther Acevedo's study of José Jara's 'Fundación de Tenochtitlán' in the *Catálogo comentado del acervo del Museo Nacional de Arte* pp. 357-366. The author provides an interesting analysis of the process involved in the production of this painting which was made for the biennial competition in 1889. See also an article entitled 'El concurso bienal en la Academia de San Carlos' published in the newspaper *El Mundo Ilustrado* on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1900.

<sup>36</sup> See Esther Acevedo's study of José Jara (cited above), and Báez Macías (1998) for examples of this.

<sup>37</sup> The information on the five hour limit has been taken from the article 'El concurso bienal' published in *El Mundo Ilustrado* referenced above (note 35).

<sup>38</sup> "During the five months that the law concedes, the practitioner develops the theme in a cartoon, with models that the Academy provides; then he undertakes the definitive work on canvas". From 'El concurso bienal' (ibid).

<sup>39</sup> Most of the collections of nineteenth century art that belonged to the Academy became part of the MUNAL when this Museum opened in 1982.

<sup>40</sup> There is a book in AGASC called 'Libro de Concursos' (catalogued in 'Índice de Libros' with the number: 08712155) which provides some useful information on the competitions such as the names of students and their grades. Extremely useful information regarding the themes assigned for annual competitions could have been taken from this book if their authors had seen appropriate the need to specify the themes to which the grades correspond. As is usually the case, time has given this information an important historical relevance which was probably not considered relevant at the time.

<sup>41</sup> The only other culture which received serious attention and study was the Maya, though this may have been influenced by a strong foreign interest in the region.

<sup>42</sup> There is some confusion in regard to the ethnic identity of the group to which this story refers. According to Roa Bárcena's (1862a), from which the story was taken, the Nahuas killed the giants after inviting them to a feast and getting them drunk with *pulque*. They did so in order to free themselves from the miserable conditions in which they were forced to live under the giant's despotic rule (1862a: 48). But Chavero claims that the 'giants' were killed by the Olmecs (1886: 239), and Orozco y Berra that they were destroyed by the 'ulmeca, tzapoteca y xicalanca' (1880, vol. 3). According to Orozco y Berra however, the xicalanca were from the same family as the Nahuas so there is some correspondence with Roa Bárcena's account.

<sup>43</sup> "The Nahuas were an intelligent race which made great progress".

<sup>44</sup> "A privileged Nation in all matters, [which] achieved the greatest power and the most enviable greatness".

<sup>45</sup> "In this the first half of the XIXth century, the possibility of transmitting history itself is again being seen as the pre-eminent act which indicates the degree of civilization achieved by a society, which confirms the ideological importance of the inclusion of this new knowledge in the cultural history of the XIXth century".

<sup>46</sup> "The histories written up until now begin with this study; because the boundaries between the races begin to become defined and determine the geography; because there are a series of occurrences that are connected with certain nations or well-known characters, and above all because we are beginning to form a chronology...".

<sup>47</sup> For the narration of this story see an article in the newspaper *El Mundo* published on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1895 which reproduced a copy of the composition presented by Joaquín Ramírez

(winner of the competition) with an explanation by Roa Bárcena. There are no references to this story in either Orozco y Berra's (1880) or Chavero's (1886) books, and it does not appear in Roa Bárcena's (1862a) either. Ramírez' composition has been used to illustrate the cover of Clavijero's *Historia antigua de México* published by Porrúa in 2003 but the story of Xochitzin is also absent in this book.

<sup>48</sup> Pi y Margall's information however, does not correspond fully with the account provided by Clavijero (2003: 257 [1781]) who makes no mention of the goddesses. Orozco y Berra (1880) and Chavero (1886) do not mention their names during this celebration either.

<sup>49</sup> The stone on which the prisoner was sacrificed was called *Cuauhxicalli* and according to Chavero the famous 'Piedra de Tizoc' (Tizoc's stone) was used for this purpose (1886: 775-76).

<sup>50</sup> An article in RP suggests that the painting may have been taken to Europe by its buyer (see 'Cuadros notables' [1874] in RP 1997: 232, vol. 2). This article is the only reference known to date that gives notice of its existence.

<sup>51</sup> The sketches I'm using for this study are part of the collections held in AGASC (ref: Planera III, Gaveta 9, numbers: 08649840, 08649842 and 08649845). They do not specify theme or year but I deduced that at least one of them is certainly connected to this subject (no. 08649840) because it clearly shows a figure playing a flute. The other two have been catalogued under the name of 'Subditos rinden homenaje a su monarca', but rather than paying homage to a monarch I believe that they are kneeling because the central figure represents the priest dressed like Tezcatlipoca.

<sup>52</sup> See for example Prescott's *History of the Conquest*.

<sup>53</sup> "This episode forms a part of the omens which preceded the conquest of Mexico, a subject which aroused the greatest of interest amongst painters at the end of the XIXth century". MUNAL unpublished documentation on Daniel del Valle's 'Moctezuma II visita en Chapultepec los retratos de los monarcas, sus antepasados'. Ramírez believes that the sources used for this competition may have been Tezozomoc and Diego Durán.

<sup>54</sup> See Díaz del Castillo *Historia verdadera de la conquista* chapter XCII.

<sup>55</sup> The term 'agency' is here used following the work of Alfred Gell who argued that art was more than a system of symbols or 'pictorial language'. In order to move away from a semiotic study of art Gell established the basis of an anthropological theory that would account for the 'agency' of art. In his own words: "I view art as a system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it. The 'action' -centred approach to art is inherently more anthropological than the alternative semiotic approach because it is preoccupied with the practical mediatory role of art objects in the social process, rather than with the interpretation of objects 'as if they were texts" (1998: 6).

<sup>56</sup> This was the only study/sketch sent to the exhibition.

<sup>57</sup> The debate took place when Cortés asked the Tlaxcaltecs to become their allies. This proposition divided the leaders of the community. Amongst the opponents of Cortés was Xicotencatl the Young who became a celebrated figure in the nineteenth century due to his resistance against the Spanish (see for example Prescott's *History of the Conquest*). His name was often included in patriotic literature alongside Cuauhtémoc and Cuitláhuac.

<sup>58</sup> See Sánchez Arceche (1998) for a detailed analysis of this painting.

<sup>59</sup> "It is no accident that the accompanying scene, that of the torture inflicted on the defeated monarch, is at its very heart in flagrant contradiction to the promises made by Cortés and has been one of most stubborn marks that tarnishes the fame he may have merited".

<sup>60</sup> This information was taken from Widdifield who says that it was reproduced in *El Hogar* in 1872, and in *El Artista* in 1875 (1996: 184).

<sup>61</sup> It has been suggested that its theme facilitated its appropriation by the growing industry of *pulque*, and was hence used to decorate many 'haciendas pulqueras' (see Ramírez 2003a: 70).

<sup>62</sup> Márquez also requested permission to copy Parra's 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' (see Sánchez Arreola 1996: 144, box 13, exp. 66).

<sup>63</sup> It was published with a text by Chavero on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1895.

<sup>64</sup> It appeared as the cover of this issue with no text on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1895.

<sup>65</sup> Published as 'Elección de un caudillo Chichimeca' on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1895 with a text by Roa Bárcena.

<sup>66</sup> See Báez Macías (1993: 369, doc. 8183, vol. 1). The Academy also granted permission for a photographic shoot of Izaguirre's 'La tortura de Cuauhtémoc' and Ortega's 'La visita de Cortés a Moctezuma' in 1909, but the document does not specify what the material would be used for (see Báez Macías 2003: 397, doc. 11396).

<sup>67</sup> See an article from the 23rd of March 1902 in the newspaper *El Mundo* which published a review of the exhibition. The article mentions that a student called Pacheco exhibited a copy of this painting.

<sup>68</sup> It is difficult to translate 'patitas asadas', in this case it would be something like 'spit roasted feet' or 'barbecued feet' except that 'patitas' (diminutive for 'patas') is used in Mexico in a derogatory way because it usually refers to animal's feet.

<sup>69</sup> This information was taken from the records of the *Museo de Historia*. According to them it was bought from Maria Luisa Unzueta together with his 'Moctezuma recibe noticias de la llegada de los españoles' in 1937.

<sup>70</sup> The only other composition that makes reference to killing Spaniards was painted by Pablo Valdés ca. 1875 (see appendix B [61]). His painting shows the head of a decapitated *conquistador* but not the moment of his murder. The figures in Valdés painting are much more 'classical', and it is very small in size.

<sup>71</sup> It was published on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1899.

<sup>72</sup> "The weekly magazine criticized the conservatism and supposed prohispanicism of the school, which it said gave preference to the canvases of Spanish painters brought over for said exhibition; ..." Bonilla's study presents an interesting analysis of the use of prehispanic imagery by *El Hijo del Ahuizote* to criticise the government of Díaz.

<sup>73</sup> "The caricature confirmed that subjection no longer existed, and it was not possible to tolerate the humiliation of the Mexicans; the Academy should defend national art and did not do so".

<sup>74</sup> "The subject matter is praise worthy; however, the reconstructions of past events require a expert brush, a complete mastery of composition and an incredible wealth of historical knowledge, in clothing, in archaeology, etc., etc., and neither the students nor the ex-students of Bellas Artes have this yet. It is too worthy a subject for such a slender brush".

<sup>75</sup> There is some evidence to show that the students at the Academy requested historical books, and historical material for the composition of their paintings (see Báez Macías 2003: 249, doc: 10826; and Sánchez Arreola 1996: 79, box 6, exp 10). The historical archive of the National Museum (presently held in the National Museum of Anthropology) also has documents that give some idea of the collaboration between the Museum and the Academy, as well as the work that some artists like Velasco and Félix Parra did for the Museum. Some of this documentation requests the return of objects that had been lent to the Academy (see for example vol. 255 doc. 9975, vol. 260 doc. 9905, and vol. 261 doc. 10023 of their catalogue). Furthermore, in his study of Isidro Martínez, Xavier Moyssén points out that the artist used objects from the Museum, and Chavero's *Historia antigua* for his composition of 'Moctezuma recibe noticias de la llegada de los españoles', and Orozco y Berra's *Historia antigua* for his painting of princess Papatzin (see Moyssén 1960: 99-100).

<sup>76</sup> Eloisa Uribe, for example, has identified the small idol used in Parra's painting 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' as part of the National Museum's collection and explains that it was used by other artists to give archaeological veracity to their paintings (see Uribe 1991). Another recognisable prehispanic object (this time quite an important one) can be seen in Luis Coto's 'La Noche Triste' where the sculpture of Coatlicue has been included amongst the architectural setting painted in the background.

<sup>77</sup> "This kind of pictorial reconstruction should be considered as a product of the same nineteenth century archaeological imagination that leapt beyond the limited knowledge of the epoch; the same thing happened in the works of architecture inspired by the prehispanic".

<sup>78</sup> For a study on the truthfulness of history paintings see Truettner (1995). This author presents a fascinating study of a painting by Emanuel Leutze (from 1848) depicting a battle between *conquistadores* and *indígenas* during the conquest. Truettner analyses the sources used by Leutze and explains that he used Maya and native American objects, as well as seventeenth century dress for the representation of Spaniards. Despite this, Leutze's painting was greatly admired and "contemporary critics applauded it for its truthfulness, its sense of 'vividness' and 'reality', and its effectiveness as a pictorial complement to Prescott's reporting of the scene" (1995: 70). The importance of Truettner's study in relation to the point I am making here is the way in which "if a skilfully told narrative reinforced existing cultural views, it had a good chance of being accepted as truthful" (ibid: 74).

**MESTIZAJE AND CRIOLLISMO  
IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL NARRATIVES**

Looking for answers in the vast literature dealing with the abstract notions of identity and nationality led me to focus on one of the most over-used terms in the literature concerning the history of modern Mexico: *mestizaje*. The consolidation of Mexico as a *mestizo* nation during the first half of the twentieth century, with the help of Vasconcelos and the cultural movement known today as the 'Mexican Renaissance', was based on a complex history of colonisation and cultural exchange which provided the raw materials for the ideological construction of *mestizaje*. Like the country itself, the meaning of this term has been the subject of transmutations, and ideological battles that have shaped its present form. The authoritative nature of *mestizaje* as the prototype of Mexicaness invites questioning and enquiry into its 'history'. As an ideological construct tied to the development of Mexico as a modern nation *mestizaje* is a useful term for exploring the complexities of national consciousness and the formation of identity. A history of imposed hierarchies, based on perceptions of race, made it difficult for Mexico to reconcile its prehispanic and colonial histories, and forge an image of the nation that could accommodate both. Thus the significance of *mestizaje* has often been explained in terms of its homogenising force. Cultural *mestizaje* however, owes as much to creole patriotism as to the racial miscegenation that engendered the bulk of Mexican society. Both *mestizaje* and the formation of a creole identity –which I will describe as *criollismo*– reflect the flow and exchange of ideas between the 'East' and the 'West', or to avoid geographical determinants, between centre (colonial powers/metropolises) and periphery (subjected or dependent territories).

This chapter will analyse the way in which an ideology of *criollismo*, expressed in the form of patriotism during the eighteenth century, and *mestizaje* as the representative of Mexican nationality after Independence sought to articulate the specificity of Mexico through the appropriation of the prehispanic past whilst asserting the country's claims to universality. This point will be discussed in relation to the figure of Quetzalcóatl in order to analyse the processes of transculturation and cultural syncretism which gave shape to the formation of *criollismo* and *mestizaje*. By focusing on the representation of Quetzalcóatl I hope to highlight the continuity of certain creole ideologies, and the way in which both *criollismo* and *mestizaje* reflect the ongoing interaction between 'local histories and global designs' (Mignolo 2000).

### Theorising 'difference'

Even though most postcolonial theory has been derived from the experience of British and French colonialism, an important body of work by Walter D. Mignolo has shown that there is scope for interesting studies to be developed from the context of Latin America. The pioneering work of Homi Bhabha has contributed to the development of postcolonial studies by breaking away from essentialist divisions between colonisers and colonised. His work centres on the notion of hybridity as an ambivalent space which represents the 'spaces in-between'. Bhabha introduced the concept of liminality in order to describe the nature of hybridity as the product of colonial encounters:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without and assumed or imposed hierarchy (2000: 4).

Like Bhabha's notion of liminality, Mignolo uses the concept of colonial semiosis to explore the flow and exchange of ideas between centre and periphery in a way which avoids binary oppositions.

Although much postcolonial theory has developed using the concept of colonial discourse, Mignolo believes that colonial semiosis opens up the study of colonialism to accommodate the representation of cultural interaction in forms other than textual or verbal systems (2001: 20). In this way colonial semiosis moves beyond postcolonial studies, based primarily on language, to incorporate non-letter based or non-verbal graphic systems. Looking at the spread of western literacy, Mignolo's book *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2001) considers the existence of parallel discursive practices and systems of knowledge operating at the same time in Latin America, as well as the adaptation and reinterpretation of dominant discourses by the colonised. Using an approach of pluritopic hermeneutics, Mignolo attempts to discover the voices of *indigenas* and to understand their world views and heritage. A pluritopic hermeneutics, the author explains, makes evident the relativity of knowledge by highlighting the fact that there is no monotopic interpretation but many depending on the subjectivity of the individual:

Colonial situations invite one to rethink the hermeneutical legacy. If hermeneutics is defined not only as a reflection on human understanding, but also as human understanding itself, the tradition in which hermeneutics has been founded and developed has to be recast in terms of the plurality of cultural traditions and across cultural boundaries (2001: 15).

The third space suggested by Bhabha is therefore the conceptual location where a pluritopic hermeneutics can be employed in order to reveal the mechanisms involved in the ideological construction of hybridity and difference. Mignolo's work is also useful for disclosing the assumed universality of the 'understanding subject' (coloniser) and the need to understand cultural interaction as exchange rather than enforced acculturation. Doing so, highlights the agency of subaltern forms of knowledge in the creation of new or syncretic collectivities which contain the elements of *mestizaje*. Although cultural relativism addresses some of the same issues, Mignolo makes an important point when he explains that his approach highlights "the social and human interest in the act of telling a story as political intervention" (2001: 15). The political nature of constructing narratives is highly relevant to the context of identity formation and the consolidation of national histories as will later be discussed.

Although part of the 'postcolonial tradition', Mignolo is sceptical about applying theories that have been developed as a result of British and French colonialism and therefore based on the context of the Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> To address this problem Mignolo locates his study in the modern/colonial world system which has the sixteenth century as its starting point. By providing this paradigm the author is also making explicit his belief that modernity carries the weight of coloniality (2000: 37). In his *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000) Mignolo continues using the concept of colonial semiosis to study the complexities of cultural interaction, but this time his study stretches into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this book the author introduces the concept of 'border thinking', and attempts to explain colonial difference as part of the interaction between local histories and global designs. Global designs he explains "are the complement of universalism in the making of the modern/colonial world" (2000: 21), and may therefore be explained as "hegemonic projects for managing the planet" (2000: 21). In this light, Christianity becomes the first global design of the modern/colonial world, and "the anchor of Occidentalism" (ibid.). Viewing Christianity and Occidentalism as global designs interacting with local histories will be a useful framework for understanding creole patriotism and the construction of identity in Mexico. The process of transculturation resulting from the experience of colonisation will therefore be seen in terms of the colonial difference which Mignolo explains as:

[T]he space where *local* histories inventing and implementing global designs meet *local* histories, the space in which global designs have to be adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated, or ignored (2000: ix).

Making further use of Mignolo's insights, I will use the term transculturation rather than acculturation because the latter implies the assimilation of a culture by a 'dominant' discourse whilst the former implies interactive exchange (2000: 14). Transculturation however, implies racial as well as cultural interaction and Mignolo's work centres primarily on the issue of semiotic exchange. Because of this, the author prefers the use of the term colonial semiosis. It is interesting to note that Mignolo does not use the word *mestizaje*. It may be possible to argue that by avoiding the use of this word the author is trying to establish the authority of a different logic based on 'border thinking' rather than hybridity or *mestizaje*. Another reason may be that for him *mestizaje* implies the act of racial miscegenation and hence cannot be used to describe only processes of cultural syncretism. In the field of Latin American historiography the word *mestizaje* has strong political implications since it has been used as an ideological tool to enforce homogenisation and national unity (see for example Moore 2002; Klor de Alva 1995; and Lienhard 1997).<sup>2</sup> By avoiding this term Mignolo is therefore able to discuss colonial difference in terms of local histories that seek to establish the authority to speak for themselves. This is no futile exercise since the ideological baggage of *mestizaje* –and *criollismo* for that matter– carries important implications when applied to the study of Mexican visual culture.<sup>3</sup> It is not my intention however, to argue for a change in paradigms or to discuss the validity of concepts and terminology (a task ambitiously taken on by Mignolo), but merely to consider the viability of Mignolo's approach.

#### **The seeds of cultural *mestizaje*<sup>4</sup>**

As a cultural process developing alongside the consolidation of modern Mexico *mestizaje* contains the legacy of *criollismo*. By *criollismo* I refer to an ideology developed by creoles during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which came to constitute the basis of nationalist discourses, and specific forms of cultural representation. The particularities of creole identity were partly based on a cultural exchange with the indigenous cultures of New Spain. This created an ambiguous discourse which sought to appropriate the legacy of prehispanic heritage whilst negating any biological links with living *indigenas*. The use of the term *criollismo* in this work hence refers to the political nature of *criollismo* as an ideology that sought to legitimise the eventual independence of Mexico. But this does not imply that all creoles wanted to assert a cultural difference from Spain or felt the need to fight for their independence. Many influential figures, like Lucas Alamán for example, had negative views in regards to the prehispanic, and defined their identity in terms of the legacy of New Spain. *Criollismo* is therefore here used only to describe a particular strain of creole patriotism that sought to incorporate prehispanic history into the articulation of national narratives.

The study of creole patriotism presents an interesting case for understanding the flow of ideas between the metropolis and its colonies because creoles found themselves victims of the same racial prejudices affecting *indígenas*. Perceptions of 'difference' and 'otherness', permeating the history of Western colonialism, were in the case of colonial Mexico<sup>5</sup> applied not only to native *indígenas* but also to an economically and politically threatening creole society. Creole identity began to form permeated with a sense of a sometimes imposed and sometimes self-imposed 'difference'. Although the word *criollo* was mainly used to describe the children of Spaniards born in America, it is also a term laden with ideological implications relating to the formation of a society that viewed itself as culturally different from its relatives in Spain. Hence, as Jacques Lafaye explains, a creole sentiment developed even before the first *criollo* was born since rather than a place of birth it was "knowledge of the country and above all adherence to the colonial ethic that defined *criollismo*" (1998:81).

The creation of a distinctive creole identity based on difference however, was a problematic and largely unresolved paradox. Its complexity lay in an attempt to mediate a sense of being different but not too different. In other words, creole intellectuals writing in favour of *patriotismo criollo* (creole patriotism) were constantly trying to legitimise their difference and defend their Spanishness at the same time (see Padgen 1987; and Brading 2002). Creole identity wanted to appropriate an Indian –though mainly Aztec– past, but to reject any links with the descendants of those 'glorious' civilisations. Hence *patriotismo*, understood as the love and loyalty of *criollos* for their fatherland (New Spain), was further legitimised by historical claims that gave them roots and therefore rights over the territory of their 'ancestors'.<sup>6</sup> Constructing a history that rightly acknowledged Amerindian cultures as civilisations was not as difficult however, as trying to explain their relationship with contemporary *indígenas*.

Difference therefore was not only what justified creole identity but also what endangered the worthiness of their culture. During the viceregal period (1521 – 1821), Spanish *peninsulares* claimed that *criollos* were inferior basing their accusations on climatic theories that claimed to explain the 'underdevelopment' and 'backwardness' of the Americas. Although these theories were meant to undermine the humanity of Amerindians, *peninsulares* argued that the different physical environment in which *criollos* developed had a damaging effect on their persona.<sup>7</sup> Imposed difference therefore threatened to divorce creole identity from a European discourse of civilisation, and *criollo* intellectuals fought hard to counteract this.

During the seventeenth century animosity between Spaniards and creoles continued to increase establishing the grounds for a debate which acquired strong political implications by the end of the eighteenth century. The tensions were mainly rooted in discriminatory policies which excluded creoles from occupying positions of power. By the middle of the eighteenth century creole patriotism had consolidated and constituted as a strong rhetorical device increasingly used to legitimise colonial difference. Brading points out for example how “[d]urante la década de los años 1750, la vida intelectual mexicana se caracterizó por una confianza renovada y un patriotismo más intenso” (2002: 29).<sup>8</sup>

This development took place alongside the publication of many important works which sought to legitimise the cultural achievements of New Spain. The *Prólogos a la biblioteca mexicana* (1755) by Juan José Eguiara y Eguren is perhaps the best example of creole self-defence against Spanish criticisms that sought to discredit their intellectual skills. Another influential personality was Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci whose *Idea de una historia general de la América septentrional* was published in 1746. Boturini’s work had strong implications in relation to an ideology of precolonial Christianity already in process – a point to which we shall return in a moment. The Crown’s decision to expel the Jesuits in 1767 only contributed to fuel a movement which was already turning colonial difference into an ideological weapon that would later be used to legitimise the demands of creoles seeking political independence.

The eighteenth century was also the time when racial theories seeking to establish the superiority of protestant Europe unleashed vicious diatribes against the Americas (see Gerbi 1993; and Poole 1997). The application of biological and environmental determinisms to legitimise the so-called inferiority of the ‘new world’ badly undermined the claims put forward by creoles. Francisco Javier Clavijero’s *Historia antigua de México* became the most representative ‘apologetic’ work in creole historiography. First published in Italian between 1780 and 1781, it was later translated into English and published in London in 1787.<sup>9</sup> Clavijero’s aim was to celebrate the cultural achievements of prehispanic Amerindians in order to present a case against the racist attacks of Cornelius de Pauw.<sup>10</sup> Apart from highlighting the social and cultural characteristics which made evident the level of civilisation attained by Amerindians Clavijero’s work also helped to vindicate the nature of prehispanic religions (Brading 2002: 37). By addressing this issue Clavijero was touching the most problematic aspect of Amerindian cultures. Paganism, idolatry and human sacrifice were not easily accommodated into a discourse of *criollismo* concerned with defending the ‘civilised’ and cultured status of prehispanic *indígenas*.

### **Christianisation: a global design in dialogue with local histories**

In a period when religion held both the questions and the answers, the role of Christianity in the process of colonisation acquires tremendous significance. When faced with the guilt of brutal domination Spain was quick to justify her actions with the excuse of evangelisation (see Florescano 2001). The moral justification of the conquest and colonisation however, became a point of contention between Spaniards and creoles, and the role of evangelisation central to these debates (see Lafaye 2002; and Brading 2002). Even though both Spaniards and creoles perceived conversion as a humanitarian and civilisatory act that would redeem and save *indígenas* from idolatrous paganism, the 'monopoly' of Christianity as part of the European tradition was put into question.

The project of cultural indoctrination –enforced by Spain in terms of its assumed racial and cultural superiority– was challenged by certain commonalities which early missionaries found between prehispanic and Spanish traditions. To explain this, some missionaries studying Amerindian history and traditions began to write advocating an idea of a common Christian origin which in America had been corrupted by the Devil. Two opposing views dominated this debate: one considered the possibility of an early evangelisation which explained the existence of similarities; and the other argued that those similarities had been devised by Satan in order to trick *indígenas* into worshipping the wrong gods. The writings of Diego Durán and Juan de Tovar exemplify the former whilst Bernardino de Sahagún and Juan de Torquemada represent the latter (Lafaye 2002: 244). The arguments in favour and against both positions are complex, but the main debate centred on whether a precolonial evangelisation could have taken place. If so, then the presence of an apostle to whom this evangelisation could be attributed to had to be proven –or at least argued. Those who favoured this view saw the apostle Saint Thomas as the best candidate for this ecumenical task. If Jesus had sent the apostles to spread the word of God, the argument went, why would he not have sent an apostle to evangelise the *indígenas* of America as he had done with the rest of the world? It is in this light that we now come to consider one of the first examples of transculturation which took place in *Nueva España*: the transformation of Quetzalcóatl into the apostle Saint Thomas.<sup>11</sup>

The figure of Quetzalcóatl became an important actor in the process of colonisation. In the pantheon of Aztec religion Quetzalcóatl was an important god, but according to Toltec history he had also been a king/priest of Tollan, their capital city. The texts of early Spanish missionaries and Amerindian writers therefore portray Quetzalcóatl as both fictional and real, king and god, mythical and historical. The manifold character of Quetzalcóatl created confusion and interest for those engaged in the task of recording prehispanic histories. Even though opinions regarding his real identity varied, Quetzalcóatl

was generally associated with a monotheistic cult whose physiognomy coincided with European stereotypes. In his *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, for example, Sahagún wrote: "[a]doraban a un solo señor que tenían por dios, el cual llamaban Quetzalcóatl, cuyo sacerdote tenía el mismo nombre que también le llamaban Quetzalcóatl [...] y les solía decir muchas veces que había un solo señor y Dios que se decía Quetzalcóatl" (quoted in Lafaye 2002: 205).<sup>12</sup> According to Lafaye Sahagún was the first one to describe Quetzalcóatl as having slender features and a beard. In spite of this, Sahagún did not believe in the Christian origin of Quetzalcóatl, and argued against the possibility of a precolonial evangelisation (ibid: 206).

Parallel to our mythical figure, the historic Quetzalcóatl or Quetzalcóatl-Topiltzin had been the benevolent ruler of the Toltecs whose wise leadership had made Tula (Tollan) a symbol of culture and civilisation. His history narrates how conflict grew amidst his subjects, due to religious confrontations, and Quetzalcóatl-Topiltzin was forced to leave—an action which prompted the prophecy of his return. Analysing the sources in this respect, Florescano explains that "Motolinía, Andrés de Tapia y Bartolomé de Las Casas hacen de Quetzalcóatl-Topiltzin el equivalente de un profeta blanco, barbado y contrario a los sacrificios humanos, quien al ser desterrado prometió volver con otros seres semejantes a él" (2001: 358).<sup>13</sup> Quetzalcóatl's prophecy implied both the arrival of Europeans and Christianity.

Fictional or real, the figure of Quetzalcóatl became increasingly associated with the apostle Saint Thomas. The elements which facilitated this transformation may be summarised as follows: his cult was seen in terms of a monotheistic religion and he was said to have opposed human sacrifice; early texts described him in terms of European physiognomic stereotypes; and above all he was associated with notions of culture and civilisation due to his relationship with the Toltecs.

The idea of a Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas preaching Christianity on Mexican soil prior to the arrival of Europeans gathered strength during the eighteenth century. The writings of Sigüenza y Góngora and Boturini greatly contributed to the popularisation of this belief. Although now lost, Sigüenza y Góngora wrote a text entitled: *Phoenix of the West, the Apostle Saint Thomas, found in the name of Quetzalcóatl among the Ashes of the ancient traditions preserved in stones, in Toltec Teoamoxtles, and Teochichimecan and Mexican songs* (Keen 1990: 192).<sup>14</sup> Boturini's work was concerned with collecting sources to prove the identity of Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas, but his aim was also to highlight the prehispanic roots of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Both Quetzalcóatl and the Virgin of Guadalupe became central to an ideology of *criollismo* seeking to legitimise colonial

difference (see Lafaye 2002). The Virgin of Guadalupe was both a meeting point and a bridge between all the different cultures and races engendered in New Spain. But she was also a symbol that helped to legitimise the differences between Spain and its colony. As such she became a fitting icon during the War of Independence and it remains Mexico's most respected religious icon.<sup>15</sup>

The articulation of an ideology legitimising the possibility of a precolonial evangelisation became a powerful tool in creole historiography during the eighteenth century (Brading 2002). Creole intellectuals seeking to defend the cultural achievements of prehispanic *indígenas*, and the civilised status of the Americas used this argument to counteract racial discriminations. If by Christianity we understand a 'global design' with claims to universality, then a rhetoric of precolonial Christianity would function as a powerful discourse which could be used to challenge European cultural superiority. Its strength was based on its ability to claim universality whilst disassociating itself from Spain and, from a pragmatic point of view, because it helped to 'neutralise' the nature of prehispanic cultures thus facilitating their appropriation into an ideology of *criollismo*. In other words, the type of creole historiography produced by writers like Clavijero, and Sigüenza y Góngora helped to 'civilise' prehispanic cultures by comparing them with other 'classical' civilisations (Greeks, Romans, Hindus, etc), but also by reclaiming the Christian tradition and making it native to the Americas. In this way, colonial difference was justified in terms of parallel rather than opposing world-views which could be made to coexist within a framework of universality. What is more, this discourse worked at both levels since, as Lafaye explains, *indígenas* were quick to realise the advantages of Quetzalcóatl's transformation:

[L]os indios acababan de perderlo todo política y militarmente, sus ídolos estaban derrotados, sus sacerdotes perseguidos y la nada se abría delante de ellos. Necesitaban recuperar su plena condición de hombres convirtiéndose a la fe de los vencedores, que les resultaría más íntima si algún *signo* en su pasado los unía a ella: ese signo fue la primitiva evangelización por santo Tomás (2002: 256).<sup>16</sup>

The theoretical framework suggested by Mignolo in terms of local histories in dialogue with global designs is a useful framework for understanding the process of transculturation taking place here. The relevance of Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas, and Mignolo's approach in regards to this work, resides in its ability to highlight the complexity of cultural exchange. The other important point to make is that in terms of cultural interaction *mestizaje* and *criollismo* cannot be separated as one is a precondition of the other. The process of 'cleansing' the barbaric elements of prehispanic cultures was intrinsic to the success of creole patriotism. To do so however, implied a complex process of transculturation which took place in the sphere of cultural *mestizaje*. An ideology of *criollismo* therefore contains the seeds of cultural *mestizaje* and many of the

characteristics which define it can be seen to prevail within rhetorics of *mestizaje* developing after Independence.

Apart from attempting to balance the differences between prehispanic and Spanish cultures, creole historiography supporting an idea of precolonial Christianity was also turned into a political discourse that sought to discredit the very fabric of colonialism by claiming that *conquistadores* had not killed pagans but Christians. The use of this rhetoric in *patriotismo criollo* is best exemplified by Fray Servando Teresa de Mier whose writings encapsulate the political and ideological underpinnings of the argument in the context of Independence. Teresa de Mier took the argument a step further by claiming that the Virgin of Guadalupe was first encountered in America not by the Indian Juan Diego, as colonial historiography claimed, but by the Apostle Saint Thomas (meaning Quetzalcóatl) well before the conquest (see Keen 1990; Lafaye 2002; and Brading 2002).<sup>17</sup> Since conversion to Christianity was the moral justification of colonialism, Teresa de Mier was therefore challenging the rights of Spanish domination by claiming that America did not owe anything to Spain –not even Christianity. Like Teresa de Mier, Carlos María de Bustamante also used the rhetoric of Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe to justify claims for Independence. He was a friend and a disciple of Teresa de Mier who published quite extensively on prehispanic history whilst working as an editor for the *Diario de México* (1805 – 1808). They were both actively involved with the long process of Independence and their work would constitute the basis of a national history already taking shape (see Brading 2002).

### Visualising colonial encounters

Leaving the traumatic wars of intervention (with the United States and France)<sup>18</sup> and the political chaos that dominated the country after Independence (1821) behind, our context will be the period between 1881 and 1910. This periodisation follows the chronological division chosen for the curatorial script of *La fabricación del Estado 1864-1910*<sup>19</sup> which Esther Acevedo and Fausto Ramírez establish in the introduction to the exhibition's catalogue. I have found this temporal division useful for contextualising the Academy's exhibition in 1881 because it centres on the final triumph of the liberal movement and their official version of history. Placing history painting at the centre of their study, the authors divided the exhibition into three main periods: 1) 1864-1867 looks at the brief reign of Maximilian and carries the heading 'The Beginnings of a Lay History', 2) 1867-1881 covers the return of Benito Juárez to the presidency, and the end of a long and violent struggle between liberals and conservatives, hence its heading 'Republican Triumphalism', 3) 1881-1910 is linked to the rise and fall of the Porfiriato and coincides with the consolidation of a national history systematically inscribed into the visual culture of Mexico through exhibitions held in the country and abroad; the heading for this section

is '*México a través de los siglos*'. The section 'Republican Triumphalism' is contextualised by the authors as the:

"[L]apso en que tiene lugar el inicio de la historia moderna de México, tal como la propuso Daniel Cosío Villegas hace casi medio siglo. Si bien la práctica de la pintura de historia nacional arranca con titubeos, al término de esta etapa se logra por fin el arraigo definitivo del género".<sup>20</sup>

Like any other political system the Porfiriato went through a process of development and change, and it only begins to flourish when Díaz returns to power in 1884. But from an art historical point of view 1881 and not 1884 becomes significant because it marks the beginning of an institutionalised attempt to consolidate images of the nation with the help of the Academy of San Carlos (see Ramírez 2003b). 1881 is also the year when the Academy celebrated its centenary with an exhibition which was hoped to highlight the artistic and cultural achievements of Mexico. Unlike previous occasions, the 1881 exhibition displayed a considerable number of works made by the students of the Academy which corresponded to the annual and biennial competitions.

For the 1881 exhibition the following competitions dealing with prehispanic and conquest themes were presented:<sup>21</sup> 'Quetzalcóatl descubre el maíz', 'Captura de Cortés en Xochimilco', 'Hernán Cortés libera a Moctezuma II', 'El asedio de Tenochtitlán', 'Entrevista de Moctezuma y Nezahualpilli', and 'El mensajero del Sol'. Apart from these, Luis Coto presented two original compositions entitled 'La captura de Cuauhtémoc en la laguna de Texcoco' and 'La Noche Triste'; and there were three sketches dealing with prehispanic history: Alberto Zaffira's 'Nezahualcóyotl en los jardines de Texcotzingo', Librado Suárez' 'Ofrenda a los dioses' [121], and Urruchi's 'El legargo de la princesa Papatzin'.<sup>22</sup>

The exhibition also included many images related to the history of modern Mexico as well as religious and classical themes. The compositions mentioned above help to give an idea of the growing popularity of prehispanic and conquest themes. Of these, two are particularly interesting for their relationship with an idea of precolonial Christianity already discussed: Antonio Ruiz' 'Quetzalcóatl descubre el maíz', and Zaffira's 'Nezahualcóyotl en los jardines de Texcotzingo'. The first corresponds to the theme established for the annual competition held in August 1880. The story was taken from Brasseur de Bourbourg's *Histoire des nations civilisées du Mexique* (see appendix A). According to Romero de Terreros' catalogue, the sketches of José María Ibarrarán, Antonio Ruiz, Librado Suárez and Alberto Bribiesca were included in the exhibition, but only the sketch by Ruiz is known to us thanks to its reproduction in the illustrated catalogue.

As we can see from the composition (figure 47), Quetzalcóatl follows the physiognomic stereotypes of the European tradition and his features contrast with that of the *indígenas* around him. Ruiz' interpretation clearly embodies the visual metamorphosis of Quetzalcóatl into the Apostle Saint Thomas that creole historians such as Sigüenza y Góngora had propounded. His composition was marked by his tutors with the grades of 'perfectamente bien y dos de muy bien'.<sup>23</sup> This means that his interpretation fitted relatively well with representations of Quetzalcóatl in the academic art of this period. Whilst one could argue that the image reflects enforced acculturation via Christianity, and hence the assimilation of *indígenas* into a European tradition, from a framework of creole patriotism Ruiz' composition may also be read as the inclusion of Quetzalcóatl into an originally prehispanic tradition. Talking about this image for example, Stacie Widdifield explains that: "[t]he tale of Quetzalcóatl is the self-fulfilling prophecy written into Europe's version of the pre-Hispanic past, which predicted and then established the rightness of the Spanish conquest" (1996: 103). From a background of *patriotismo criollo* however, I would suggest that it is in fact the opposite. Rather than assimilation, the image of Quetzalcóatl implies the nativisation of Christianity in a way that challenges the straightforward imposition of dominant discourses. The interpretation of Quetzalcóatl by Sigüenza y Góngora, and Teresa de Mier within a rhetoric of *patriotismo criollo* reveals the complexities involved in the process of assimilation. Hence, rather than referring to the rightness of the Spanish conquest, the image may be seen to challenge the moral justification of colonial authority earlier discussed. If so, Ruiz' composition may also be seen to reflect liberal ideologies and the liberal version of history which sought to downplay the legacy of colonialism whilst giving primacy to the heritage of prehispanic cultures.

Unfortunately, Zaffira's composition has not yet been located so I can only refer to its title which is in itself fairly descriptive: 'Nezahualcóyotl in the gardens of Texcotzingo, afternoon prayer to the god of heavens'. Although other representations relating to Nezahualcóyotl exists, like Luis Coto's 'Nezahualcóyotl salvado por la fidelidad de sus súbditos' (figure 22),<sup>24</sup> Zaffira's choice of subject matter is interesting because it relates directly to Nezahualcóyotl's conversion to Christianity. The figures of both Quetzalcóatl and Nezahualcóyotl were generally associated with notions of high culture, and viewed as agents of civilisation who introduced noble values to Toltecs and Texcocans. Texcoco flourished under the regime of Nezahualcóyotl (also known as the poet-king) and became the cultural capital of the Aztec empire. Its magnificence was celebrated in the works of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, and Juan Bautista Pomar both of whom descended from Texcocan noble families. In their writings Nezahualcóyotl is transformed from paganism to a monotheistic religion that followed the guidance of a single supreme God.

It is possible that Zaffira may have used Prescott's *History of the Conquest* as his source. In this book Prescott talks in admiration about the reign of Nezahualcōyotl and the cultural achievements of Texcoco, and he cites Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl as his historical source. Prescott narrates the story of how, disillusioned with his own religion, Nezahualcōyotl goes to his palace in Texcotzingo in search of solace and meditation. After forty days fasting and meditating Nezahualcōyotl realised the falsity of indigenous idolatry and claimed to have found the true religion in a unique and supreme God (Prescott 2000: 90-91 [1844]). According to its title, Zaffira's composition depicted the moment in which Nezahualcōyotl converts to Christianity during his stay in Texcotzingo. It must be pointed out that Zaffira was not a student at the Academy and that his composition was exhibited in the gallery assigned for original works from private artists (Romero de Terreros 1963: 530). It is therefore possible that the work may have been made for sale since Nezahualcōyotl was one of the most popular prehispanic figures in this period.<sup>25</sup>

Another interesting composition in relation to prehispanic evangelisation is the story of 'Princess Papatzin' depicted by Juan Urruchi (figure 48).<sup>26</sup> Since there is no information on Urruchi's composition in the catalogue to the exhibition it is difficult to assert what historical source may have been used by the artist, but it is possible that it could be based on Clavijero's *Historia antigua de México* or Roa Bárcena's *Leyendas mexicanas*. Urruchi's composition shows the moment in which two of Papatzin's servants arrive at the scene of her resurrection guided by the little girl.<sup>27</sup> Talking about this image Widdifield explains that the story of Papatzin represents *indígenas* as "the agents of their own conversion" (1996: 137). The story of Nezahualcōyotl may also be linked to this idea of Christianisation without the direct influence of Spanish missionaries.

In the figures of Quetzalcóatl, Nezahualcōyotl and princes Papatzin we therefore find two parallel discourses which together sought to legitimise the humanity of *indígenas* and their parity with Europeans. The former by making Christianity native to the Americas, and the latter by claiming that conversion to Christianity was not dependant on the evangelisation of Spanish missionaries. Both sought to reevaluate the nature of prehispanic histories by claiming sameness (through Christianity), but this sameness was articulated in terms of a precolonial experience which challenged the legitimacy of colonial authority.

### Quetzalcóatl in the Porfiriato

It may at first appear strange to find an image such as Ruiz' 'Quetzalcóatl descubre el maíz' in 1881 when a discourse of creole patriotism had long given way to notions of nationality, and it would be an anachronism to talk about *criollismo* rather than *mestizaje*

at the end of the nineteenth century; but the legacy of certain creole ideologies continued to prevail in some of the scholarly writings of the Porfiriato. If we place this image next to Orozco y Berra's *Historia antigua y de la conquista de México* (1880) the contrast between the image and its context becomes less stark. Manuel Orozco y Berra (1818-1881) was one of the most influential historians during the second part of the nineteenth century. Part of a selected intellectual circle, Orozco's friend and mentor was José Fernando Ramírez (1804-1871) whose work became a standard reference for a future generation of historians. Orozco's four-volume work is encyclopaedic in nature and his aim, as stated by himself in the introduction, was to provide an accurate and objective history of precolonial Mexico. Orozco's research benefited from the documents and manuscripts collected by José Fernando Ramírez and Joaquín García Icazbalceta. The significance of Orozco's work in general, and of his book in particular, are important for the study of Mexican historiography (see Pérez Rosales 2001), but attention here will be given to his study of Quetzalcóatl. The author approaches this subject by providing a synthesis of the existing literature on Quetzalcóatl which highlights the fictional and historical nature of his life. Following these Orozco y Berra describes Quetzalcóatl with the following words: "[c]omo predicador y pontífice, enseñó nueva ley, con practicas en muchos puntos semejantes a las cristianas, dejando derramado el culto de la cruz" (1880: 69, vol. 1).<sup>28</sup> He then proceeds to discuss the existence of crosses in prehispanic material culture and other similarities with the Christian tradition such as baptism. Orozco's analysis is thorough and 'scientific'. His method consists of presenting a vast amount of sources which are then contrasted and discussed in order to find the veracity of their arguments. Based on this Orozco then proceeds to present his own conclusions. This is the approach he follows in relation to the issue of Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas, and the possibility of an early evangelisation as discussed by colonial writers and early missionaries. Weighing the arguments in favour and against Saint Thomas, Orozco concludes that it would indeed be impossible to prove that an apostle, or a Saint called Thomas, preached Christianity in America before the arrival of Europeans. His conclusion was based on the insurmountable anachronism between Saint Thomas and Quetzalcóatl.<sup>29</sup> His final words on this matter however, do not challenge the controversial nature of Quetzalcóatl:

Pero si ambos Santo Tomás sucumben a la crítica, Quetzalcóatl queda en pié con su historia, á la cual no alcanza la contradicción: hubo un predicador blanco y barbado, que enseñó doctrinas muy semejantes a las cristianas (1880: 86, vol. 1).<sup>30</sup>

According to Orozco y Berra, Quetzalcóatl had been an Icelandic missionary who introduced elements of civilisation and Christian doctrines in precolonial Mexico. By claiming this Orozco y Berra was perpetuating an idea which constituted the essence of

*criollismo*. In the words of Keen: “[t]his is little more than the traditional version of Sigüenza, Veytia, Mier and Bustamante, with the substitution of an Icelandic missionary for Saint Thomas” (1990: 421). Orozco also rejected arguments against the agency of the Devil in introducing Christian-like elements in prehispanic religions. In relation to the cross, for example, he argues: “imposible fuera que el demonio entregara por símbolo de adoración á sus adeptos el signo que lo amedrenta, y trabajara en allanar el camino para la predicación evangélica” (1880: 83, vol. 1).<sup>31</sup>

In short, Orozco y Berra’s aim to provide a scientific and impartial account of prehispanic cultures was still influenced by the weight of Christianity as an overarching discourse, or ‘global design’, which gave meaning to the world. Within this framework Orozco’s reappraisal of prehispanic cultures could not present a critical departure from creole historiography. This by no means implies that Orozco y Berra sought to promote an ideology of *criollismo*, on the contrary, Orozco viewed Mexico as a *mestizo* nation which needed to reconcile its precolonial and colonial histories in order to progress. What I want to highlight here is an attitude towards the prehispanic which reflects the continuity of certain creole ideologies and hence the influence of *criollismo* in the development of *mestizaje*.

This continuity has also been pointed out by Tenenbaum (1992, 1994) who argues that the ceremony organised for the unveiling of the first monument to Cuauhtémoc in 1869 reflected the legacy of creole ideologies. Tenenbaum explains that the speeches delivered for this occasion “continued firmly in the Mier-Bustamante tradition, speaking of the Spaniards as bloodthirsty villains and Cuauhtémoc as a hero” (1994: 136).<sup>32</sup> Although the celebration of prehispanic heroes (and history in general) was indeed crucial to an ideology of *criollismo*, we must not forget that this ceremony took place two short years after Mexico had regained its independence from France. Hence, in a context of fragile sovereignty the speeches of patriotic orators could not but highlight the issue of resistance against foreign domination. We may argue that the ceremony organised for the inauguration of the monument to Cuauhtémoc erected on *Paseo de la Reforma* in 1887 (discussed in the following chapter) was more representative of *criollismo* because by the end of the 1880s we find a country much more confident on its ability to develop as a modern and independent nation. As such the need to perpetuate the heroism of Cuauhtémoc was much more tied to issues of nationalism, and the appropriation of prehispanic elements to the legitimisation of the Díaz administration –just as the creoles had done to legitimise their political position.

Another example that reflects the continuity of a Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas tradition can also be found in an interesting play written by Alfredo Chavero in 1877. In the prologue to his play, called simply 'Quetzalcóatl', Chavero explains the historical significance of Quetzalcóatl and says that he was without a doubt a Christian. As a result of this, the character of Quetzalcóatl is constructed in a way that denotes the Christianity of this figure, and the play ends when Quetzalcóatl departs leaving behind a cross as a sign of his faith (see Chavero 1877). The work of Chavero represents an interesting example to consider changes in the study of prehispanic cultures because by 1886 his view of Quetzalcóatl had drastically changed. In his version of *Historia antigua* Chavero contested the so-called Christianity of Quetzalcóatl and explained that he had been neither Saint Thomas nor a Christian prelate; and that there had been no evangelisation prior to the arrival of the Spaniards (1886: 378). Chavero's unyielding position in this respect was stated very clearly: "[s]i algun cristiano predicó el cristianismo á los indios fué un cristiano que no creía en el Credo" (ibid: 378); and "[l]os que han dicho que la barbara religión de los mexica se derivó de ese origen han ofendido al Evangelio" (ibid: 379).<sup>33</sup>

Chavero's analysis reveals a scientific approach which attempts to find rationalist explanations for the legends built around the figure of Quetzalcóatl. He explains for example, that the myth of his return is related to the fact that Quetzalcóatl is associated with the evening star, and the prophesy that foretells its return as the morning star that inevitably appears in the East –hence his return and the arrival of Europeans from the East. In relation to the physiognomy of Quetzalcóatl, Chavero argues that since the Toltecs came from the North they were generally of lighter skin and had beards "de los toltecas se dice que eran blancos y barbados" (1886: 381).<sup>34</sup> Finally, after weighing all the arguments and discussing all the sources around the figure of Quetzalcóatl Chavero concludes: "Quetzalcóatl no era más que un sacerdote nahoa reformador de la religión y fundador de una secta numerosa. Fué un gran pontífice y un gran rey" (ibid: 382).<sup>35</sup>

This change in attitude may be attributed to the increasing weight of rationalism and scientificism in the intellectual life of Mexico, as positivism and social Darwinism became the theoretical tools of the Porfirian intelligentsia (see Hale 2002). The increasing secularisation of Mexico contributed to the displacement of religious beliefs by scientific truths. The future of Mexico would depend on its adaptation to new 'global designs' this time expressed in the form of rationalism and scientificism. By the end of the 1880s, when the Porfiriato was taking shape, new paradigms therefore emerged which had to be adapted and transformed.

Yet the tradition of Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas seems to have survived the ideological changes that we find reflected in scholarly publications. Four sketches (figures 49 to 52) presented for the Academy's annual competition in 1894 depict a Quetzalcóatl that few people nowadays would identify with this prehispanic figure. The compositions are extremely interesting and revealing of the continuity of creole ideologies which this chapter has been presenting.

The sketches belong to the collection of AGASC. They are not signed but a note in pencil identifies them as responding to the annual competition held in August 1894. This information coincides with document no. 8319 reproduced in the catalogue of Báez Macías (1993: 389 vol.1) which confirms the correct dating.<sup>36</sup> The document specifies that one of the competition themes set in 1894 was the episode in which "Quetzalcóatl, que ha abandonado Tula a causa de la rebelión suscitada contra él por Tizcatlipoca [sic], se detiene un instante en el camino que lo lleva a Cholula y llora sendado en una peña".<sup>37</sup> In the records of AGASC only one of the authors has been identified, but thanks to the information recorded in the 'libro de concursos' I was able to identify the authorship of the other three, and the grades given to them.<sup>38</sup> The students that presented sketches for this competition were: Rafael Aguirre (grades: 'dos de bien y uno de mediano'),<sup>39</sup> Mateo Herrera (grades: 'dos de bien y uno de mediano'),<sup>40</sup> Antonio Cortés (grades: 'dos de muy bien y uno de bien'),<sup>41</sup> and Daniel del Valle (grades: 'muy bien por unanimidad').<sup>42</sup>

The episode chosen for the competition relates to the story in which Quetzalcóatl is forced to leave his city due to religious confrontations with Tezcatlipoca.<sup>43</sup> The legend narrates how Tezcatlipoca tricked Quetzalcóatl into getting drunk with *pulque* –a humiliating experience which compelled Quetzalcóatl to leave his beloved Tula forever.<sup>44</sup> According to this story, on his way to exile Quetzalcóatl stopped a moment and sat down on a rock to cry. The episode is also related to the fall of the Toltec empire (because its decline began after the departure of Quetzalcóatl) and to the prophesy of his return. The most interesting thing about these sketches, however, is not so much their subject matter but the way in which Quetzalcóatl has been portrayed. In all of the sketches the physiognomy of Quetzalcóatl corresponds with the Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas tradition. The Christian identity of this figure is particularly clear in the sketch by Rafael Aguirre (figure 50) in which Quetzalcóatl is even wearing a cross. Without the buildings in the foreground, and the figures behind the tree it would be very difficult to identify the figure in the composition with a prehispanic god. Although the same could be said of the rest, the overt Christianity of Aguirre's Quetzalcóatl may explain why his composition was given relatively low marks. As venturing to discuss the sketches based on their grades would be ambitious –since we

do not know the exact criteria used for marking these exercises— we only wish to highlight the way in which these compositions continue the Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas tradition.

Although the sketches were made after Chavero's *Historia antigua y de la conquista* was published their interpretation of Quetzalcóatl follows the version of Orozco y Berra, and the legacy of creole patriotism. The existence of these sketches is therefore interesting because they reveal the continuation of the Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas tradition in the academic art of the Porfiriato. And the ongoing process through which prehispanic cultures were neutralised and civilised in order to articulate the authenticity and the universality of Mexico. This is particularly apparent in relation to Quetzalcóatl, and the arguments in favour of a prehispanic evangelisation, but Mexico also participated in a discourse of universality through the articulation of nationalism and modernity. This work does not set out to exclude such manifestations as important elements in the development of Mexico. The above study has been presented in order to consider the way in which *criollismo* was in many ways the first attempt to construct a discourse of authenticity based on the cultural heritage of Mexico. This authenticity was needed in order to fundament claims of difference, and to anchor the basis of a nationality already taking shape.

#### **Race in the construction of a national identity**

The hybridity of neo-prehispanic representations may be interpreted as instances of *mestizaje*. Stacie Widdifield's book *The Embodiment of the National*, for example, describes these images in terms of an ideology of *mestizaje* and assimilation. A complementary analysis however, may be derived from a perspective of *criollismo*, and the way in which this informed the construction of images that conveyed *cultural* rather than *racial* syncretism. Hence, although it may appear anachronistic to speak, or even suggest, the notion of *criollismo* in the Porfiriato, I believe that the use of the term *mestizaje* to describe neo-prehispanic representations also presents difficulties. What this chapter argues is that attitudes towards the prehispanic reflect a continuation of certain creole ideologies. This point has been discussed in relation to the image of Quetzalcóatl, but the overall research indicates that neo-prehispanic representations produced during the Porfiriato also reflect a similar attitude towards Mexico's prehispanic past. The way in which this emulates an ideology of *criollismo* has also been pointed out by Rodríguez Prampolini:

La imagen del indio que surge en estos cuadros es aún la imagen que correspondería al ideal criollo. Es el glorioso pasado que el grupo de jesuitas había colocado, en osada comparación, al nivel del pasado de los grandes 'pueblos cultos'. El artista de la Academia recoge, en tardía plasticidad, con treinta años de retraso, el eco de la ideología que la clase criolla en el poder le había

asignado al indio. En su programa de dominio, el indio de carne y hueso, el miserable, el de cuerpo esquelético y debilitado, no es tomado en cuenta, no le es necesario y el arte lo ignora (1988: 213).<sup>45</sup>

My use of the term *criollismo*, in the context of the Porfiriato, therefore refers to a particular attitude towards the prehispanic which was based on the appropriation of prehispanic history whilst seeking to erode the particularities of contemporary indigenous cultures.<sup>46</sup> *Criollismo* may hence be understood as a process through which cultural exchange was transformed into a particular type of cultural *mestizaje*. Looking at discourses on race in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century however, reveals that *criollismo* was also involved in the debate over the racial status of Mexicans indicating that *criollismo* participated in the gradual legitimisation of *mestizaje* as a concept that included both cultural and racial syncretism.

Underlying discourses on race was a concern for national unity which was seen as intrinsic to the development of Mexico. Even though attitudes towards *indígenas* varied depending on the individual, the general consensus agreed on the need to work towards the homogenisation of Mexico –be it through education, citizenship or *mestizaje*. In the years following Independence people like Luis Mora, for example, believed that citizenship alone would erase ethnic differences. In the words of Basave Benítez “[a]sí, mágicamente la Constitución había hecho desaparecer a los indios, creando en su lugar abstractos ciudadanos mexicanos” (2002: 21).<sup>47</sup> But with time –and as racial conflict continued– *mestizaje* became the redemptive mechanism through which racial ‘deficiencies’ could be overcome and national unity secured. The debate over race in the Porfiriato was largely based on the issue of *mestizaje* and led by an almost ‘blind faith’ in education. Through education Mexicans would acquire a sense of belonging and pride that would encourage individuals to work for the betterment of the nation. But the rhetoric of race often clashed with official policies that sought to erase racial difference through free and public education, and hence promote the unification of Mexico and all its citizens.

The difficulty in creating images of *mestizaje* during the Porfiriato may be partly explained by the weight of European racial theories that continued to impose the superiority of the Arian and Saxon races making it difficult for Porfirian intellectuals to defend the status of *mestizos* as quintessentially Mexican. Racist attitudes based on biological and environmental determinisms can be seen reflected in the debates around foreign migration, and the colonisation policies which politicians sought to promote in order to aid the agricultural and industrial development of Mexico (see González Navarro 1988). Those in favour of colonisation (preferably of the European kind) believed that the condition of *indígenas* could only be improved by mixing with Europeans. The argument

was based on the assumed racial superiority of 'whites' which, some intellectuals claimed, would help industrial and agricultural progress whilst 'bettering' the racial 'decadence' of *indígenas*. Those against colonisation policies regretted the time and money invested in attracting foreign migration when attention should be centred on improving the living conditions of *indígenas* in rural areas (see Powell 1968). But racist views continued to associate beauty with whiteness and according to Powell "[p]roponents of foreign colonization at times cited the need to beautify the Mexican people as one reason for bringing Europeans to Mexico" (1968: 31).

Racial discourse in Mexico was therefore led by a need to defend the racial status of all Mexicans most of whom were *mestizos* and *indígenas*. Accepting European racial theories meant to agree with the second rate status assigned to non-white Euroamericans. Because of this, Mexican intellectuals adapted, rejected and transformed main stream ideologies in order to explain the racial status of Mexicans, and as a result, their writings reflect an eclectic use of theories and a creative interpretation of western racial discourse.

The polemic over the racial status of *mestizos* and contemporary *indígenas* (known as *indigenismo*)<sup>48</sup> is complex, and opinions regarding the civilised or uncivilised nature of *indígenas* varied depending on the political and social positions of the intellectuals involved.<sup>49</sup> For our purposes, the important issue at stake is the way in which foreign racial theories influenced the self-definition of Mexicans. Rojas, for example, explains that the "introducción del positivismo como referencia ideológica de las elites porfiristas, colocó el tema étnico en el centro del debate sobre la identidad nacional" (2000: 609).<sup>50</sup> And Nahmad (1973) points out how liberal intellectuals like Justo Sierra struggled to defend the worthiness of *mestizaje*, and the ability of *mestizos* to achieve progress against the weight of mainstream European theories which argued in favour of racial purity. Mexican intellectuals had therefore to argue against racial purity, and in favour of racial miscegenation in order to fence off a European racial discourse aimed at protecting the colonialist interests of the metropolises. In his book on the life and work of Molina Enríquez, Basave explains that social Darwinism was less appropriate to incorporate an ideology of *mestizaje* than positivism (2002: 95), and that this was due to the overemphasis given to biological and environmental determinism in social Darwinism whilst for positivism race was also dependent on other sociological factors. Either way, Basave explains an apology of *mestizaje* could not succeed due to the structural problem of trying to "fundamentar la reivindicación de una raza de color en teorías diseñadas para legitimar el imperialismo de la raza blanca" (2002: 93).<sup>51</sup> On the same lines Tenorio Trillo has pointed out the difficulty of supporting an ideology of *mestizaje* against a background

of positivism and social Darwinism, and the way in which intellectuals "had to manipulate international and national sciences, and prejudices that were applied against Indians, in order to produce both modern science and a cosmopolitan nation" (1996b: 99).

Going back to Basave, his work is extremely useful for understanding changes in perceptions of race and the eventual victory of *mestizaje* as representative of *mexicanidad*. His analysis is based on the work of Molina Enríquez (1868-1940) who became a very influential figure in the consolidation of *mestizaje*. Molina Enríquez represents the transition from the Porfiriato to the Revolution and his writings may be interpreted as the conceptual bridge between these two periods. Basave surveys changes in the ideology of Molina Enríquez as the country moved towards revolution and into a period of regeneration that prompted new forms of national identity. As Basave makes clear, changes in the political situation of Mexico were also accompanied by an important ideological shift that began to replace biological determinism by cultural relativism. This shift benefited from the work of Franz Boas who visited Mexico between 1911 and 1912.<sup>52</sup> New approaches prompted a revisionist understanding of race that took into account cultural and socio-economical factors. Such novel ideas would become crucial to the legitimisation of *mestizaje* and the revaluation of *indígenas* after the Porfiriato. The defence of *mestizaje* that Molina Enríquez worked so hard to present, benefited enormously from this change in paradigms, and so did a new generation of intellectuals who began the task of dismantling the ideological credo of positivism. As explained by Carlos Fuentes:

El relativismo cultural de Boas le permite a Molina romper con los positivistas y declarar que no hay sociedades atrasadas, 'sino pueblos diferentes'. Gracias a Boas, Molina separa raza de cultura. Gracias a Molina, podemos ver nuestra propia cultura sin carga genética determinando 'retraso' o 'progreso' (in Basave 2002: 9).<sup>53</sup>

Hence even though an ideology of *mestizaje* begins to take shape during the Porfiriato, the weight of racial theories and the particular context of this period makes it difficult to speak of *mestizaje* as we understand it today. This is why we are reluctant to interpret neo-prehispanic representations within a framework of *mestizaje*, and our interest in trying to understand the transition from *criollismo* to *mestizaje*. Looking at issues of race in the Porfiriato is interesting because we can perceive the coexistence of these two ideologies, and begin to see that rather than opposites they are in fact 'two sides of the same coin'.

Within a context of racial discourse, *criollismo* is informed by attitudes towards *indígenas* and their ability to contribute towards the development of Mexico. A *criollo* stance in the debate over race in the Porfiriato would generally claim that both *indígenas* and *mestizos*

were inferior to white Euroamericans. Racial mixing with 'whites' was therefore seen as intrinsic to the genetic improvement of Mexicans, and to the socio-economic progress of Mexico. Francisco Pimentel for example, encouraged racial mixing with whites in order to promote the gradual whitening of Mexico (Basave 2002: 28). But clear cut divisions between apologists of *criollismo* and *mestizaje* are not that straight forward since even writers like Justo Sierra –who wrote favourably about *indígenas*– believed that foreign colonisation would improve the social condition of *indígenas*.

Of all the writers advocating an ideology of *mestizaje* Vicente Riva Palacio was probably the most congruent in his position. For Riva Palacio only *mestizos* were the 'true' and authentic Mexicans. Neither *indígenas* nor *criollos* could claim a truly patriotic feeling since their extraneous legacies hindered an honest allegiance with Mexico. In the words of Basave, with Riva Palacio "[p]or primera vez se hace una vinculación explícita entre el mestizaje y mexicanidad que otorga al mestizo la exclusiva de la nacionalidad mexicana" (2002: 30).<sup>54</sup> But in spite of Riva Palacio's efforts to turn *mestizos* into the soul of Mexico, the influence of creole ideologies continued to prevail, and according to Basave the image of Mexico during the Porfiriato "difería poco de aquella soñada tiempo atrás por los *criollos* liberales" (Ibid: 40).<sup>55</sup> Browsing through the newspapers of the period also reveals that, although *mestizaje* was increasingly used in patriotic and nationalistic rhetorics, *criollos* were sometimes described as the representatives of the nation. An interesting article published in *El Mundo* in 1898 talks about *criollos* as the 'new race', and describes them in terms of their hybridity:

[S]urgió la raza nueva, la cruzada, la criolla, que es la nuestra; muy diferente de la ibera y de la india, con singular amalgama de elementos de ambos, un tanto híbrida y en consecuencia sin personalismo marcado, ni tendencia genuina, ni tradición homogénea, componentes todas de lo que puede llamarse arte nacional y propio.<sup>56</sup>

The article was written with reference to the coming Academy of San Carlos' exhibition in the winter of 1898, and it reflects the author's concern with the consolidation of a national school. It is interesting to note his description of *criollos* because the hybridity which he highlights is the same syncretic process that apologies of *mestizaje* emphasise. In other words, we must be aware of making clear cut divisions between *criollismo* and *mestizaje* as if they were opposite ideologies. The same can be said in relation to the neat divisions often ascribed to conservatives and liberals, and hence associating *criollismo* with the former and *mestizaje* with the latter must also be done with caution. It is in the overlaps between dominant ideologies that we find the essence of the issues at stake. These

overlaps reveal the negotiations, appropriations, and interpretations that will give shape to new ideas and facilitate the gradual transformation of society.

***Criollismo* and *mestizaje*: two sides of the same coin**

The eventual victory of *mestizaje* depended on its ability to legitimise cultural as well as racial syncretism, and on the ability of intellectuals to defend the racial status of *indígenas* and *mestizos*. But this could not be properly achieved until the legacy of European racial theories gave way to more culturalist approaches. After the Porfiriato the bridge between prehispanic and contemporary *indígenas* was more successfully addressed, and the racial status of *mestizos* as quintessentially Mexican legitimised. Changes in perceptions of race, brought about by cultural anthropology and a disenchantment with Porfirian progress, would help make of *mestizaje* the dominant ideology after the Revolution.

The reinterpretation of prehispanic cultures and religion as a descendant of Western Christianity has often been understood as the assimilation of *indígenas* and their world views into European discourses and heritage. From this perspective precolonial Christianity may be viewed as Europeanising. The process of making Christianity native to the Americas however, shows that dominant discourses were not simply imposed or absorbed uncritically in the colonies, but that a much more complex and syncretic interaction occurred. In this case, the example of creoles who found themselves transformed from colonisers to colonised can help us to understand the interaction between European and American world views.

Even though after Independence the concept of nationhood became increasingly associated with notions of *mestizaje*, certain creole ideologies prevailed making evident the ongoing ambiguity of the elites in regards to contemporary *indígenas*. Analysing the way in which *criollismo* influenced the construction of *mestizaje* may help us to understand the development of *mestizaje* as the dominant ideology after the Porfiriato, and its consequent authority to 'represent' the nation. This becomes particularly relevant if we consider that the reality of contemporary *indígenas* (symbolised by the phrase 'el problema indígena') continues to be a contested issue in Mexican politics.

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<sup>1</sup> The use of postcolonial theory in the context of Latin America has been discussed by scholars in the field. For a discussion in this respect see the journal *Latin American Research Review* Vol. 28, No. 3 1993. See also Adriaensen (2002), and Seed (1991).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on the implications of using terms like *mestizaje* and hybridity see Cornejo Polar (1998). One of the most influential writers in the study of hybridity in Mexico and Latin America is García Canclini. His work has become a standard reference for any one interested in the study of cultural syncretism, and the negotiation between global and local interests, but his work concentrates on the twentieth century and on contemporary issues such as the media and popular crafts (see García Canclini 1989).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Dean and Leibsohn who discuss the suitability of the term hybridity when applied to colonial visual culture. One of the important points they make, is that: "recognizing colonial hybrids is –or ought to be– a profoundly political act, for hybridity is inherent to the process of colonization" (2003: 24).

<sup>4</sup> The following discussion on *criollismo* has been developed from some of the work I presented for my MA dissertation 'One image multiple realities: the ambiguity of Mexican colonial casta paintings' (University College London 2001).

<sup>5</sup> The use of the term 'colonial' –in Spanish *la colonia*– to describe this period has been questioned by Mexican historians who feel that its meaning misrepresents the reality of New Spain which was not a 'colony' in the modern sense of the word. This period is therefore often referred to as the *Virreinato* as this implies instead its status as a Viceroyalty.

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Earle's article 'Creole patriotism and the myth of the loyal Indian' presents an interesting study of the way in which both royalists and republicans used Amerindian cultures to legitimise their political positions during the period of Independence. Her work is important to understand the various levels at which a discourse of *indigenismo* operated (see Earle 2001). In her paper 'Padres de la Patria' Earle continues a discussion on changing attitudes towards the colonial and pre-colonial pasts in Spanish America. Her study centres on archival documentation relating to *discursos cívicos* (civic speeches) pronounced during Independence day celebrations. Earle's study makes evident the continuation of creole ideologies, during and after Independence, and the legacy of *criollismo* in the construction of national narratives (see Earle 2002).

<sup>7</sup> See Brading (2002), and Alberro (2002). Alberro's book *Del gachupín al criollo* presents an interesting analysis of the way in which Spaniards living in America developed a creole identity. The author suggests, for example, that differences in diet (corn and wheat) produced cultural behaviours which were then associated with the personality traits of *indígenas* and creoles (pages 83–87).

<sup>8</sup> "During the decade of 1750, Mexican intellectual life was characterised by a renewed sense of confidence and a more intense patriotism" (my translation).

<sup>9</sup> For an account of the different versions and translations of Clavijero's book see Keen (1990: 299).

<sup>10</sup> Cornelius de Pauw was one of the most influential encyclopaedists of his time, and a bitter critic of the Jesuits. His work provoked a wave of controversy and was discussed in learned societies and academies throughout Europe (see Church 1936). Following the ideas presented by Comte de Buffon in his *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (1749–1809), De Pauw claimed that Americans were inferior due to climatic and biological factors. His *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américaines* (1768) however was more vindictive than Buffon's because he claimed that the inferior condition of Americans would never be improved. In the words of Keen: "[w]hereas Buffon's judgment was tempered by the belief that the works of man would eventually make the New World equal to the Old, no gleam of light relieved the darkness of America's prospects for De Pauw" (1990: 260). See also Gerbi (1993: 66–101). For a useful and informative study of his life and work see Church (1939).

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of this debate see Lafaye (2002). The author presents a brilliant account of the complexities involved in the metamorphosis of Quetzalcóatl with Saint Thomas, and gives detailed descriptions of all the arguments involved.

<sup>12</sup> "They worshipped one lord whom they thought to be god and called Quetzalcóatl, whose priest had the same name and whom they also called Quetzalcóatl [...] and he used to tell them often that there was only one lord and God who called himself Quetzalcóatl" (my translation).

<sup>13</sup> "Motolinía, Andrés de Tapia and Bartolomé de Las Casas make of Quetzalcóatl-Topiltzin into the equivalent of a white and bearded prophet, who had opposed human sacrifice and when he was exiled had, as a result of this, promised to return with other people like him" (my translation).

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion about the authorship of this text and the sources Sigüenza y Góngora used for his work see Lafaye (2002: 257–263).

<sup>15</sup> The status of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a 'virgen mestiza' is fundamental to its strength as a national symbol. The cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe goes back to the sixteenth century when it was mainly followed by *indígenas* in the 'cerro del Tepeyac'. As Florescano explains, Tonantzin-Guadalupe originated as a syncretic cult between Amerindian and Christian religions before it was appropriated by the *criollos* (2001: 405–426). The hagiography of this virgin promulgated by the creoles was based on her apparitions to the 'indio Juan Diego' which was used to prove the existence of a virgin native to the Americas. The significance of the Virgin of Guadalupe within rhetorics of nationhood has been studied by authors like Brading (2002), and Lafaye (2002). It may be interesting for a future study to consider why Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas receded into history whilst the Virgin of Guadalupe continued to gain strength.

<sup>16</sup> "The Indians had just lost all their political and military strength, their idols were defeated, their priests persecuted and an empty chasm opened up ahead. They needed to recover their full human condition by converting to the religion of their conquerors. This religion, would seem closer to them if a *sign* of their past united them to it: that sign was the primitive evangelisation of Saint Thomas" (my translation).

<sup>17</sup> Brading's book *Los orígenes del nacionalismo mexicano* provides an interesting study of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier and his famous speech in 1794 which made public his unorthodox ideas about the Virgin of Guadalupe. Brading's analysis helps to contextualise the life and work of Teresa de Mier. He also presents an illuminating account of how the 'discovery' of the 'Aztec calendar' stone in 1790 and Ignacio Borunda's work influenced the content of Teresa de Mier's speech.

<sup>18</sup> The amount of existing literature on the wars with the United States (1846) and France (1862-63) is extremely vast and varied. Both topics have been extensively researched by scholars in Mexico and abroad. Studies on the subject are largely based on the accounts left by nineteenth century historians many of whom were actively involved during the revolts. In his *Juárez su obra y su Tiempo*, for example, Justo Sierra leaves an account of the French Intervention which reflects the political agenda of the liberal government during the presidency of Juárez and Porfirio Díaz (see Sierra 1974 [1904]). Pi-Suñer's edited book *En Busca de un discurso integrador* provides an extremely useful review of nineteenth historians who wrote about their political and military involvement in these wars (see Pi-Suñer Llorens 2001). For an account on the historiography of Maximilian's reign and the French intervention see Martín Quirarte (1970). See also Acevedo (2001) for a study on contemporary depictions of the military campaigns during the war with the United States made by artists who witnessed the events. For general studies on the American War see Henry (1961) and Singletary (1962).

<sup>19</sup> This exhibition, recently held at the MUNAL, follows the trace of its predecessors *El origen del reino de la Nueva España, 1680-1750*, and *De la patria criolla a la nación mexicana 1750-1860*. All the exhibitions were joined under the umbrella *Pinceles de la Historia*.

<sup>20</sup> "Period in which the modern history of Mexico begins to unfold, as propounded by Daniel Cosío Villegas almost half a century ago. Even though at the beginning the production of history painting seemed uncertain, by the end of this period the practice of this genre was definitively established" (my translation). Introduction to *La fabricación del Estado* page 28.

<sup>21</sup> This information was gathered from Romero de Terreros' catalogue (1963: 526-540).

<sup>22</sup> See appendix B for more detailed information on these images. The illustrated catalogue of this exhibition reproduced some of these compositions including Urruchi's (see *Vigésima Exposición*).

<sup>23</sup> The grades were usually based around degrees of 'bien' (meaning good), so they varied between 'perfectamente bien' (PB, perfectly good), muy bien (MB, very good), and bien (B, good). See 'Libro de Concursos' in AGASC (ref: 08712155).

<sup>24</sup> This is the title recorded in Romero de Terreros catalogue (1963: 373). It was exhibited in *La fabricación del Estado* as 'Perseguido Nezahualcōyotl por sus enemigos, encuentra a unos labradores que lo ocultan entre la chíá que estaban recogiendo (Lugar salvaje por Tlaxpana)' cat. No. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Sánchez Solís for example, one of the few patrons of neo-prehispanic representations, gave primacy to the figure of Nezahualcōyotl in his commissions (see Ramírez 2003a: 69).

<sup>26</sup> Stacie Widdifield thinks that the composition responded to a competition theme (1996: 136) but this is highly unlikely since Urruchi was no longer a student at this point (Fausto Ramírez personal communication). See appendix B cat. no. 122.

<sup>27</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Isidro Martínez painted a composition based on the same theme a few years later (see appendix B [76]).

<sup>28</sup> "As a preacher and pontiff he taught a new law that contained practices which were in many ways similar to Christianity, thus spreading the cult of the cross" (my translation).

<sup>29</sup> The issue of historical anachronism between the apostle Saint Thomas and Quetzalcōatl, used by the critics of precolonial Christianity, was tackled by Teresa de Mier who argued instead that a saint called 'Tomás de Malipur' had been responsible for the evangelisation of the Americas (see Lafaye 2002: 245).

<sup>30</sup> "But if both Saint Thomas succumb to criticism, Quetzalcōatl's history remains firm, which belies the contradiction: there was a white and bearded preacher who taught very similar doctrines to Christianity" (my translation).

<sup>31</sup> "It seems impossible that the devil would give his followers the cross as a symbol of his cult, this being the very sign which intimidates him, and that he would have thus contributed to pave the road towards evangelisation" (my translation).

<sup>32</sup> Another interesting interpretation by Tenenbaum is her discussion on the monument to Christopher Columbus commissioned by Manuel Escandón and unveiled in *Paseo de la Reforma* in 1877. According to the author the iconographic design of the monument, which gives primacy to

the role of evangelisation, is also revealing of a creole ideology (1994: 132-33). But the reason for this is not that clear since she bases her argument on the Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas tradition yet says that the monument celebrates the work of Spanish missionaries and their role in the Christianisation of America.

<sup>33</sup> "If some Christian preached Christianity to the Indians, he was a Christian who did not believe in the Credo", and "Those who have said that the barbarous religion of the Mexica came from this source have wronged the Gospels".

<sup>34</sup> "It is said that the Toltecs were white and bearded".

<sup>35</sup> "Quetzalcóatl was nothing more than a Nahua priest, religious reformer and founder of a popular sect. He was a great pontiff and a great king".

<sup>36</sup> Most of the sketches found in AGASC have dates below the compositions, but I have found them to be wrong on more than one occasion. This has created problems in the cataloguing of the material because this information has been used to create the records of these works.

<sup>37</sup> "Quetzalcóatl, who has abandoned Tula because of the rebellion stirred up against him by Tizcatlipoca [sic], stops for a moment on the road leading to Cholula and weeps seated on a rocky outcrop".

<sup>38</sup> Even though the book does not specify the themes for the competitions, the sketches were marked in pencil with a number and this number corresponds with those used in the book (AGASC ref. 08712155) to identify the author and grades given to the composition.

<sup>39</sup> 'Two good and one medium'.

<sup>40</sup> 'Two good and one medium'.

<sup>41</sup> 'Two very good and one good'.

<sup>42</sup> 'Very good by unanimity'.

<sup>43</sup> Tezcatlipoca was a god associated with war and sacrifices. He was a more violent and fearful figure than Quetzalcóatl, and his cult was one of the most important ones amongst the Aztecs.

<sup>44</sup> This story is narrated in most of the literature dealing with prehispanic history (see for example Chavero 1886: 374-75). Chavero's play 'Quetzalcóatl' (1877) mentioned earlier narrates this story with some detail (and much fantasy).

<sup>45</sup> "The image of the Indian portrayed in these paintings still corresponds to a creole ideal. It is the glorious past that the Jesuits had positioned, in daring comparison, at the level of other great civilisations. The artist of the Academy gathers, with thirty years of delay, the echo of an ideology which the creoles in power had assigned to Indians. In their programme for domination, the real Indian, whose body is weak and whose life is miserable continues not to be taken into account, he is not needed and art ignores him".

<sup>46</sup> See for example Lira González (1986) who has looked at the problematic relationship between *criollos* and *indígenas* after Independence.

<sup>47</sup> "Thus, the Constitution had magically made the Indians disappear, creating in their place abstract Mexican citizens".

<sup>48</sup> See Powell (1968) for a study on *indigenismo* during the Porfiriato.

<sup>49</sup> The best studies in this respect have been presented by Nahmad (1973), González Navarro (1988), Powell (1968), Villoro (1996), Stabb (1959), and Basave Benítez (2002). See also Rojas (2000) who presents an interesting study of how a feeling of *Hispanidad* gained strength in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century due to the Spanish-American war of 1898. Rojas explains that the loss of Spanish colonies prompted a debate over the racial superiority of Anglo Saxons *vis-à-vis* the so called 'decadence' of the Latin race.

<sup>50</sup> "Introduction of positivism as the ideological point of reference of the Porfirian elites placed the ethnic issue at the centre of the debate over national identity".

<sup>51</sup> "Base the vindication of a coloured race on theories designed to legitimise the imperialism of the white race".

<sup>52</sup> Franz Boas was a German anthropologist who emigrated to the United States in 1888. He was professor of Ethnology at Columbia University for forty years during which time he developed a very influential anthropological theory that laid the basis for a relativist understanding of race. Boas argued that each culture possessed a unique character and rejected the universalist approach to race which placed biological and evolutionary determinisms at the centre of scientific enquiry. From this perspective race was the result of wider cultural and socio-economical factors and not the end product of an evolutionary system (see Boas 1989). During his visit to Mexico Boas gave a series of lectures that introduced Mexican anthropologist to his work, and promoted the creation of an International School of American Anthropology and Ethnography in Mexico (see Urías Horcasitas 2001).

<sup>53</sup> "The cultural relativism of Boas allows Molina to break with the positivists and declare that there are no backward societies, 'but rather different peoples'. Thanks to Boas, Molina separated race

from culture. Thanks to Molina, we can see our own culture without the burden of a genetic determinism of 'backwardness' or 'progress' ".

<sup>54</sup> "For the first time, an explicit link between *mestizaje* and *mexicanidad* has been made, which grants the *mestizo* sole right to Mexican nationality".

<sup>55</sup> "Differed little from that dreamed of by the liberal creoles long before"

<sup>56</sup> "A new race arose, that of mixed blood, the creole, which is our own; very different from the Iberian and the Indian, with a particular amalgam of elements from both, somewhat hybrid and as such without a marked partiality, or genuine tendency, or homogenous tradition, all components of what you might call an individual, national art". Oscar Herz, 'Bellas Artes. Una exposición en perspectiva' in *El Mundo* 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1898.

## REPRESENTING THE NATION: MONUMENTS AND ARCHITECTURE

In August 1887 one of the headlines of the newspaper *El Nacional* announced: "¡Apotheosis! El aniversario del Tormento es hoy el día de la gloria."<sup>1</sup> And submersed in patriotic fervour the article continued: "Así del gran CUAUHEMOC; con cerca de cuatro siglos los odios de las razas se extinguen en la sombra;..." (Sosa, 1887: 9).<sup>2</sup> These words referred to one of the most lavish celebrations organised during the Porfiriato designed to mark the inauguration of the monument to Cuauhtémoc on the twenty first of August that year. From then on the urban landscape of Mexico City has embraced the figure of an Amerindian hero which, as the official rhetoric announced, all Mexicans can feel proud of.

This event was one of the most visible examples of a nationalist agenda driving cultural politics and artistic production during the long presidency of Porfirio Díaz. The following study will look at some examples of state funded projects during the Porfiriato in order to examine issues of representation, and the way in which Mexico constructed images of the nation using prehispanic iconography whilst seeking to convey notions of modernity. It will focus on the role of architecture and monumental sculpture in order to examine the debates over the form and content of a national style, and the difficulty of presenting a modern face of the nation whilst celebrating the cultural legacies of prehispanic Mexico. By comparing different projects, I will also discuss the possible reasons for the success or failure of certain architectural styles and monuments to convey notions of nationhood, as well as their ability to combine the political and aesthetic discourses operating at the time.

### **Nineteenth century architecture in Mexico**

Nineteenth century architecture is generally viewed in terms of its eclecticism and a taste for historicist revivals. Romanticism contributed to fostering a taste for 'exotic' archaeological remains pertaining to ancient civilisations in Italy, Greece, and the near East. A trend for expeditions to remote and unexplored lands gained popularity during the nineteenth century, and artists were hired to record the findings of these expeditions. Travel literature also developed as a consequence –as did the creation of panoramas both of which were extremely popular at the time. The work of Stephens, Catherwood and Waldeck are a perfect example of the age. The knowledge acquired through these expeditions constitutes the basis of modern archaeology, and it became a rich source of inspiration for artists wanting to experiment with non-European iconography (see for example Catlin 1989; and Bourbon 1999). Nineteenth century European architecture is therefore marked by an eclecticism influenced by the ideological legacies of romanticism, and by a growing interest in archaeology and explorations (see Lorenz 1970). Apart from

an interest in the 'exotic' material remains of non-European cultures there was also a reevaluation of gothic architecture and the overall cultural legacies of the Middle Ages. The popularisation of a gothic revival was particularly strong in Britain and France, and it was theoretically articulated by leading intellectuals such as Ruskin (1819-1900), William Morris (1834-96), and Viollet-le-Duc (1814-79).

Whilst in Europe the style of romanticism appeared as a response to the 'coldness' of neoclassicism, in Mexico neoclassicism was adopted during the first half of the nineteenth century to substitute the 'excesses' of the Baroque. The adoption of neoclassicism as the 'official' style, regulated and enforced by the Academy of San Carlos, was also a response to the newly achieved independence of Mexico. Since the Baroque was the architectural style *par excellence* of New Spain a different style was needed to represent the new status of Mexico as a nation. The associations of the Baroque with the old regime sometimes propitiated the substitution of colonial buildings for neoclassical structures. The motives were not always political however, since the construction of neoclassical buildings was also a matter of taste (see Lira Vazquez 1990, 1998; and Katzman 2002). On its turn, neoclassicism gave way to eclecticism towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Looking at the influence of classical styles in Mexican architecture from the nineteenth century, Katzman noticed a shift in stylistic trends which indicates a stronger preference for eclecticism towards the end of the century. He explains that some examples of eclectic architecture –mainly neogothic– already existed in the 1800s, but that the incidence of these increased by the 1880s, and that from 1895 onwards eclectic architecture became the dominant style in Mexico (2002: 81). As was the case in Europe, eclecticism appeared in Mexico as a response to the rigid formalisms of neoclassicism allowing architects to experiment with form.

It is in the context of eclectic architecture that we must therefore understand an attempt to create a national style that may incorporate prehispanic elements. As explained by Lira Vazquez:

[E]l eclecticismo arquitectónico devolvía al Mexicano la posibilidad de enriquecer formalmente, una vez más, su lenguaje arquitectónico; más aún, el eclecticismo permitió al Mexicano hacer uso de repertorios tanto prehispanicos como coloniales, exentos de sus anteriores connotaciones políticas y ubicados ahora en contextos más universales, y tan válidos como los repertorios góticos, románticos y renacentistas (1998: 99).<sup>3</sup>

Even though eclecticism facilitated freedom of experimentation, this was by no means free of the political connotations which Lira Vazquez claims. The adaptation of prehispanic elements in architecture was intrinsically linked to issues of representation, and the

possibility of using neo-prehispanic architecture to represent the nation became an extremely controversial issue as will be later shown.

Against a background of eclecticism and romanticism architecture was therefore placed alongside an interest in archaeology, and the debates around the form and content of a national style certainly reflect this –not always amicable– relationship. In relation to the sources used for prehispanic material the texts of architects such as Manuel Alvarez, Luis Salazar and Nicolas Mariscal (see Schávelzon 1988; and Alvarez 1900) refer to the work of Catherwood, Stephens, Waldeck, Kingsborough, and Charnay. And in terms of Mexican writers the work of Alfredo Chavero, Orozco y Berra, Peñafiel, and Francisco del Paso y Troncoso were amongst the most commonly used. The close dialogue developed between architecture and archaeology was a point of criticism for the opponents of neo-prehispanic architecture, and claims were sometimes made in regards to the accuracy in the use of this material. Talking about the architecture of this period Francisco de la Maza complains, for example, that the architects of the Porfiriato did not always have first hand knowledge of archaeological material, and that their work was based on secondary sources taken from Kingsborough, Waldeck, Dupaix, etc.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from these sources the writings of Viollet-le-Duc were the most influential in regards to theory. The nature of his work gave architects –both in favour and against historical eclecticism– grounds for the use or rejection of prehispanic material, and to theorise on the development of Mexican architecture.<sup>5</sup> Viollet-le-Duc argued that architecture was the product of the social, environmental and cultural context which produced it, but that it did not necessarily act as a reflection on the level of civilisation attained by those groups (see Viollet-le-Duc 1945 [1875]; and Vargas Salguero 1986). His 'relativistic' approach allowed Mexican writers to justify different positions and to argue for and against the incorporation of prehispanic material. There is much to say about the role of architecture in Mexico, and the significance of styles,<sup>6</sup> but I will limit my discussion to the debate around the formation of a national style using prehispanic iconography, and the agency of architecture within governmental projects seeking to visualise an image for the nation.

The innovative work of Casanova, Eguiarte et.al (in Uribe 1987) has made apparent the way in which the interests of dominant groups defined the nature of artistic production during the nineteenth century. Casanova's essay examines the role of the Academy as an awarding body highlighting its agency as an institution partaking in structures of power, and able to regulate work practices. This is most apparent in regards to architecture which was one of the main disciplines taught at the Academy.<sup>7</sup> According to the author, even though engineering was taught at the *Colegio de Minas* professional certificates could

only be issued with the approval of the Academy of San Carlos. This meant that both architects and engineers had to comply with the Academy's regulations. What we find therefore is an intricate network of relationships between the State, public and official institutions, and the dominant members of society; all of which combined to determine the form and content of artistic production during the later part of the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, looking specifically at the period between 1877 and 1910 Eloisa Uribe explains that the development of architecture and public sculpture in Mexico City responded to a need to present a modern and civilised image of the country. The embellishment of the city with adequate services, she explains, was part of a strategy to consolidate a favourable image of Mexico that could produce trust in its potential, and as a result further promote foreign investment: "[I]a confianza en un país prospero, en donde la paz y el orden aseguraban los capitales invertidos, fue respaldada visualmente por el desarrollo urbano y arquitectónico de la ciudad" (1987: 187).<sup>8</sup> Uribe also explains that the production of monuments and public sculpture was regulated by the State through official institutions and the Academy of San Carlos. According to the author, the government stipulated the "autorización de presupuestos, lineamientos temáticos e ideológicos que debían seguir la enseñanza y los proyectos escultóricos, y en el patrocinio y adquisición de obras" (1987: 191).<sup>9</sup>

#### **An 'Aztec palace' in Paris: in search of a national architecture**

Under Porfirio Díaz the arts and literature flourished even though, as in all other respects, success in these fields depended on their allegiance to the Porfirian canon. In regards to cultural policies, and the politics involved in issues of representation Díaz overtly supported the work of a group which Tenorio Trillo has accurately described as 'The wizards of progress' (Tenorio Trillo, 1996a).<sup>10</sup> The idea of an 'acceptable national past', discussed by Tenorio Trillo in the context of international exhibitions, underlined all the policies of State sponsored art, and was the crucial element for the selection of artistic and prehispanic objects sent to international exhibitions. The government wanted to control the scrutiny of a foreign audience who would most certainly be critical of threatening exoticism.

World fairs provided the perfect forum for making visible official constructions of *mexicanidad*. Late nineteenth century international exhibitions were contrived displays in which industrial and technological progress were placed at the forefront of human achievement and seen as the concrete signs of modernity.<sup>11</sup> As explained by Hobsbawm progress was most evident in technology and "[m]odern technology was not only undeniable and triumphant, but highly visible" (2002: 27). The iconic visibility of the Eiffel tower and its role as signifier of Frenchness gives poignancy to his words. One of the

most flamboyant exhibitions in this period was the 1889 Paris fair for which the Eiffel tower was built –it was organised to celebrate the centenary of the French Revolution. The participation of Mexico in this fair was significant because at that point France was seen as the cultural centre *par excellence* and its guiding role in the path towards modernity widely acknowledged. In the words of Tenorio Trillo: “[b]eyond a doubt, if modernity was the goal, France was the place to be in 1889” (1996a: 18).

For this occasion Mexico designed an expensive Pavilion best described as a modern type of ‘Aztec palace’. The question that now follows is why was the Aztec palace chosen to represent Mexico in the 1889 Paris exhibition when the concepts of progress and modernity were paramount? The answer to this is complex and underlined by unresolved paradoxes related to an ongoing attempt to consolidate national narratives. What we do know for sure however, is that it failed to become a permanent signifier of *mexicanidad* –a status achieved by the Eiffel tower for example. To explore this question we must look briefly at the participation of Mexico and its pavilion in this international fair.

The 1889 exhibition was destined to become “the greatest fair of the nineteenth century” (Tenorio Trillo, 1996a: 16), and the Mexican display the biggest and most impressive exhibit to that date. All the creative, administrative and practical skills of the ‘wizards of progress’ were combined to secure a place for Mexico in the consciousness of the international community. Personally appointed by Díaz, the commission in charge spent almost two years of careful planning, and after successful negotiations with the French government Mexico was allowed to occupy a big and well placed space within the exhibition’s grounds (see Ramírez 1988). The location of the Mexican pavilion (and all the other Latin American exhibits) at the feet of the Eiffel tower was highly symbolic since, as pointed out by Ramírez “su destino era servir de arranque al triunfal arco de la producción europea” (1988: 249).<sup>12</sup>

The time was right for Mexico because the country had been experiencing a decade of unprecedented economic growth, and its confidence in becoming an important industrial centre and attracting foreign investment was also at its peak. Modernisation in terms of urbanisation and communications were also flourishing, and so was the infrastructure needed for the growth of capitalism with its internal and external markets. Mexico exhibited its own colonising mission on the native inhabitants of its territory and was proud to show them as ethnographic specimens –just as the British did with Australian aborigines, Maoris and other imperial subjects.<sup>13</sup> Mexico, viewed in Europe through an aura of ‘otherness’, devised intelligent displays that satisfied an appetite for the exotic whilst asserting the ‘normative’ civilised and cultured nature of the ruling classes and the

elites.<sup>14</sup> This point has been studied by Tenorio Trillo who explains how: "Mexico in nineteenth-century world's fairs shared Europe's orientalist and exoticist concerns and in turn undertook an 'autoethnography' " (1996a: 7). This was a difficult and potentially dangerous task however, since the racial status of all Mexicans was at stake. To counteract this, the official rhetoric established ideological parameters to differentiate Mexicans from contemporary *indígenas* and these from their prehispanic forefathers. In this way the government was able to appropriate the cultural heritage of *indígenas* and claim the authority to represent them. Porfirian intellectuals spoke for, described and studied *indígenas* whose bodies and cultural traditions were forced to fit dominant discourses on race.

The participation of Mexico in International Exhibitions was also used by the government to promote foreign migration, but the awaited northern European migration never happened in great numbers. Instead, most of the immigrants came from Spain, Italy, the United States, and China (Tenorio Trillo 1996a: 35). As has been pointed out, the work of geographer Antonio García Cubas was aimed at promoting the country abroad. His detailed maps showing the natural richness of Mexico also provided an account of its racial and cultural characteristics. Mexico badly needed to overcome its negative reputation because "[t]he imperatives of progress were as much a part of Mexico's displays at world's fairs as was their nationalistic symbolism" (Tenorio Trillo 1996a: 37). To present itself as a nation therefore, meant to portray the characteristics that made Mexico both unique and modern. This uniqueness was based on a notion of authenticity which relied on the existence of a primordial past, and which was intrinsic to discourses of nationhood. The primacy of authenticity in the legitimisation of a national sentiment is explained by Prasenjit Duara in terms of the linear construction of time that fundamentals the existence of nations. In his study 'The regime of authenticity' (1998) Duara argues that the internal unity of the nation relies on an idea of a timeless or unchanging past, and that: "the unchanging essence of the past is often endowed with a special aura of sanctity, purity and authenticity at the heart of modern discourse of progressive change" (1998: 293). As has been discussed, Mexico's prehispanic heritage helped to fundament the characteristics of its national history and hence also of its authenticity.

The conceptual visualisation of Mexicaness abroad became the focus of debates on what constituted the nature of national identity, and the architectural styles chosen for its pavilions the best representatives of these debates.<sup>15</sup> In spite of their complexity and interesting ambiguities, regarding the precolonial and colonial pasts, arguments around the form and content of national architecture may be briefly summarised as follows: 1) One view argued that the nature of Mexican nationality was grounded on the experience

of colonisation and the legacy of Spain, hence the country should be represented by European/Spanish architecture. 2) Contrary to this, others believed that the roots of nationality stretched back to precolonial times, and so Mexico should search for its identity in the legacy of prehispanic cultures –this implied that the country should be represented through prehispanic iconography and styles. 3) Another view claimed that nationality was the product of the encounter between Spanish and Amerindian cultures, and hence the creative combination of both legacies should be used to portray a faithful image of the country. Broadly speaking we may describe them as conservative, liberal and eclectic. Uniting these views was a parallel consensus that Greek or Roman styles could be used as a means to represent the universality of Mexico.

For the Paris 1889 exhibition a liberal –one may say quasi-orthodox– view dominated, and the Mexican government decided to promote a national style based on prehispanic elements. Two projects were presented for this purpose. One of these was by Antonio M. Anza and Antonio Peñafiel who joined forces to concoct the materialisation of this historicist revival [1]. Peñafiel presented an ambitious iconographical design which attempted to present what may be described as a metanarrative based on prehispanic history, cosmology and legends. Peñafiel was not interested in putting together a design to simply 'decorate' the exterior walls of the pavilion, he wanted to present a complex historical narrative which would make visible the foundations of Mexican nationality. This was clearly stated by himself in the long and detailed account Peñafiel provided for his design, and which was published parallel to the exhibition as a trilingual edition.<sup>16</sup> In this text Peñafiel makes evident his bias towards Aztec culture, as well as his erudite knowledge of archaeology –for which he had first hand experience through his own research and explorations.<sup>17</sup> As mentioned in chapter four, the second proposal was presented as a collaboration between the architects Luis Salazar, Vicente Reyes and José M. Alva. Unlike Peñafiel's design, this second project was a melting pot of prehispanic styles which presented an eclectic array of forms and shapes:

In the Salazar palace, all pre-Hispanic styles and histories were synthesized into one single architectural past, which in turn was the stylistic antecedent of the modern nation. The building was 70 metres long, 30 metres wide, and 17.20 meters tall. The shape of the base was a copy of Xochicalco's temple, combined with motifs taken from Mitla's ruins. The monolith of Tenango was used as a model for the columns, and the lateral windows were copied from Palenque's forms as described by Dupaix and Chamay and reinterpreted by Chavero (Tenorio Trillo 1996a: 73).

Based mainly on his own work, Peñafiel's programme consisted of framing the central part of the pavilion with figures symbolising the rise and fall of the Aztec empire (figure 53). Placed on the left, Nezahualcóyotl [105], Izcoatl [104], and Totoquihuatzin [113] represented the consolidation of the empire and the triple alliance between Mexico, Texcoco and Tlacopan. Opposite them, Cacama [106], Cuitláhuac [110], and Cuauhtémoc [109] stood for the defeat of the empire at the hands of conquering Spaniards. On either side of these prehispanic heroes, mythological figures were carefully chosen by Peñafiel for their relevance in Aztec cosmology.<sup>18</sup> The artist responsible for visualising Peñafiel's design was Jesús Contreras, already working in Paris at that time.<sup>19</sup> In relation to the interior (figure 54) we must note that its content contrasted quite sharply with the exterior. Even though prehispanic-based designs were used, the overall picture is that of a European influenced space dominated by light and metal structures more akin to conceptions of progress and modernity operating at the time. Incidentally the illustration also shows José María Velasco, behind whom a small scale copy of the Eiffel tower rises. And to the right of this group, at the centre of our view point, we can also see a small version of the monument to Cuauhtémoc carefully placed to receive the visitors. Insightful studies relating to the overall iconographical design of the Aztec palace and its content have already been presented by Ramírez (1988) and Tenorio Trillo (1996a). For our purposes however, the question is what happened to the pavilion, and Contreras' sculptures after they were dismantled and removed from the exhibition grounds, and what kind of response did the pavilion provoke amongst Porfirian intellectuals.

From existing research we know that the structure of the Aztec palace was designed to be easily dismantled so that it could be rebuilt in Mexico, and that Anza and Peñafiel had suggested that it could be used to house an archaeological museum (see Ramírez 1988: 210, and Godoy 1890). Thanks to Ramírez we also know that the structure was damaged in the process of repatriation, and that once back in Mexico the Pavilion and its accompanying sculptures slowly fell into decay. The possibility of sending it to the Madrid Columbian exhibition of 1892 was contemplated but never materialised; and equally failed was an attempt to reassemble it near Merced de las Huertas in Mexico City "to embellish the towns of Tacuba and Popotla" (Ramírez 1988: 252-53, my translation).<sup>20</sup> Contreras' sculptures were somehow more fortunate even though they remained hidden and forgotten for many years after their glorious days in Paris.<sup>21</sup> Cuauhtémoc, Izcoatl, Totoquihuatzin and Nezahualcóyotl were reused by the architect Luis Lelo de Larrea for his monument to 'La Raza' in 1940,<sup>22</sup> and the rest sent to Aguascalientes where Contreras was originally from (Ramírez 1988: 253).

In spite of the Aztec Palace's ephemeral fate, contemporary accounts show that on the whole the pavilion –and the Mexican exhibit in general– received a favourable response both in Mexico and abroad.<sup>23</sup> According to sympathetic press and official records, Mexico received many prizes and honorary distinctions for its artistic,<sup>24</sup> agricultural, industrial and scientific displays. In other words controlled public opinion –written and manipulated by Porfirian sympathisers– stated that Mexico's participation in Paris had been an outstanding success. Such an overstatement cannot be dismissed since an increasing move towards the use of prehispanic iconography was indeed becoming the preferred style for representations of Mexican identity. As pointed out by Ramírez “[p]ara 1888 (fecha del proyecto), ya había arraigado en los sectores dominantes la convicción de que la manera mas apropiada de que México ofreciera al mundo una faz característica era asumiendo su pasado indígena” (1988: 239).<sup>25</sup>

Not every one however agreed with this. Critical opposition to the architectural design of the Aztec Palace reveals the contention between liberal and conservative positions earlier stated. One of the best sources for the study of these debates is Schávelzon's *La polémica del arte nacional* (1988). This book reproduces some of the most significant texts published at the time voicing the opinions of those against or in favour of a national architecture based on prehispanic styles. Briefly summarised, from a pragmatic point of view most of the opinions against claimed that prehispanic architectural styles were obsolete, and could not properly respond to the demands of modern life styles. Behind this was an evolutionist perspective that saw Amerindian cultures as backward and Europeans as civilised. Mexico, the opinion went, should 'move forward' and this could only be achieved by following European models. The words of Manuel F. Alvarez are a perfect example of how many upper class Mexicans felt in relation to this. Talking about the Aztec Palace Alvarez brilliantly constructs the following metaphor:

Aquello lo veía yo enteramente raro y antiartístico, y se me figuraba un individuo Mexicano vestido correctamente con casaca, corbata blanca y guantes, pero embozado en un sarape de Saltillo: en lo primero veía yo nuestros productos marcando nuestro adelanto; en el sarape, las fachadas indias del edificio en cuestión tapando las columnas de fierro, las escaleras, los tragaluces y, sobre todo, los objetos de nuestra industria (1900: 275).<sup>26</sup>

The contrast between the interior and the exterior –brought to the fore in Alvarez' words– encapsulates a historical predicament which artists and intellectuals were working hard to address, and which by 1889 had clearly not yet been resolved. As already mentioned, the way in which Porfirian intellectuals 'imagined the nation' was largely based on a long debate on the role of prehispanic cultures and the cultural effects of colonialism. Mexico's ambivalent relationship with its past was mediated and expressed differently depending

on whether it was seen from a conservative or a liberal background. Both parties however, manipulated prehispanic history to legitimise the institutionalisation of Mexicaness, and both were equally discriminating in regards to the situation of contemporary *indígenas*. Figures carved in stone by the hands of our great prehispanic ancestors were praised, but the living inheritors of those 'vanished' civilisations were not wanted in the consciousness of proud mestizos and creoles –unless of course *indígenas* willingly abandoned 'their ways' and became thoroughly absorbed by the unifying force of the nation. Apart from this, the example of the Aztec Palace also illustrates the difficulty of constructing an image of the nation which could be rooted in a prehispanic past, whilst portraying a present concordant with the demands of progress, and the notions of modernity stipulated by Western capitalism.

The Aztec Palace and Contreras' sculptures were an attempt to reconcile Mexico's colonial and precolonial histories, and to combine history with progress and modernity, but they remained at the level of experimentation. Like Alvarez' metaphor what they portrayed was contrast and distance with the prehispanic rather than honest dialogue and reconciliation. This point is also raised by Toca who argues that an attempt to create a national architecture based on prehispanic elements did not represent a rapprochement with the cultures which produced it. He also explains that the popularity of eclecticism:

[N]o fue sino el resultado de la continuada influencia de la cultura europea que había encontrado un rico filón en la novedosa explotación de la arquitectura de 'estilos' que, además de ayudar a airear el momificado aire de las Academias, le permitía adornarse con innumerables exotismos que la hacían ver mas cosmopolita..... siendo así este 'nacionalismo' sólo una faceta más de la imposición cultural de la Europa ilustrada (1987: 36).<sup>27</sup>

How could it be otherwise, one may ask, when the task was to marry an indigenous past still struggling against the weight of western racial and cultural prejudices, with a present seeking to emulate the same culture which kept Mexico at bay in order to legitimise its own superiority and domination.

#### **Cuauhtémoc: a monument for a national hero**

Our second example of state sponsored art using prehispanic imagery is a monument built to honour the last Mexica emperor Cuauhtémoc [39] (figure 55). This time however, the project received a positive response and was generally welcomed as a symbol of national identity. Once finished, the monument was also praised for its artistic merit and has since remained one of the few examples of its kind.

Before proceeding it must be pointed out that a monument to Cuauhtémoc already existed. It was placed along *Paseo de la Viga* under the presidency of Juárez and

unveiled with an official ceremony in 1869 [38]. One of the only records we have of this monument is a lithograph reproduced in Rivera Cambas *México pintoresco artístico y monumental* (1974 [1880-83]).<sup>28</sup> The illustration (figure 56) shows a relatively modest plinth supporting the bust of Cuauhtémoc. No prehispanic iconography seems to have been used to decorate the pedestal or any other part of the monument. According to Rivera Cambas a commemorative plaque was placed on one side of the base written in 'Castilian' and 'Mexican' which read: "Al último monarca Azteca, á Guauctimoczin, heróico en la defensa de la Patria, sublime en el martirio: el Ayuntamiento Constitucional en 1869" (1974: 185, vol. 2).<sup>29</sup> Rivera Cambas also provides a small description of the inauguration ceremony which was attended by the president Benito Juárez and his cabinet. It was unveiled on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, a date which commemorates the final defeat of the Aztecs and the fall of Tenochtitlán. The ceremony was organised by the city council,<sup>30</sup> and important intellectuals of the time such as Sánchez Solís and Guillermo Prieto participated with laudatory words (see Velazquez Guadarrama 1999; and Tenenbaum 1992).

Even though the monument was modest compared to its Porfirian successor, the fact that an effigy to Cuauhtémoc was erected at a time when the country was just recovering from a costly and painful second war of Independence gives it a special significance. Its rightful place as an important historic monument however, only survives in textual documentation since no sources have been found containing information as to its whereabouts after it was removed from its original location.<sup>31</sup> It is always possible of course that it does no longer exist. Either way this first monument to Cuauhtémoc belongs to the list of unlocated neo-prehispanic representations from the second half of the nineteenth century.

The monumental grandeur of Jiménez' design compared to its predecessor, and the different location chosen for it convey the historical significance attained by Cuauhtémoc towards the end of the nineteenth century. As the last emperor of the Aztec empire Cuauhtémoc became increasingly associated with ideas of nationhood (see García Quintana 1977; and Andrés Lira 1991). Rivera Cambas' comments reflect the contemporary admiration of nationalist intellectuals when he complains about the smallness and modesty of this first commemorative attempt. He also criticised the government for not wanting to invest more money so that a bigger and more worthy sculpture could had been made (1974: 186, vol. 2). Rivera Cambas was perhaps unaware that a more magnificent and expensive monument was already under construction; a monument that would fit the heroic grandeur of Cuauhtémoc, and give pride to the Mexican nation.

The monument to Cuauhtémoc in Reforma was the first major project of public sculpture commissioned by the Díaz administration. According to Schávelzon the competition was publicly announced on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1877 asking participants to submit their projects no later than the 31<sup>st</sup> of November the following year (1988: 127). The monument was part of an overall governmental project planned to commemorate historical events by placing national heroes along *Paseo de la Reforma*. Together with Cuauhtémoc, Hidalgo, Juárez and Zaragoza were also selected to represent the liberal's version of history which gave primacy to the Conquest, Independence and Reform periods. This ambitious monumental project was devised by Vicente Riva Palacio who, as previously mentioned, became one of the leading figures in the consolidation of a national history.<sup>32</sup> Riva Palacio was minister of development from 1876 to 1880, and worked closely with Francisco Sosa who later devised a second monumental project to decorate *Paseo de la Reforma* (see Velazquez Guadarrama 1999; and Sosa 1974 [1900]). Talking about the different views expressed by the intellectuals involved in the development of *Paseo de la Reforma* Tenenbaum describes their position as either 'Francophile progressives' or 'nationalist mythologizers' (1992: 370). The work of Riva Palacio and Sosa was without a doubt an example of the latter position. Riva Palacio believed that monuments were important because they had both a pragmatic and an aesthetic function:

'Public monuments exist not only to perpetuate the memory of heroes and of great men who deserve the gratitude of the people, but also so awaken in some and strengthen in others the love of legitimate glories and also the love of art, where in those monuments one of its most beautiful expressions is to be found' (quoted in Tenenbaum 1992: 371).

The construction of the monument to Cuauhtémoc is intrinsically tied to the development of *Paseo de la Reforma* as an urban marker of progress and modernity.<sup>33</sup> The avenue was made under the reign of Maximilian who wanted a more direct link between Chapultepec and the *Plaza Mayor* (now *El Zócalo*). Maximilian's interest in its construction has sometimes been explained as an attempt to copy the urban development of Paris under Napoleon III, but Tenenbaum argues that the Emperor "wanted the new boulevard strictly for his personal convenience" (1992: 369). The avenue was designed as a straight line from the monument of Carlos IV<sup>34</sup> in Bucareli to the entrance of Chapultepec. After Maximilian was defeated Juárez kept a distance from this urban landmark due to its associations with the Second Empire, but he renamed it *Paseo de la Reforma* on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1872, "and declared it to be for the use of all citizens, whether on foot, horse, or any other means of transport" (Agostoni 2003: 80). The development of *Paseo de la Reforma* as a recreational space began with Lerdo de Tejada, but the Porfiriato saw its consolidation as a civic location where important monuments to the nation were placed. Talking about the urban design of Mexico City –as it prepared to celebrate the centenary

of its independence— Tenorio Trillo explains that the image of the 'ideal' city it attempted to recreate "was the capital city understood as a textbook of a civic religion; a city of monuments and well-defined public spaces" (1996b: 79).

Going back to the monument, five projects were submitted for the competition. The winning proposal was by Francisco M. Jiménez who presented his study with a stamp that read: 'Verdad, Belleza y Utilidad' (see Schávelzon 1988: 131). Unlike Peñafiel's design, Jiménez opted for a mixture of prehispanic styles because he felt that was the best way to convey the characteristics of a national style. In his own words:

Para llenar bien las condiciones a que debe satisfacer el proyecto a la memoria de Cuauhtémoc y demás héroes que se sacrificaron por la defensa de la patria durante la lucha de la conquista por los españoles, he creído que ningún estilo de arquitectura convendría como un renacimiento en cuyos elementos entraran los detalles hermosos que hoy se contemplan en las ruinas de Tula, Uxmal, Mitla y Palenque, conservando tanto cuanto más fuere posible el carácter de la arquitectura de los antiguos habitantes de este continente; arquitectura que contiene riquezas y detalles tan bellos y adecuados, que se prestan para desarrollar un estilo característico, que podremos llamar el estilo nacional (reproduced in Schávelzon 1988: 131).<sup>35</sup>

Once approved, the sculptor Miguel Noreña was hired in 1882 to oversee the completion of its accompanying sculptures and the bas-reliefs included in the composition. He would also be responsible for the creative interpretation of its main symbolical figure:

Cuauhtémoc. Noreña and all the other sculptors involved in this project worked and trained at the Academy of San Carlos.<sup>36</sup> Jiménez trained as a civil engineer and seems to have dedicated his professional career mainly to the construction of monuments (see Katzman 2002: 363). But his death in 1884 meant that he was unable to oversee the completion of the monument, and the work was finished by Ramón Agea.

According to Tenenbaum the original design by Jiménez included the composition of three bronze statues instead of just one. The author specifies that Jiménez had intended to include the effigies of Cuauhtémoc (4 meters high), Cacamatzin (2.8 meters high), and Cuitláhuac (2.8 meters high),<sup>37</sup> but that due to budgetary strictures when the project was presented again in 1880 only the sculpture to Cuauhtémoc remained (1992: 374).

Jiménez design was also supposed to have four bas-reliefs and not just the two that were made by Guerra and Noreña (ibid). Tenenbaum explains that these changes occurred when Díaz was no longer in the presidency and Riva Palacio had resigned as minister of Development. But I found two images of Jiménez' project in the FNINAH (National Photographic archive - INAH), one from 1878 (no. 464839), and the other from 1879 (no. 464838) which do not seem to include any of these secondary sculptures (see figures 57

and 58). With respect to the elimination of Cacama and Cuitláhuac from the original composition Tenenbaum argues that:

[B]y eliminating the other two figures and concentrating solely on Cuauhtémoc, and by putting the monument at such a prominent location, the Porfirian proponents of an official liberal 'national' history for the country sought to inculcate their view of the past and create public support for their domination of the present and the future (1992: 375).

Tenenbaum is right to highlight the significance of placing the new monument on *Paseo de la Reforma*, but the reason why eliminating the other two figures stressed the aims of the liberal government is not all that clear. We could argue that the decision to concentrate on the statue of Cuauhtémoc alone responded to budgetary and practical reasons. And that, from a didactic point of view, the authorities may have decided to concentrate the attention on Cuauhtémoc rather than confusing matters with secondary figures which people might not have been able to identify. Either way, the characteristics of the final composition are: a pedestal decorated with prehispanic elements (figure 59), two commemorative plaques and two bas-reliefs: one representing the apprehension of Cuauhtémoc by Cortés sculpted by Miguel Noreña [103] (figure 60), and a second one depicting the torture of Cuauhtémoc sculpted by Gabriel Guerra [104] (figure 61);<sup>38</sup> four commemorative inscriptions to the figures of Cacama, Cuitláhuac, Coanaoch and Tellepanquetzal<sup>39</sup> at the base of the second structure; and, at the top of a narrower third base, the bronze sculpture of Cuauhtémoc made by Noreña. The lions on the base that holds the whole structure were made by Eпитacio Calvo.

The complicity between the State and artistic production, highlighted by Casanova and Uribe (1987), becomes unquestionable during the official inauguration of the Monument to Cuauhtémoc in 1887. For this occasion a carefully orchestrated performance was devised by the Porfirian entourage to honour the figure of a prehispanic hero who embodied the patriotic feelings of the official rhetoric. Cuauhtémoc's resistance against the conquering Spaniards, and his bravery in the face of torture made him a fitting symbol of endurance and opposition to foreign domination.

A small booklet edited by Francisco Sosa (1887) provides a good account of this event. For this occasion leading intellectuals of the Porfirian circle such as Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, Alfredo Chavero, and Francisco Sosa prepared speeches that sought to encourage national unity. Dressed in patriotic fervour their words urged spectators to join hands as brothers united behind a common history. The overt use of prehispanic imagery and rhetoric during the ceremony shows the appropriation of history by the hegemonic groups in power, but also the still problematic relationship between *indígenas*, *mestizos*

and creoles. A desire to overcome racial divisions is perhaps best reflected in Francisco del Paso's discourse which was written and pronounced in both Nahuatl and Spanish. Del Paso ended his speech claiming that the figure of Cuauhtémoc:

[U]na enseñanza encierra: que nos unamos y que olvidemos nuestras antiguas malquerencias; en presencia de este gran caballero que nos esta oyendo [referring to Díaz] declaremos: defenderemos la patria que nos dejó Cuauhtémoc, como el nos enseñó; y con todo nuestro corazón conservaremos la unión, la Independencia (in Sosa 1887: 29).<sup>40</sup>

Sosa's account also makes apparent the participation of indigenous communities who arrived at the ceremony with banners, flowers, and music. Furthermore, a triumphal arch made with flowers and crowned by the national symbol (an eagle resting on a cactus) was presented by the *indígenas* of Atzacapozalco to president Díaz. From the events proceedings and Sosa's descriptions we get a clear sense that Cuauhtémoc was not the only central figure in this symbolic occasion. A flamboyant Aztec gallery was designed to accommodate Díaz and the members of his selected entourage. From this platform both the president and his followers were able to enjoy the unveiling of a monument that Jiménez intended as signifier of 'Truth, Beauty and Utility'. Descriptions of the gallery indicate that a large canvas representing the Valley of Mexico served as its background, and that on top of a platform an *icpalli* (Aztec throne) was built for Díaz. Surrounded by an Aztec décor, and with the Valley of Mexico behind him Díaz therefore claimed his rights over the empty throne left by Cuauhtémoc. This public performance reflects the increasing visibility of prehispanic legacies in the cultural life of Mexico during the Porfiriato; and the way in which discourses of nationhood used prehispanic history to legitimise claims of authenticity. The complicity between history and the State, and the significance of authenticity in this context is clearly explained by Martin:

In Mexico, the notion of authenticity thrives in the space of technologies of power that seek to disseminate particular versions of history in the name of nationalism. History serves as a technology of power when constructions of the past are deployed by the state to establish the legitimacy of the present government (1993: 449).

The ceremony to Cuauhtémoc began a tradition of annual celebrations held every 21<sup>st</sup> of August organised by the city council.<sup>41</sup> Contemporary descriptions of these events can be found in the newspaper *El Mundo Ilustrado* which often illustrates the articles with photographs showing children dressed up as prehispanic Indians (figures 62 and 63).<sup>42</sup> The ceremonies were usually attended by indigenous communities, schools, mutual societies and government officials. The events usually included theatrical representations

of Cuauhtémoc's life, speeches in Nahuatl and Spanish, and the national anthem. Although the government wanted to perpetuate the memory of a prehispanic hero who embodied notions of patriotism and nationhood, the ceremonies were also dangerous spaces where indigenous resentment against the ruling classes could be incited.

Going back to the monument itself, two things are of particular interest. Firstly, the –mainly– positive responses it received by even the most bitter critics of the Aztec Palace; and secondly, the way in which the monument was seen to convey the 'Truth, Beauty and Utility' notions stipulated by Jiménez. As discussed in chapter three, a national style should be based on objective realism and have a pragmatic –one may say utilitarian– purpose. Pragmatic and objective however, only to a degree since critics were also keen to ask for 'beauty'. The modernity of these thinkers was still trapped in a traditional European legacy that defined art in terms of beauty, and beauty in terms of classical traditions (i.e. the Greco-Roman world). The artist's skill relied therefore on his ability to interpret reality and to transform the mundane into art –that is into beautiful objects– and the veracity or truthfulness of his work depended on its ability to convey notions or ideas about nationhood. In short, a 'modern' art would respond to the demands of progress by being part of nation-building projects that in turn emphasised the cultural and artistic achievements of Mexico. Under this programme Jiménez' project presented with a zeal that read 'Truth, Beauty and Utility' becomes a perfect example of nationalist agendas driving artistic production during the Porfiriato.

Applying this to the iconographical design of the monument to Cuauhtémoc, a text by Vicente Reyes<sup>43</sup> (published in the *Anales de la Asociación de Ingenieros y Arquitectos de México* and written in 1886) provides the best example of how truth and beauty were seen as preconditions to art. In this document Reyes provides a lengthy explanation that accounts for all the sources used by Jiménez in his design. No detail was left untouched. His detailed observations include the plinth, the bas-reliefs and Noreña's sculpture (figures 64 and 65) for which he provides the most interesting comments:

Auxiliándose con todos los recursos que la historia y la ciencia arqueológica ponían a la disposición del escultor, animado por un sentimiento ecléctico digno de loa, y eliminando de la composición algunos detalles grotescos del atavio marcial del monarca, que, si bien exactos, habrían interrumpido la armonía general, el ritmo de las líneas y la majestad y la severidad de la figura, el profesor Noreña ha creado una noble efigie del heroico rey Azteca, en parte real y en parte clásica, ....<sup>44</sup>

And in regards to the physiognomy of Cuauhtémoc Reyes says:

[Y] razón sobrada asistió al escultor Noreña para hacer algo más ideal, dando a la cabeza de su estatua los caracteres fisonómicos de la raza Azteca, embellecidos por el vigor de la juventud, ennoblecidos por el arte y realizados por el sello de la energía, del valor y del patriotismo ...<sup>45</sup>

The conflict between reality and idealism, truthfulness and beauty is what stands out most in Reyes's words. The issue of how to marry prehispanic history with a present that now follows the demands of modernity is here once again present. Although Reyes demands veracity the artist is given relative freedom to interpret and produce a more worthy version of history. Noreña's creative skills have, in the opinion of Reyes, allowed him to portray a truthful yet beautiful representation that honours the patriotic virtues of its model. Guerra's bas-relief was also praised by Reyes for its accuracy and beauty. Its composition reveals a similar interpretation of prehispanic elements that is in harmony with the statue of Cuauhtémoc and Noreña's bas-relief. Like Noreña, Guerra's bas-relief (figure 60) reflects the way in which a predominantly classical language has been used to 'cleanse' unwanted elements and portray a more favourable image of the prehispanic.

It must be remembered that Reyes was actively involved in experimenting with the use of prehispanic architecture to create a national style, and that he designed one of the façades in the second project for a Mexican pavilion in Paris. His description of Cuauhtémoc's monument certainly reveals his knowledge of prehispanic material, and his comments are therefore concordant with his participation in the debates over the creation of a national style.

The monument's fitting role as representative of the nation is reflected in the fact that reproductions of it were sent to various international exhibitions including the Rio de Janeiro fair held in 1922 (see Tenorio Trillo 1996a), and Paris in 1889. Talking about the bronze replica sent to Rio de Janeiro Tenorio Trillo describes the monument as "the main relic of official Porfirian indigenism" (ibid: 205). His words are concordant with Justino Fernández who claims that Jiménez' design "quedará como el primero que ha sido capaz de tratar con tino un estilo que podría llamarse 'neointígena', del cual el monumento a Cuauhtémoc es la sola muestra digna,..". (Fernández 1983: 168).<sup>46</sup> As a canonical figure in the discipline of Mexican art history, Fernández' appraisal has helped to legitimise the artistic value of the monument, and hence confirmed its uniqueness within the genre of neo-prehispanic art:

No produjo nada mejor la academia; basamento y estatua son la cúspide artística del indigenismo académico del siglo XIX; .... Es interesante observar, tanto en su arquitectura como en su escultura, que la medida y acertada fusión del clasicismo con los Mexicanismos es lo que le da unidad, con un resultado excepcional y grandioso (ibid: 169).<sup>47</sup>

This may indeed be the 'main relic' of Porfirian monumental sculpture using a neo-prehispanic style, but it was not the only one. Other examples of monuments and sculpture will be considered in order to analyse the complexities involved in creating images of the nation using prehispanic elements. Before this however, I would like to consider why the monument to Cuauhtémoc was allowed a space in the official canon of Mexican art whilst the Aztec palace receded into oblivion.

To answer this one cannot escape considering issues concerned with the particularities of genres and their role in society. The fact that one is an example of architecture and the other of monumental sculpture has profound implications in regards to their function. The former responds to more practical or pragmatic demands which makes it ontologically more related to the present. In other words, apart from covering an aesthetic function architecture is also used to create spaces that fulfil the demands of every day life. Monuments on the other hand don't serve any pragmatic function other than to *represent*. Monuments are about memory and remembrance, and hence cover an essentially symbolic role. The materiality of architecture as a form that cannot be detached from the present makes the use of prehispanic elements difficult because it needs to present an image of Mexico 'as it is'. During the Porfiriato the present meant modernity and modernity western canons. This idea is reflected in the criticisms made of the Aztec Palace by Leopoldo Bartres and Francisco Rodríguez<sup>48</sup> which Alvarez quotes in his 'Creación de una arquitectura nacional' (see Alvarez 1900). Rodríguez for example, states that the aim of pavilions sent to international exhibitions was to represent the contemporary *ethos* of the country and with disapproving words complains: " ¡Nuestro edificio nos exhibió en época anterior á la conquista! ¡Con cuán poco acierto! " (in Alvarez 1900: 278).<sup>49</sup>

The debate over the suitability of a neo-prehispanic style to represent Mexico abroad reached its climax in 1895 when Luis Salazar presented a paper entitled 'La arqueología y la arquitectura' during the *XI International Congress of Americanists* held in Mexico City.<sup>50</sup> In this paper Salazar urged artists to create a national style using prehispanic elements, and spoke in favour of the relationship between archaeology and architecture. Salazar based his arguments on his own work since he had already presented a project for the Mexican pavilion sent to Paris in 1889 –together with Reyes and Alva. Apart from encouraging the use of prehispanic elements, Salazar was also hoping to promote this project for the Paris International Exhibition in 1900. As was expected the proposal was strongly opposed, and its archaeological veracity put into question by Leopoldo Bartres who was then the leading figure in the nascent discipline of archaeology (see Alvarez 1900). The fact that a completely different style was chosen for Paris in 1900 reflects the

need to present an image of modernity, and the difficulty of consolidating the characteristics of a national style. For this occasion Antonio Anza designed a completely neoclassical structure (figure 66). Tenorio Trillo explains that the decision to present this pavilion indicates that a consensus on the form and content of a national style had not yet been reached: "the 1900 pavilion seemed to claim that there was no option but to keep following cosmopolitan trends until a real national style emerged" (1996a: 193).

One may question however, why if nineteenth century European architecture was marked by eclecticism and revival styles was the incorporation of prehispanic elements still not deemed appropriate? To answer this properly would require a separate study, but we may suggest that its appropriation was partly hindered by the weight of Euroamerican racial discourse operating at the time. Hence, even though contemporary debates seriously considered the application of prehispanic styles in modern architecture there are no examples of neo-prehispanic architecture in Mexico City from this period.<sup>51</sup>

The monument to Cuauhtémoc, on the other hand, could indulge in prehispanic celebrations because its materiality was linked with the past. The suitability of this style in the case of monuments is reflected in the debate over a national architecture since many of the critics argued that prehispanic material could be used for the elaboration of commemorative structures. Cuauhtémoc's monument could draw inspiration from the legacies of prehispanic Mexico whilst being 'modern' because it helped to construct a favourable image of the country by redeeming the past through 'beautiful' representations that denoted the civilised nature of Mexico. Furthermore, the monument to Cuauhtémoc fulfilled the demands of 'Truth, Beauty and Utility' underlying the principles of Porfirian aesthetics, in a way that the Aztec palace had failed to do. The words of Alvarez accurately express this point:

Vemos pues, que el edificio no es *útil*, puesto que hace diez años permanece desarmado quien sabe dónde, acaso en la antigua Ciudadela sin que sirva para nada; no expresa lo *verdadero*, como queda probado, y no lo bello, pues no corresponde a nuestro gusto actual ni á los principios de la belleza absoluta (1900: 278).<sup>52</sup>

Finally, we must also highlight the significance of their location since the Aztec Palace was made for a foreign audience in Paris, whilst the Monument to Cuauhtémoc was designed to become a permanent landmark in one of the most important locations in Mexico City.

Even though the use of prehispanic material was deemed appropriate, due to the monument's nature as a commemorative structure, other aesthetic elements were also

needed for it to be accepted it as an *object d'art*. This status was not achieved by other monuments made during the Porfiriato such as the monument to Juárez in Oaxaca (1894), and *Los Indios Verdes* (1891). These and other examples will be now considered in order to explore the agency of monuments, and the politics involved in forging images for the nation.

### Monuments and the politics of representation

One of the most interesting examples of a 'failed' monumental enterprise are the two sculptures made by Alejandro Casarín (ca 1840-1907)<sup>53</sup> representing Izcoatl and Ahuizotl best known as *Los Indios Verdes* [116] (figures 67 and 68).<sup>54</sup> Their nickname as 'Green Indians' was given to these sculptures because they are made of bronze –a material which turns green when exposed to the elements. Most people know them today as *Los Indios Verdes* and it is extremely unlikely that many, apart from academics, may know who they represent.<sup>55</sup>

Casarín's unfortunate sculptures were originally placed in a highly symbolic place at the entrance of *Paseo de la Reforma* (see figure 69), and according to some sources they were inaugurated on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1891 (see for example García Barragán 1988: 181).<sup>56</sup> Knowledge about these sculptures is scant, and based on the few primary sources (namely newspaper articles) that have been found.<sup>57</sup> This has made it difficult to ascertain who commissioned Casarín and the purpose for which his sculptures were made. Robles García (1987: 23), and Katzman (2002: 255) for example, say that the sculptures were commissioned in 1877, but neither author provide the sources for their information. Others like Pérez Bertruy (2003: 179), and Agostoni (2003: 100) state that they were made for the Paris fair in 1889, but again sources to back up this information are not given.<sup>58</sup> The latter proposition seems highly unlikely however, since no references to them exist in any of the official documentation relating to this exhibition.<sup>59</sup>

One cannot but wonder why so little primary documentation exists in regards to these sculptures. Especially if we consider the strong political connotation of their original location: at the entrance of *Paseo de la Reforma* proudly facing the monument to Carlos IV by Manuel Tolsá. In other words, Casarín's sculptures were consciously made part of the monumental design of *Paseo de la Reforma*, and must have therefore been an important governmental commission.<sup>60</sup> If Robles García, and Katzman are right then the date would coincide with the 1877 decree which launched the monumental project of *Paseo de la Reforma*.

It may be possible to attribute this lack of official documentation to the extremely bad press which the sculptures received at the time. Unlike the monument to Cuauhtémoc,

cries of outrage and dismay were voiced pretty much immediately after the sculptures were unveiled. These criticisms did not cease until they were removed to *Paseo de la Viga* in 1902.<sup>61</sup> This may have persuaded the people involved in the project to hide (or even destroy) any evidence of involvement with their commission –especially if two of them were individuals of high public profile such as Vicente Riva Palacio, and Porfirio Díaz. Another important point to note is the fact that the sculptures may have been inaugurated on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September during the celebrations of Independence.<sup>62</sup>

There is also little information with regard to the overall iconographical design, and the reasons behind the selection of Izcoatl and Ahuizotl as the figures to be commemorated on this occasion. We know from historical references that Izcoatl and Ahuizotl were important Mexica rulers who contributed to the aggrandisement of the Aztec empire.<sup>63</sup> As already mentioned, Izcoatl joined forces with Nezahualcōyotl (king of Texcoco) and Totoquihuatzin (king of Tlacopan) to form the triple alliance that secured the dominance of the Aztecs –and which according to Peñafiel represented the birth of the Mexican nation. And according to prehispanic historiography, Ahuizotl's monarchy represented the climax of the Aztec empire. Ahuizotl's ambitious military campaigns greatly contributed to the expansion of the Aztec empire bringing wealth and securing prisoners for the sacrificial rites of their ceremonies. Apart from his highly successful campaigns, Ahuizotl is also important because the *Templo Mayor*<sup>64</sup> was expanded and finished under his reign. Its inauguration was celebrated with an elaborate and lavish ceremony designed to impress upon the viewers the power and magnificence of the Aztec empire. According to Orozco y Berra as many as twenty thousand prisoners were sacrificed to the blood-thirst Huitzilopochtli on this occasion.<sup>65</sup> The figure of Ahuizotl is therefore not easily accommodated into the pantheon of Mexican national heroes. His strong associations with what appears to have been violent domination, and with a ceremony that epitomised the horror of Aztec religion made him an unlikely candidate to represent moral and civic values.

Compared to other prehispanic figures neither Izcoatl nor Ahuizotl can really be seen as the right choice for the important task of guarding the entrance of *Paseo de la Reforma*. Nezahualcōyotl and Xicotencatl, for example, would have been a more obvious choice since the former is generally associated with notions of culture and civilisation, and the latter remembered as a brave opponent to the Spanish *conquistadores*.<sup>66</sup> The decision to choose Izcoatl and Ahuizotl instead of figures like Nezahualcōyotl (from Texcoco), and Xicotencatl (from Tlaxcala) may reflect the primacy given to the history of Tenochtitlán, and the Mexicas in the official rhetoric of the Porfiriato.

Whatever prompted the decision to honour the figures of Izcoatl and Ahuizotl may never be known. What is certain however, is that they became an extremely controversial element in the monumental design of *Paseo de la Reforma*. Reactions against their presence were immediate. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1891 an article in *El Siglo XIX* was already announcing their relocation to *Paseo de la Viga*, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1892, just a few months after they were inaugurated, an article in *El Universal* wrote:

Sabemos que quizá teniendo en cuenta las observaciones hechas por *El Universal* acerca de las estatuas llamadas 'momias Aztecas'; y atendiendo al buen gusto y la estética, varios de los más ricos vecinos del Paseo de la Reforma van a dirigir al Ministerio de Comunicaciones un curso, en el cual piden que se mande quitar aquellas estatuas que en vez de adornar la calzada, la hacen aparecer ridículamente y podrían tomarse como triste muestra de atraso en nuestros artistas y de mal gusto en nuestra sociedad que, sin protestar, consiente en su exhibición.<sup>67</sup>

Interestingly, all the criticisms made were based on issues of taste, and the negative impressions they might leave in the minds of foreign tourists visiting the city:

Los turistas que visitan esta capital creen que esos adefesios son obra de los primitivos pobladores del Anáhuac y que nuestro ayuntamiento los conserva allí como reliquias arqueológicas. Así opinan los que nos juzgan favorablemente. *En cuanto a los que sepan que son obras contemporáneas nos calificarán seguramente de salvajes* (my italics).<sup>68</sup>

And the complaints continued. In 1900 a guide of Mexico City written by Prant and Grosso complained about their presence with the following words:

The first thing that one sees at the beginning of the Paseo is a pair of monsters, that is to say a pair of colossi Aztecs cast in bronze and which are two monsters engendered in the mind of someone who does not have the slightest idea of aesthetics (quoted in Agostoni 2003: 100).

As we can see no mention is made about the historical identity of the *Indios Verdes*. It is possible that appearance and taste may have been the only cause of discontent though it seems strange that the critics may not have also considered the connotations of the personages involved.

After fierce public criticism the figures were finally relocated to *Paseo de la Viga* in 1902. During the repositioning their original pedestal was replaced by a base designed by the architect Guillermo Heredia using Maya iconography (figure 70). The decision to move them to *Paseo de la Viga* is extremely telling of the relationship between monuments, and the significance of the urban location they occupy. According to Agostoni this area of Mexico City was a very insalubrious place at the beginning of the twentieth century, and

was “deliberately excluded from the imagery of modernity” (2003: 101). This however, would not be the last time the sculptures were moved. Around the 1940s Casarín's creations were sent to the outskirts of the city, and are now located at the north end of Insurgentes (Mexico City's largest avenue) in the area known as *Indios Verdes*.<sup>69</sup>

Going back to the issue of taste, if we compare Contreras' version of Izcoatl (figure 71) with Casarín's (figure 72) we can see that Contreras' version is unquestionably more classical and therefore, in terms of Porfirian aesthetics, more 'beautiful'. Contreras' composition shows the reinterpretation of Amerindian physiognomy and dress in a way that conveys the Hellenistic tradition –and hence notions of absolute beauty in art. The creative reinvention of Izcoatl presented by Contreras is concordant with Reyes' demands, and therefore responds better to Porfirian taste and notions about art. Casarín's sculptures on the other hand were 'too' real to meet the standards of taste demanded by the Porfirian elites. Their physiognomies, anatomies and dress had not been sufficiently embellished by the language of classicism failing to combine the right amount of realism and idealism which Mexican art critics asked for. As discussed in chapter three, *romantic realism* became the preferred style for the representation of prehispanic subjects. The underlying aesthetic of this style was determined by notions of Beauty which required the reinterpretation of nature in order to present a more perfect version of reality (see Revilla 1878). Within this schema Casarín's sculptures were too realistic for their own good. An author writing under the pseudonym of 'Sin-cero' (meaning sincere) –who seems to have been a lone voice of praise– wrote favourably about the sculptures of Casarín saying that they were unmistakably Mexican. The author describes the old figure as an 'Aztec Hercules' and admires the fact that his physiognomy was unmistakably Aztec and could not be confused with a Greek, a Chinaman, an Englishman or a Spaniard.<sup>70</sup> But Sin-cero was ahead of his time and it would be some time before the physiognomies of *indigenas* could be represented without the veil of classicism which characterised the production of neo-prehispanic representations at the time. Like the Aztec palace, Casarín's sculptures failed to meet the standards of 'Truth, Beauty and Utility' favoured by Porfirian intellectuals.

The sculptures of Casarín present an extremely interesting example of the relationship between the symbolical nature of monuments and their agency in society. The success of monumental sculpture resides in its ability to combine politics and aesthetics, but it must also be able to convert political discourse into universal values which will transcend the specificity of its time. The hazardous lives of Casarín's sculptures have followed the urban development of the city as they moved from one location to the next. This extraneous existence has granted them a significance that transcends their original purpose making

them a very interesting case for the study of representation. We can only hope that the art historical significance of these sculptures will one day be acknowledged, and that public opinion may allow them once more to occupy a significant space in the urban landscape of the city.

### **Making a monument worthy of Juárez**

Whilst form and location seem to have been the main obstacles to the success of Casarín's sculptures, issues of form alone seem to feed the criticisms voiced against the monument of Juárez in Oaxaca [40]. The monument was made by the architect Carlos Herrera and the sculptor Concha (see Ramírez 1986: 136), and it was placed in the *Paseo de Juárez* in Oaxaca City. In his 'Creación de una arquitectura nacional' Alvarez highlights the contrast between the base, and the sculpture representing Juárez which crowns it. Alvarez compares its overall composition with the monument to Cuauhtémoc, and argues that in this case the authors had failed to design a harmonious composition: "[d]esde luego faltó la unidad de pensamiento, ya no fue el individuo indio, con su traje también indio terminando el monumento, sino D. Benito Juárez, el hombre de 1857" (1900: 274).<sup>71</sup>

As we can see in the illustrations (figures 73 and 74), the pedestal is a relatively simple structure reminiscent of prehispanic architecture which has been decorated using inlaid patterns from Mitla. On top of this heavily decorated base, Juárez –clad in cosmopolitan dress– stands proudly next to the Mexican flag. His sculpture represents the image of a contemporary *indígena* who has managed to overcome the stigma of his race, and become a proud representative of the nation. In the eyes of Alvarez, the neo-prehispanic base of the monument does not correspond with the figure of Juárez who –in spite of being an *indígena* from Oaxaca– had come to embody the ideals of the liberal government.

The possibility of using prehispanic elements to design a monument for Juárez was again considered when the government announced a competition to commemorate him in 1906. The projects presented<sup>72</sup> reveal the complexities involved in representing a national hero who was an *indígena*, but who also symbolised the principles of Mexico as a modern nation. According to Francisco de la Maza eleven projects were submitted, but only four were selected for consideration (in Schávelzon 1988: 196). Three of these followed the language of neoclassicism, but one was made using Zapotec designs and prehispanic elements [98] (figure 75). The jury was formed by Antonio Rivas Mercado, Nicolás Mariscal and Velásquez de León.<sup>73</sup> Referring to this project Mariscal wrote in *El Arte y la Ciencia* that the study was worthy of praise, but that its author had failed to understand that: "[l]a convocatoria pidió un monumento a Juárez y a sus colaboradores en la

Reforma y el autor concibió un monumento a la civilización zapoteca' " (quoted in García Barragan 1988: 183).<sup>74</sup> In other words the project did not convey the political significance of Juárez as a representative of republican and liberal values. What it did however, was to highlight his roots with the legacies of prehispanic Mexico.

An article published in *Revista Moderna de México* in 1906 laments the decision of the jury to reject this project saying that its style fitted the nationalistic nature of the monument. Its author said that a taste for European neoclassicism continued to hinder the possibility of creating a national style based on prehispanic traditions, and argued that an 'indígena of pure race' could only be properly represented using prehispanic iconography:

Se trata de una obra de arte nacional, que se emancipa de las influencias extranjeras, como la obra misma del libertador indio.... Si Juárez fue un indio de pura raza, ¿qué cosa más natural que honrarlo con el arte creado por el genio de su raza misma? El monumento es grandioso, severo, eternamente Mexicano,....<sup>75</sup>

The basic tenets of the debate over the form and content of a national iconography were still very much alive in the early 1900s, as this article clearly shows. It is also interesting to note that the article included the monument to Cuauhtémoc into the argument:

Si pareció natural y justo erigir a Cuauhtémoc un monumento indio, no lo es menos levantarlo a Juárez, tan indígena como aquél, y sobre cuya alma pesaban, además, abrumadores atavismos, que el glorioso emperador postrero no conoció.<sup>76</sup>

Even though the figures of Juárez and Cuauhtémoc were often associated in the patriotic literature of the time the experience of colonisation separated the lives of these heroic men. In spite of the commemorative nature of their monuments the government could not present the image of Juárez as an *indígena* still marked by the influence of his prehispanic roots. For the official narratives Juárez was no longer an *indígena* but a Mexican who embodied the principles of universal values. This position is clearly reflected in the monument that was finally erected for Juárez and unveiled during the centennial celebrations of Independence in 1910.

The now famous *Hemiciclo a Juárez* which spreads along one side of the Alameda square in Mexico City (facing the Juárez Avenue) was designed by Guillermo Heredia. As we can see from the illustration (figure 76), the monument is a completely neoclassical structure made of white marble and bronze. Ignacio de la Barra described the monument as " 'puro estilo helénico, divina mezcla de dulzura y fuerza, majestad y de gracia, evoca su contemplación del hermoso pensamiento de Hegel' " (quoted in Tenorio Trillo 1996b: 97).<sup>77</sup> The contrast between the Monument to Cuauhtémoc, and the *Hemiciclo a Juárez*

erected a short distance from *Paseo de la Reforma* could not had been greater. The reason for this difference is accurately noted by Tenorio Trillo:

Unlike the monument to Cuauhtémoc that was meant to honour a mythical Indian past, the monument to Juárez was dedicated to an Indian and sought to honour the present. Here was an Indian who responded to contemporary universal values: republicanism, liberty and justice.... An Indian who belonged to humanity had to be represented with an Hellenic fashion and in white marble (1996b: 97).

The words of Tenorio Trillo highlight the importance of making visible the temporal and cultural difference between Mexico's prehispanic and postcolonial histories. Like the Aztec Palace and the Monument to Cuauhtémoc, the different views in regards to the monument to Juárez indicate the need to differentiate between past and present in order to avoid giving the 'wrong impression'. The critics of Juárez' monument in Oaxaca and the neo-prehispanic project for 1906 claimed that the use of a neo-prehispanic style would fail to present a modern face of the nation. Whilst the *Hemiciclo a Juárez* and the Mexican pavilion, designed for the Paris international fair in 1900, reinforce the view that a modern image of the nation could only be presented following the schemas of the western tradition. Prehispanic architecture could never be modern. It had been excluded from a discourse of European civilisation for too long, and its temporality placed far behind the cultural development of the Greco-Roman world.

### **A monument to the Porfiriato**

As has been discussed, monuments and architecture played a key role in the debates over the form and content of a national style. These debates were influenced by contrasting views on the cultural value of prehispanic material, and influenced by the study of archaeological remains and early colonial manuscripts. We have also noted how form depended on the successful combination of prehispanic and western styles, whilst issues of content were largely determined by the notions of 'Truth, Beauty and Utility'.

For monuments and architecture to function as representatives of the nation form and content had to combine with politics and aesthetics in order to promote favourable images of the nation. This was a difficult task because the prehispanic past was tainted by the weight of European racial theories, and the postcolonial present was caught in a predicament over what made Mexico both unique and universal. As a result of this, representations of the past were forced to occupy a carefully defined niche in order not to interfere with the modern face of the nation –characterised by notions of progress and modernity. This was clearly expressed in the criticisms voiced against the Aztec Palace *vis-à-vis* the overwhelming popularity of the monument to Cuauhtémoc. A similar logic can

be seen at work in the arguments over the characteristics of a monument to Juárez, and the suitability of a neo-prehispanic style to represent him.

The fact that only the monument to Cuauhtémoc succeeded in becoming a permanent representative of the nation indicates the difficulty of incorporating prehispanic and indigenous cultures into discourses of modernity and progress in the Porfiriato. Apart from issues of temporality, the construction of national images was influenced by a public demand for 'beautiful' representations which required the use of classical styles for the artistic interpretation of prehispanic themes and Amerindian physiognomies. The ability to transform indigenous forms into acceptable (meaning beautiful) representations was crucial to the success of neo-prehispanic sculpture. In this respect the work of Noreña, Contreras and Guerra represent the goals of Porfirian aesthetics whilst Casarín stands as its antithesis.

Our last example is a project for a monument to Porfirio Díaz designed by Adomo Boari<sup>78</sup> in 1900 which encapsulates the overall characteristics of the Porfirian *Zeitgeist*. His study [96] (figure 77) presents an interesting mixture of styles that conceptualise what was then perceived as the social and artistic development of Mexico. Boari's design visualised the prehispanic and postcolonial histories of Mexico by presenting a structure which combined neo-prehispanic and neoclassical styles. His monument was an ambitious project that would have immortalised the political ambitions of Díaz and given visual form to ideas of nationhood.

On top of a neo-prehispanic base (shaped in the form of a pyramid) a neoclassical structure rose up crowned by the equestrian sculpture of Díaz. As part of the design, Boari planned a low-rise wall in the shape of serpents to cover the periphery of the monument. According to Fernández, the design of Boari responded to his interest in the use of indigenous elements and their reinterpretation in modern forms. His daring use of prehispanic motifs, as Fernandez explains, was probably influenced by the success of Cuauhtémoc's monument (1983: 179). Unlike many of his contemporaries, Boari believed that prehispanic elements could be used in modern architecture (see Lira Vazquez 1990: 142). His ideas represent the aesthetic shift that would take place after the Porfiriato, and which –through modernist styles– would succeed in incorporating prehispanic iconography.

Apart from his revolutionary ideas however, the most interesting aspect of Boari's project is the way in which it materialised the ideological foundations of an official historiography. As Fernández accurately explains, Boari's monument to Porfirio Díaz represented "la

fusión de lo viejo y lo nuevo... y el olvido del intermedio" (1983: 179).<sup>79</sup> Boari's design managed to capture with amazing skill the core of liberal ideologies and the general feeling of the Porfiriato. The two styles chosen for the monument represent the two historical stages given primacy by the liberal credo: the prehispanic and the postcolonial. Hence the 'olvido del intermedio' pointed out by Fernández highlights the absence of *Nueva España* in the official narratives constructed by many liberal historians. Boari's monument was therefore much more than a commemorative structure to Díaz. It was in fact a monument to the liberal's version of history.

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<sup>1</sup> "Apotheosis! The anniversary of the Torture is now the day of glory".

<sup>2</sup> "So it goes with the great Cuauhtémoc; after almost four centuries the hate of the races breathes its last in the shadows, ...".

<sup>3</sup> "Architectural eclecticism gave Mexicans the chance to enrich, once again, in a serious manner their architectural language; furthermore, eclecticism allowed Mexicans to make use of both prehispanic and colonial artistic repertoires, free from their previous political connotations, now placed in more universal contexts and as valid as gothic, romantic and Renaissance repertoires".

<sup>4</sup> See De la Maza in Schávelzon (1988: 194-96).

<sup>5</sup> Even though the work of Viollet-le-Duc was extremely popular amongst the architects of the Porfiriato, the influence of this writer has not been properly studied (see Vargas Salguero 1986). My discussion in regards to this is therefore limited to general comments, but it would be very interesting for future research to study the influence of this important figure in relation to Mexican architecture in the later part of the nineteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> It has often been pointed out the relative lack of studies dealing with Porfirian architecture compared to those from other periods. The most comprehensive study in relation to nineteenth century architecture to date is by Israel Katzman whose book *Arquitectura del Siglo XIX*, first published in 1973, has recently reappeared in a second edition (2002). Other important references are Lira Vazquez (1990, 1998), Jaime Cuadriello (1983), and the writings of Francisco de la Maza. Most of the existing literature on this subject however, seems to focus on a formal approach which does not properly account for the role of style, and its ability to reveal the mentality of this period. Although some do address this issue on the whole a comprehensive study of style and the function of architecture in the Porfiriato is pending.

<sup>7</sup> An ongoing debate in regard to the relationship between engineering and architecture meant that the discipline of architecture was not always taught at the Academy. See Israel Katzman (2002: 62-66).

<sup>8</sup> "Confidence in a prosperous country, where peace and order safeguarded any capital invested, was visually reinforced by the urban, and architectural development of the city". For an in depth study of urbanisation in Porfirian Mexico see Agostoni (2003). Her work reveals the way in which sanitation and improvements in hygiene standards helped to foster an image of Mexico City as representative of a modern nation.

<sup>9</sup> "Authorisation of budgets, the thematic and ideological lines which teaching and sculptural projects had to follow, and the patronage and acquisition of works" (my translation).

<sup>10</sup> See Tenorio Trillo's *Mexico at the World's Fairs* for a thorough and illuminating analysis of Mexico's participation in International exhibitions.

<sup>11</sup> The role of international exhibitions as spaces of cultural production has been the focus of many academic studies. Much can be learnt from these exhibitionary spaces thanks to their holistic outlook and desire to cover every aspect of human activity –science, arts and technology being the most prominent areas. The allegiance between international exhibitions and the economic interests of colonial empires as well as their relationship with issues of race, modernity and nationhood has attracted the attention of cultural historians, anthropologists and art historians. Even though the organisation of international exhibitions was not limited to Europe and the United States most of the studies on this subject tend to focus on France, Britain and the United States. Such is the case of Paul Greenhalgh's *Ephemeral Vistas* (1988) which emphasises the relationship between empire building and representation. Burton Benedict (1983), and Robert W. Rydell (1984, and 1993), have produced the most influential studies in relation to World's Fairs in the United States. One of Rydell's contributions has been to highlight the representation of African Americans whilst Benedict

has addressed the relationship between anthropology and international exhibitions. From an anthropological perspective Penelope Harvey's *Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition* (1996) presents an interesting study of the Expo '92 in Seville which surveys changes in the exhibitionary practices of these fairs. The relationship between international exhibitions and modernity has also been the focus of many academic studies. The book *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* provides a series of articles on this topic written by some of the scholars who participated in a symposium hosted by the Smithsonian Institute in 1992. See Rydell and Gwinn (1994).

<sup>12</sup> "Their purpose was to serve as a starting point for the triumphal span of European production". It is interesting to note that most of the pavilions representing Latin American countries in this occasion had actually been designed by French architects (see Ramírez 1988: 244).

<sup>13</sup> For a study on the display of 'exotic' and 'primitive' peoples in Europe and the United States see Corbey (1993).

<sup>14</sup> According to Tenorio Trillo Mexicans in traditional costumes were exhibited in Buffalo (1901), Atlanta (1895), and Nashville (1896). For the Atlanta exhibition a 'Mexican village' was designed "formed with people from Tehuantepec, brought to Atlanta by the Mexican Village Company" (1996a: 85). He also points out that an exhibit entitled 'Aztecs and their industries' was shown during the Saint Louis' Missouri fair in 1904 (*ibid.*).

<sup>15</sup> For an account of these debates see Schávelzon (1988), and Alvarez 'Creación de una arquitectura nacional' in his *Las ruinas de mitla y la arquitectura* (1900).

<sup>16</sup> See Peñafiel, *Explication de l'edifice Mexicaine a l'Exposition Intrnationale de Paris en 1889*. Barcelona: d'Espase et Cia. 1889. Also published in Spanish the same year under the name: *Explicación del edificio Mexicano para la exposición internacional de Paris en 1889*.

<sup>17</sup> Peñafiel's most important work was published in 1890 with the title *Monumentos del arte mexicano antiguo* divided into four large volumes. Incidentally volume two reproduces the two projects presented for the Paris exhibition.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed analysis of Peñafiel's iconographical programme see Ramírez (1988), and Tenorio Trillo (1996a).

<sup>19</sup> Contreras was a gifted sculptor who later became a leading artist in the Porfiriato. For a study of his life and work see Pérez Walters (1990).

<sup>20</sup> In regards to this see the newspaper *El Siglo XIX* which in 1891 published a series of articles about different projects for its relocation. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of January, for example, the article 'Palacio Azteca' says that plans were being made for it to be placed in the *Alameda*. Another one from the 7<sup>th</sup> of August entitled 'El pabellon Azteca' said that it would be reconstructed at the entrance of Chapultepec, and used to house exhibits of agricultural and industrial products.

<sup>21</sup> According to Ramírez all the sculptures were placed in the patio of the *Museo de Artilleria* where they could be seen until 1910 (1988: 253).

<sup>22</sup> These sculptures have been replaced by copies, and since 1992 the originals belong to the collections of the *Museo del Ejercito y la Fuerza Aerea* (Betlemitas). They have been placed in an open space outside the Museum.

<sup>23</sup> See Díaz y de Ovando (1990) who reproduces an interesting selection of articles written about Mexico's participation in Paris. Her essay also includes the document that suggested the use of the Pavilion as an archaeological museum.

<sup>24</sup> José María Velasco received a silver medal and his work was widely admired by the critics.

<sup>25</sup> "By 1888 (the date of the project), the conviction that the most appropriate way for Mexico to offer the world an individual identity was by taking onboard its indigenous past had become firmly established in the dominant sectors".

<sup>26</sup> "I saw that thing as completely strange and antiartistic, and it appeared to me as a Mexican individual dressed in the correct manner with a frock, white tie and gloves but wrapped in a 'sarape' from Saltillo: in the first, I saw the products that signify our progress; in the sarape, the Indian façades of the building covering the steel columns, the stairs, the skylight and especially the products of our industry" (my translation).

<sup>27</sup> "Was nothing more than the result of the continued influence of European culture, which had found a rich seam in the novel exploitation of architectural 'styles'. As well as helping fresh air to penetrate the stuffiness of the academies, these 'styles' allowed them to festoon themselves with innumerable exoticisms that made them look more cosmopolitan... thus making this 'nationalism' just another facet of the cultural dominance of enlightened Europe".

<sup>28</sup> I also found a photograph of this monument in the national photographic archive of INAH (FNINAH) (ref. 464842), but it doesn't specify the date or the author. The image shows its location in an open space with a fountain in the foreground. See also Schávelzon (1988) who reproduces a lithograph by Hesiquio Iriarte.

<sup>29</sup> "In memory of the last Aztec monarch, Guautimocztin, heroic in his defence of the fatherland, sublime in his martyrdom: the Constitutional City Council of 1869".

<sup>30</sup> The 'Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal' (Historical archive of the Federal District, henceforth AHDF) holds a file in regards to this monument. See Ramo Historia: Monumentos Vol. 2276 no. 17.

<sup>31</sup> According to Schávelzon, the bust of Cuauhtémoc which can be seen nowadays in the atrium of the Cathedral in Mexico City is the bust that was located in Paseo de la Viga (1988: 111), but this is highly unlikely. If we compare the existing visual records of the monument with the bust in the Cathedral we can notice considerable differences. Fausto Ramírez is also sceptical of the claim made by Schávelzon (personal communication). The bust in the cathedral has been attributed to Jesús Contreras by Pérez Walters (see Appendix B [120]).

<sup>32</sup> For a specific study on Vicente Riva Palacio see Clementina Díaz de Ovando who has published quite extensively on the subject.

<sup>33</sup> In relation to the overall urban planning of Mexico City see Agostoni (2003), and Tenorio Trillo (1996b) who analyses the way in which Mexico city tried to embody the characteristics of an 'ideal city' based on notions of nationhood, cosmopolitanism and modernity. See also Tenenbaum (1992), and Velazquez Guadarrama (1999) for a more specific study of *Paseo de la Reforma*; and Pérez Bertruy (2003) for a study on the development of parks and leisure spaces in the Porfiriato.

<sup>34</sup> This sculpture designed by Manuel Tolsá was originally placed in the *plaza mayor* in 1803, but for political reasons, namely independence, it was removed in 1824 and hidden in the patio of the University by Lucas Alamán. In 1852 a decree allowed its relocation to *Paseo de Bucareli* which was then an unpopular place in the outskirts of the city (see Velazquez Guadarrama 1999: 333). As the *Paseo de la Reforma* gained importance it was once again removed and it is nowadays located in front of the MUNAL.

<sup>35</sup> "In order to adequately fulfil the conditions which must be met for the project in memory of Cuauhtémoc, and the other heroes who sacrificed themselves in defence of the fatherland during the battles of the Spanish conquest, I felt that no other style of architecture would be more fitting than a renaissance which will contain the beautiful details that can now be seen in the ruins of Tula, Uxmal, Mitla and Palenque, preserving as far as is possible the character of the architecture of the ancient inhabitants of this continent; an architecture which possesses a richness and wealth of detail so beautiful and so fitting that they lend themselves to the development of a characteristic style which we could call the national style".

<sup>36</sup> Jesús Contreras also worked in the project helping Noreña, who was then his teacher, in the foundry. Romero de Terreros' catalogue lists a bass relief by Contreras entitled 'Cuauhtémoc en presencia de Cortés' for the 1891 Academy's Exhibition (1963: 593) which could be a copy of the composition made by Noreña for this monument (Fausto Ramírez personal communication). This piece is registered in the catalogue of Contreras' work by Pérez Walters (1990) in the section of unlocated pieces.

<sup>37</sup> See Tenenbaum (1992: 374). According to Prescott (2000) Cacamatzin, king of Texcoco, was the son of Nezahualpilli and the brother of Ixtlixóchitl. Both Cacamatzin and Cuitláhuac were involved in the famous battle of 'La Noche Triste' when Cortés and his troops were defeated. Cuitláhuac led and won this battle becoming one of the prehispanic heroes often celebrated in nationalist historiography.

<sup>38</sup> Guerra's bass-relief was exhibited at the Academy in 1886.

<sup>39</sup> According to Prescott (2000) Coanaoch and Tetelepanquetzal were killed by hanging with Cuauhtémoc. Tetelepanquetzal was also tortured with Cuauhtémoc when the *conquistadores* were trying to discover the whereabouts of Moctezuma's treasure.

<sup>40</sup> "Encapsulates a lesson: that we should unite and forget our old dislikes; in the presence of this great gentleman who is listening to us, we declare: we will defend the country that Cuauhtémoc left us, just as he showed us; and we will preserve the union, the Independence, with all our heart".

<sup>41</sup> The AHDF contains documents from 1887 to 1913 requesting permission to hold commemorative celebrations for Cuauhtémoc on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August (see Ramo: *Diversiones diversas/Indice* 1059), but this date does not correspond with the ones reported in *El Mundo*. The government had previously avoided choosing that date for the inauguration of the monument due to its connotations –and possible political implications. It is possible however that other celebrations took place in a different location.

<sup>42</sup> For examples of these see *El Mundo Ilustrado* on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1900, 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1902, and 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1904.

<sup>43</sup> Reyes graduated as an architect in 1870 and designed a monument to Hidalgo in Guanajuato (Katzman 2002: 374)

<sup>44</sup> "With the aid of all the historical and archaeological resources available to him, animated by an eclectic sentiment worthy of praise, and eliminating from the composition some grotesque details belonging to the monarch's attire, which although exact, would have marred the general harmony,

the rhythm of the lines and the majesty and severity of the figure, professor Noreña has created a noble effigy of the heroic Aztec king, in part real and in part classical,..." (my translation). Reyes 'El Monumento de Cuauhtémoc' [1886] (in RP 1997: 210, vol. 3).

<sup>45</sup> "Reason enlightened Noreña to create something more ideal, giving to the head of the statue the physiognomic characters of the Aztec race beautified by the vigour of youth, dignified through art and enhanced by the seal of energy, bravery and patriotism, ..." (my translation) (ibid).

<sup>46</sup> "Will remain as the first that has been able to capture with a skilful touch a style one could call 'neindigenous', the only worthy example of which is the monument to Cuauhtémoc".

<sup>47</sup> "The Academy did not produce anything better; the base and statue are the artistic pinnacle of XIXth-century academic indigenism;... It is interesting to note that, as much in its architecture as in its sculpture, the measured and well-conceived fusion of classicism with Mexican elements is what gives it unity, with exceptional, grandiose results".

<sup>48</sup> In spite of his strong opposition to neo-prehispanic architecture, Francisco Rodríguez designed a monument to Tepoztlán using some prehispanic elements (see appendix B [95]). Its inauguration was planned to coincide with the XI *International Congress of Americanists* (for an explanation of its iconography see Francisco Rodríguez in Schávelzon 1988: 162-64).

<sup>49</sup> "Our building showed us in a pre-conquest era! What a lack of judgement!"

<sup>50</sup> It was re-published in 1899 in the magazine *El Arte y la Ciencia*, vol. 1, no.7 (for a reproduction of it see RP 1997: 478-487 vol. 3).

<sup>51</sup> According to Katzman in 1898 a company was formed to direct the construction of neo-prehispanic buildings, and their first project was planned for *Paseo de la Reforma* (2002: 255). The aims of the company however, seem to have remained unrealised. Alvarez also says that Bartres built a façade for his house in neo-prehispanic style, but that realising his mistake he had it replaced for a different one (1900: 380). It is also important to point out that prehispanic elements were some times used in the design of triumphal arches made during the Porfiriato. This suggests the suitability of this style for ephemeral architecture (see appendix B [2-5] for examples of these).

<sup>52</sup> "As we can see, the building is not *useful*, given that for the last ten years it has been left dismantled who knows where, perhaps in the old Ciudadela, not serving any purpose; it does not have *integrity* [reflect the truth], as has been shown, nor does it possess beauty, as it does not conform with current tastes or the principles of absolute beauty".

<sup>53</sup> Alejandro Casarín was an artist of liberal tendencies who worked on different media and made illustrations for newspapers. Due to his political allegiances Casarín was sent to Paris during the war with France in the 1860s. Whilst in Paris Casarín became familiar with the work of Meissonier, Fortuny and Corot. Apart from Izcoatl and Ahuizotl, Casarín also produced a couple of small paintings with prehispanic themes (see appendix B [56, 57]). Perhaps affected by the strong criticisms that his *Indios Verdes* received, Casarín moved to New York where he died in 1907. According to an article from the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1891 in the newspaper *El Siglo XIX* Casarín had a house in Mixcoac called *Castillo de Montecristo*. His paintings were usually small, and the majority of his work is in the hands of private collectors (see Ciancas 1959; and Tovar de Teresa 1995).

<sup>54</sup> The young figure represents Izcoatl and the old one Ahuizotl.

<sup>55</sup> Most people nowadays associate the name with a metro station which was named after them as a result of their proximity. The area of *Los Indios Verdes* has become an extremely busy place where buses, metro and *peseros* compete to offer their services to a huge number of stressed city dwellers who struggle to find their way amongst a sea of *vendedores ambulantes*. The sculptures have been buried around this chaos and most people are obviously unaware of their existence.

<sup>56</sup> The sculptures were placed on top of black marble pedestals also designed by Casarín (Agostoni 2003: 100) which gave them a considerable height.

<sup>57</sup> For newspaper articles on Casarín's sculptures see Rodríguez Prampolini (1997). One of the few authors who have looked at these sculptures is García Barragan (1988). For other references see Pérez Bertruy (2003), Agostoni (2003), Ramírez (1986), Robles García et.al. (1987), and Katzman (2002).

<sup>58</sup> This claim could be based on an article entitled 'Estatuas' published on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1891 in the newspaper *El Siglo XIX*. In this note the author announced the proximity of their inauguration, and stated that they had had been commissioned for the Paris international exhibition.

<sup>59</sup> Fausto Ramírez is also sceptical about the possibility that the sculptures were made with the Paris exhibition in mind (personal communication).

<sup>60</sup> An article published on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1889 in the newspaper *El Siglo XIX* mentions that the sculptures were commissioned by the *Secretaría de Fomento*, and that they were being cast in bronze that year (see 'Dos Estatuas' in RP 1997: 266-67, vol. 3).

<sup>61</sup> According to García Barragan they were moved to this location on August 1901 (1988: 182), but the photographic archive of the IIE has the slide of a commemorative plaque (no longer in place),

which states that they were relocated to *Paseo de la Viga* in 1902. This date seems correct since an article published on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1901 in *El Mundo Ilustrado* shows a photograph of Ahuizotl being removed from its pedestal in *Paseo de la Reforma*.

<sup>62</sup> This date is provided by García Barragan, but I was unable to find any primary documentation to confirm this. One of the sources I checked was the official programme for the celebrations of Independence in 1891 which made no reference to the inauguration ceremony (see AHDF Ramo: Festividades 15 y 27 de Septiembre 1823-1915, indice 1070 doc. 124). It seems strange that the official programme would not have included such an important event. Especially if we consider that the inauguration of other sculptures in Reforma, unveiled during the festivities of Independence, were recorded in the programmes.

<sup>63</sup> See for example Prescott (2000), Clavijero (2003) and Orozco y Berra (1880).

<sup>64</sup> The *Templo Mayor* was the religious heart of Tenochtitlán.

<sup>65</sup> Some contemporary accounts claimed that as many as one hundred thousand people were sacrificed (see Orozco y Berra 1880, vol. 3)

<sup>66</sup> The patriotic connotations of Xicotencatl made him a fitting subject in the production of nationalist propaganda. We know of two novels written in his honour (see Rojas Garcidueñas 1988). An effigy of Xicotencatl was also included in the decoration of the Mexican exhibit arranged for the 1892 Columbian exhibition in Madrid (see Del Paso y Troncoso 1892: 13, vol. 1). See appendix B [23, 41, 97, 99] for examples of works made after him.

<sup>67</sup> "Perhaps bearing in mind the observations made in *El Universal* concerning the statues referred to as 'Aztec mummies' and following the dictates of good taste and aesthetics, we know that many of the richest residents of *Paseo de la Reforma* are going to send a letter to the Ministry of Communication, in which they ask them to order the removal of said statues, as rather than adding beauty to the avenue, they bring it into ridicule and could be taken as a sad indication of the backwardness of our artists and bad taste in our society, which if it does not protest is approving their display". 'Las momias Aztecas' (in RP 1997: 340, vol. 3).

<sup>68</sup> "The tourists who visit this capital think that these unwanted objects are the work of the primitive inhabitants of Anáhuac and that our town hall keeps them there as archaeological remains. And that's what those who judge us favourably think. As for those who know that they are contemporary works, they certainly take us for savages". *El Monitor Republicano* 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1893 (reproduced in García Barragan 1988: 182).

<sup>69</sup> According to Fausto Ramírez there is a possibility that they may be moved again this time to Chapultepec (personal communication). This project may become a necessary action to rescue them from the sad conditions in which they are found.

<sup>70</sup> See 'Los guerreros Aztecas' by Sin-cero in *El Siglo XIX* 29th of September 1891.

<sup>71</sup> "Of course unity of thought was lacking, now it was not an indian with his indian attire, topping the monument, but D. Benito Juárez, the man of 1857".

<sup>72</sup> For reproductions of some of these projects see *El Mundo Ilustrado* 28<sup>th</sup> of January, and 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1906.

<sup>73</sup> See *El Mundo Ilustrado* 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1906.

<sup>74</sup> "The wording of the prize asked for a monument to Juárez and his collaborators in the *Reforma* and the author envisaged a monument to the Zapotec civilization".

<sup>75</sup> "It is a national work of art, which rid itself of foreign influences, like the very work of the Indian liberator... If Juárez was a pure blood Indian, what could be more natural than to honour him with art created by the genius of his own race? The monument is grandiose, stern, and eternally Mexican". The article is reproduced in Moyssén (1999: 210, vol. 1). It was published on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1906 but it does not specify its author. An identical article is quoted by Ramírez (1986: 137), but published in a different newspaper. Ramírez cites his source as having been written by José Juan Tablada which means that he is probably the author of both.

<sup>76</sup> "If it seemed right and natural to erect an Indian monument to Cuauhtémoc, it is no less so in the case of Juárez, as indigenous as the latter, and furthermore upon whose soul weighed a heavy burden of atavisms that the last glorious emperor did not have". 'El monumento a Juárez' [1906] in Moyssén 1999: 210, vol. 1, (pages 208-210).

<sup>77</sup> "A pure Hellenic style, a divine blend of sweetness and strength, majesty and grace. Its contemplation evokes the beautiful thinking of Hegel".

<sup>78</sup> Boari was the architect of the National Theatre (today *Palacio de Bellas Artes*) which became the most wonderful representative of *Art Deco* in Mexico. He also designed the *Palacio de Correos* in neogothic style.

<sup>79</sup> "The fusion of the old and the new... and the forgetting of anything in-between".

## CONCLUSION

During the Porfiriato many liberal intellectuals continued the work that creole nationalists had begun, and which was abandoned after Independence for a political and cultural project that sought to emulate the example of the United States. From the 1880s the legacies of prehispanic cultures became more central to the cultural politics of the Porfiriato. The government liaised with artists and intellectuals to insert the history of prehispanic Mexico into a national historiography that would pay homage to this past, and give visual and material evidence of their significance in the history of the nation. A growing interest in the celebration of prehispanic cultures however, contrasted with the miserable conditions under which most contemporary *indígenas* lived.

The overt use of prehispanic elements to legitimise the political aims of the Porfirian government against a background of social inequalities and discontent was denounced in a caricature published in *El hijo del Ahuizote* in 1900. *Una ofrenda a Porfiriopoxthli* (*An offering to Porfiriopoxthli*) (figure 78) is a powerful image that conveys the contrast between celebrations of the prehispanic and the reality of contemporary *indígenas*. The artist constructed his visual critique of the regime by presenting the body of two sacrifice victims one representing an indigenous community from the North of Mexico ('pueblo Yaqui'), and the other the people of Tomochic – a small town in Chihuahua where a terrible massacre was committed by the Mexican army in 1892. The figure on the right (Bernardo Reyes) is dressed as an Aztec priest and is offering the heart of one of his victims to a carved portrait of Díaz. In the steam emanating from the heart the artist wrote the word *patriotismo*, and on the sacrificial stone the word *tiranía* (tyranny). This is one of the many caricatures published in *El hijo del Ahuizote* which denounced the government's manipulation of prehispanic elements to promote a nationalist agenda which in itself harmed the social conditions of contemporary *indígenas*. The newspaper criticised the political and economic policies of a regime that encouraged the foreign exploitation of Mexico's natural and human resources (see Bonilla 2003).

In spite of its unquestionable allegiance to a *laissez faire* politics designed to benefit the interests of the elites, the Porfirian government helped to promote the creation of institutions that would facilitate the conservation and preservation of Mexico's prehispanic heritage. Parallel to this, Mexican intellectuals also began to lay down the basis of a discourse that would legitimise the status of *mestizaje* as representative of the nation after the Revolution. It was therefore a period when hegemonic ideas of the nation took root and flourished leaving an important legacy for the development of Mexico in the twentieth

century. Following the steps of other nation-states Mexico was adapting to the demands of modernity by assimilating foreign ideologies and creating its own forms of cultural and political development. The creative refashioning of the country as a civilised and modern nation was the result of innovative policies that gave the country for the first time a sense of national identity and pride.

In a context dominated by the weight of Euroamerican racial discourse and the unforgiving effects of imperialism however, Mexico needed to construct favourable images of the nation in order to protect its sovereignty whilst assuring the trust of foreign investors. To do so Mexico needed to reconcile its precolonial and postcolonial histories, and to redefine the cultural legacies of Amerindian cultures within a framework of universality. In response to this, a 'civilisatory' project was put to work in order to vindicate the cultural and historical significance of Mexico's prehispanic past.

The need to present a modern image of Mexico within a language of universality is best exemplified by the cover of *Mexico its Social Evolution* (1900). This image (figure 79) visualises many of the issues discussed throughout this work. Holding a waving flag on the left and a laurel branch on the right, a female figure stands proudly on top of the Tizoc stone. Above her an eagle devouring a serpent on top of a cactus symbolises the foundation of Tenochtitlán and hence the birth of the Mexican nation. Below her a train and a ship represent the importance of communications in the modern world. On both sides the allegorical figures of children represent the fields of 'arts', 'letters', 'science', 'agriculture', 'industry', and 'commerce'; and prehispanic objects in each corner help to construct the decorative elements of the frame. The physiognomy of the central figure may be read as that of a *mestiza* and her dress as reminiscent of Greek or Roman dress. Like the monument to Porfirio Díaz by Adomo Boari, this image portrays with amazing clarity the type of nation that the government was trying to promote. The most important national symbols are there: the flag, the eagle, the 'calendar' and the Tizoc stones, but also the symbols of modernity and progress. As the title indicates, this image was constructed to represent the 'Social evolution' of Mexico. The universality and the authenticity of Mexico are here portrayed as a harmonious whole, but each element occupies its rightful place. Furthermore, in a similar way to Boari's monument, in this image only the prehispanic and the postcolonial are conceived of as representatives of the nation.

The book *Mexico its Social Evolution* and its cover are prime examples of how Mexico was seeking to construct images of the nation within a framework of universality; and the way in which this universality was related to notions of modernity, and associated to the

legacies of the classical tradition. The title and its subtitle are also revealing of the promotional nature that works such as these had in the context of Porfirian Mexico: 'Monumental inventory summing up in masterly exposition the great progress of the nation in the XIX century'. It is also interesting to note that the authors changed all the names in the publication to give them a more universal feel, for example: Justus Sierra (Justo Sierra), Porphyrius Parra (Porfirio Parra), Benedict Juárez (Benito Juárez), Julius Zárete (Julio Zárate), and Michael Hidalgo (Miguel Hidalgo) to name a few.

For the modern reader the fact that Mexico published a book where all the names were translated into English or Latin appears bizarre, and it may be viewed as yet another example of the 'westernisation' of Mexico during the Porfiriato; but we cannot judge this within the framework of our own perspective. In 1900 when the book was published most nations were constructing their identity by combining elements from their history with those of the classical tradition (i.e the Greco-Roman world). Mexico was not the only country seeking to legitimise its authenticity against a background of universality in order to be recognised as an independent and modern nation. Hence it is not possible to brand the cultural life of the Porfiriato as simply imitative of European models.

The power of images to represent complex historical narratives, and their ability to convey abstract notions explains why artistic production became an intrinsic part of nation-building projects at the end of the nineteenth century. Within a cultural agenda motivated by the institutionalisation of national images, the Academy represented a space through which hegemonic ideologies could be expressed in terms of visual narratives. Neo-prehispanic representations therefore participated in a discourse of nationhood which sought to legitimise the authenticity and the universality of Mexico whilst consolidating the institutionalisation of an official Mexicaness.

The creation of a national school and the demand for 'romantic realism' in the production of history paintings was part of this 'civilisatory' programme. The interpretation of prehispanic cultures via the agency of academic styles that were rooted in notions of classical beauty helped to portray this history through an aura of universality. In other words, through 'romantic realism' Mexico tried to convert the specificity of its Amerindian legacies into an acceptable and non-threatening 'difference'. Or to reiterate the point made by Rodríguez Prampolini, in relation to the artistic production of the Porfiriato, it tried to turn the local (Mexican) into the universal (1997: 158, vol. 1). This explains why the creation of a modern national art was based on the experimentation of content rather than stylistic change, and the reason why Mexican history paintings are very similar in style to those produced in other countries during the nineteenth century. Their unquestionable

allegiance to academic styles however, has contributed to their discredit as simple copies of European artistic traditions. A revision of their status in the history of Mexican art calls for a reappraisal of their role as mediators of dominant discourses.

Talking about the use of European styles by Indian artists in the second half of the nineteenth century Partha Mitter makes a very important point which explains the difficulty of viewing this as anything other than 'imitation':

The inability to see influence in terms other than plagiarism stems from the fact that colonial (and post-colonial) art criticism is unable to detach itself from the values of imperialism, anchored in power relations. As such, it remains a prisoner of its own reductionism (1994: 6).

Mitter's words are an encouraging plea to break away from an art historical discourse that has trapped non-western art into an aura of 'difference', and a necessary step to re-evaluate the significance of neo-prehispanic representations. After all, in both form and content these images encapsulate the predicament of being Mexican.

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FCE	Fondo de Cultura Económica
IIE	Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas
IIH	Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas
INAH	Instituto de Antropología e Historia
INBA	Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública
HAHR	<i>Hispanic American Historical Review</i>
UIA	Universidad Ibero Americana
UNAM	Universidad Autónoma de México
RP	Rodríguez Prampolini
MUNAL	Museo Nacional de Arte

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